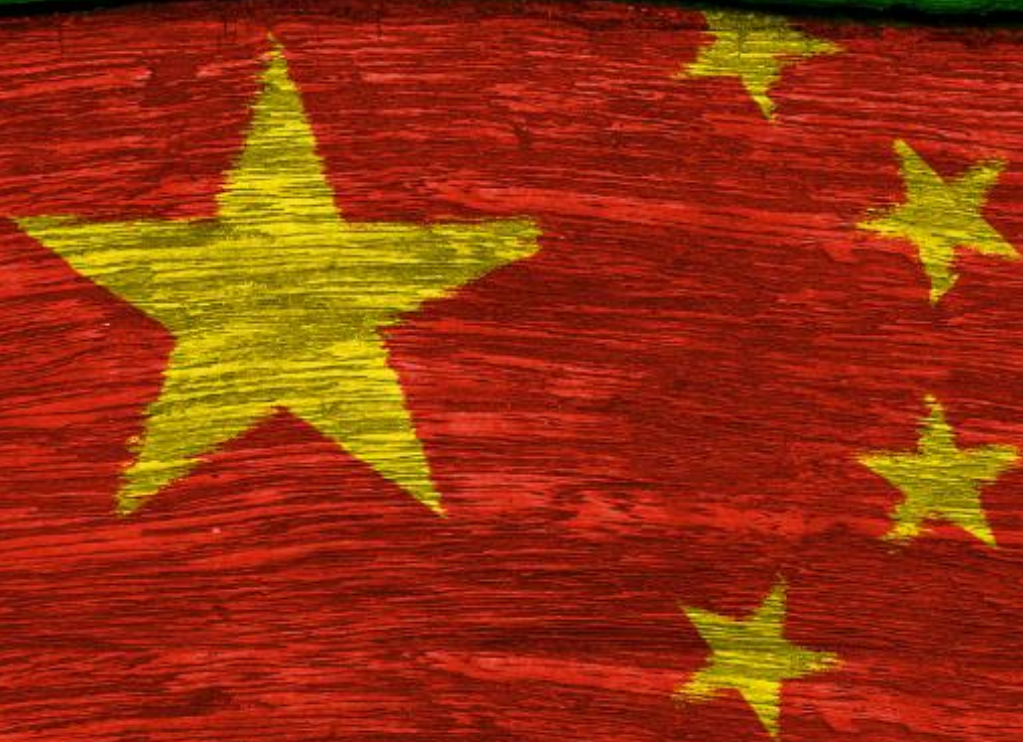


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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a nonprofit media organization that engages in citizen journalism and civic education.

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Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

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What Lies Behind East Asia's Mask Culture?

Dai Wei Tsang
July 1, 2020

Why did East Asian diaspora communities start wearing face masks in response to COVID-19 long before the practice was widespread or required?

In East Asia, face masks are accessories akin to hats and scarves, a civilian, not a medical, accessory. People wear them for a variety of reasons: the smog, the cold, the sun, hay fever, unruly acne or to send a message usually transmitted via earbuds in North America: Don't talk to me unless absolutely necessary.

This perspective stems from both the region's population density, history with communicable diseases and cultural similarities shared between its countries. It also helps explain why East Asian diaspora communities began wearing face masks long before the practice became commonplace or required by law around the globe.

In East Asia, where population density tends to be high, the risk of contagion is generally understood by the population to be higher as well. In metropolitan areas where the majority of the workforce travels by public transportation rather than personal vehicles, commuters guard against the constant possibility of falling sick. People begin wearing masks whenever there are reports of a seasonal spike and stop doing so once the rates of infection have gone down.

The 2002-03 SARS contagion and the 2009 H1N1 outbreak also help explain the public's receptivity to masks. Countries in East Asia had faced mask shortages during both crises, which prompted families to keep medical and cloth masks at home as part of their first-aid kit.

Beyond disease prevention, masks are also worn widely in East Asia for cultural and everyday sanitary reasons. Some people wear

masks to hide skin problems or to block out the sun. Scooter commuters wear masks to protect themselves against car exhausts. Street vendors wear masks while preparing food. And healthy elders often wear masks when they go for a routine medical check-up to avoid catching an actual disease due to their weakened immune system.

Given these historical, cultural and practical reasons behind wearing masks, the practice is widespread and does not incite alarm. When an individual in East Asia wears a mask in public, he or she is not automatically presumed sick. There is much less stigma attached to masks.

Outside of East Asia, however, this mentality does not exist in mainstream culture. In Europe and North America, there are two groups of professionals who regularly wear masks: doctors and housekeeping staff. In the first group, masks are associated with contact with sick individuals, and in the second, masks enforce a uniform, nameless identity. Other reasons for wearing frontal face coverings are based in religion or the desire to conceal identity, all of which also attract stigma.

These reasons explain why the general public outside of East Asia was initially reluctant to wear face masks. In the US in particular, individuals resisting wearing a mask cite infringements on personal freedom. Many public officials refuse to wear masks even when it is not their turn to speak in a televised press conference as they see wearing a mask as a vote of no confidence in containment measures rather than adherence to good practice. Those who make a point to wear masks during news updates acknowledge that people are not used to seeing faces being covered.

When news of the novel coronavirus started to spread around the world, East Asians who live outside of the region brought their perspectives with them and began wearing masks long before everyone else. In other words, they continued to see masks as a part of disease containment that would not be made redundant even by a sound institutional response. While everyone wears

masks for self-protection, East Asians consider the practice a sign of consideration for the nameless people they come in touch with. Sadly, many of them faced hate crimes for wearing masks, likely as a result of being associated with recent travel to China.

Wearing masks has become accepted in East Asia because the region has seen and adapted itself to contagion on multiple occasions, and East Asians have carried this acceptance with them as they spread around the world. Their early reaction has regrettably not spread to mainstream society, but perhaps after COVID-19, it will.

***Dai Wei Tsang** is the 2020 Asia Pacific fellow at Young Professionals in Foreign Policy.

Herd Immunity May Be Our Best Hope

Daniel Wagner & Mark Eckley
July 6, 2020

Herd immunity is an option that should be seriously considered by the world's governments as a safe and effective vaccine could be many years away — and may not be achieved at all.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, analysts have been opining about when a vaccine may be discovered and become widely available. Many suggest that it is simply a matter of time, given how many organizations around the world are busy racing to find a cure. But that assumption could well be fallacious. After all, there is no vaccine for HIV, SARS or any other coronavirus, including the elusive common cold. In the case of HIV, that remains the case even after the US and many other governments have spent billions of dollars trying to produce a vaccine. Why would this virus prove to be any different?

For a sense of perspective, the fastest existing record for developing a vaccine occurred for mumps. The mumps virus was first isolated in 1945; by 1948, an inactivated vaccine had been developed, but with short-term effectiveness. It was not until 1967 that a long-term vaccine became available. The average amount of time required to discover, test and approve a vaccine is 10 to 20 years. Given this, why would anyone presume that a COVID-19 vaccine will not only be discovered, but tested, approved and mass-produced in billions of doses in the next year? That is not going to happen. Currently, levels of mass production of vaccines occur in millions of doses, not billions. The world's drug manufacturers are not even capable of doing that.

There are presently 274 treatments — including 171 novel vaccines — being tested across the world to combat the coronavirus. Unfortunately, that may not improve the likelihood of success in a short time frame. Given the durability of the first wave of the virus and an impending second wave, achieving herd immunity may be the only realistic solution. The objective of herd immunity is to limit the ability of an infection to spread by making the majority of a population immune through exposure to it. In so doing, individuals with mild cases of an infectious disease mount an immune response that protects them from future infections by the same or related agents.

Epidemiology protocols require significant testing of a virus in a population to determine levels of reproduction accurately. In March of this year, scientists from Leicester University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong calculated that 70% of the population would need to be infected to achieve herd immunity against COVID-19. Implementing quarantines, practicing social distancing and regularly changing face masks alters the basic reproduction number by limiting transmission events, which can reduce the threshold for herd immunity.

The fact that some US states that were saturated with COVID-19 cases early on in the pandemic successfully flattened their curves for

intensive care occupancy, and deaths implied that herd immunity may already have been in the process of becoming established. But America's subsequent collective failure to institute widespread testing and contact tracing — as has been done in numerous other countries — has meant that its ability to more accurately determine true levels of infection remain extremely limited. Given current infection levels, contract tracing is now impossible.

The existence of multiple strains of COVID-19 in circulation further complicates America's and the world's ability to achieve herd immunity. The S strain is rapidly spreading, but with milder symptoms than the more widely spread G strain that has savaged Europe and the US. Whether productive immunity can be achieved in individuals exposed to milder strains, and whether immunity to any strain of the virus is permanent or temporary, are among the questions that remain to be answered.

The truth is, much remains unknown about this virus and will probably remain unknown for many months or even years to come. What is clear, however, is that six months after it began to spread around the world in earnest, this virus is out of control, in the US and globally. It is now completely unrealistic to imagine that America or the world will be able to successfully contain its spread, short of a total lockdown of the global economy, termination of all global travel, mandatory global stay-at-home orders and 100% compliance with wearing face masks and sterilizing hands multiple times per day. Even if that were possible, doing so would take many more months. That is obviously not going to happen.

So we are left with herd immunity and viable treatments as the world's only realistic near-term solution. Sweden has been roundly criticized and shunned by its neighbors for embracing herd immunity at the outset of the pandemic. It has paid a price for having done so based on accelerated infection and death rates. But while the jury will remain out for some time to come about the wisdom of having done so, Sweden

may prove to have been ahead of the curve in its approach. Herd immunity is an option that should be seriously considered by the world's governments for a safe and effective vaccine could be many years away — and may not be achieved at all.

***Daniel Wagner** is the founder and CEO of Country Risk. **Mark Eckley** holds a PhD in Cellular Biology.

Will Paraguay's President Abdo Benitez Redeem His Name?

Glenn Ojeda Vega & German Peinado Delgado
July 7, 2020

Mario Abdo Benitez's last year in office will shape his legacy, giving him a unique opportunity at historical redemption.

Paraguay's current president, Mario Abdo Benitez, was elected in April 2018. When he was sworn into office in August that year, it represented a second consecutive five-year term in power for the conservative Colorado Party, following the right-wing presidency of Horacio Cartes. At 48, Abdo Benitez is one of the youngest heads of state in Latin America along with Nayid Bukele in El Salvador, Luis Lacalle Pou in Uruguay and Ivan Duque in Colombia. Before becoming president, Abdo Benitez, who is also known for his entrepreneurship in the construction and infrastructure industry, served five years as senator, one of them as the body's president.

Throughout the last century, Paraguay has struggled with a military dictatorship and ultra-right-wing political movements. Between 1954 and 1989, the country was ruled by the military dictator Alfredo Stroessner, who was a Nazi sympathizer of German descent. Stroessner's 35-year reign came to an end with a coup led by

General Andres Rodriguez, who subsequently acted as president from 1989 to 1993. Stroessner was exiled in Brazil, where he lived until his death in 2006, never acknowledging the numerous crimes committed during his regime.

Both Stroessner and Rodriguez were officially affiliated with the Colorado Party, which formally ruled Paraguay between 1948 and 2008. In 2008, the Colorado's right-wing hegemony was pierced by the election of a former Catholic bishop-turned-leftist politician, Fernando Lugo. However, President Lugo's term in office was marked by a great deal of resistance from the country's establishment and ended abruptly in June of 2012 with a legislative impeachment process that some in the country and the region denounced as a parliamentary coup.

Lugo's mandate was completed by Vice President Federico Franco as interim president. Since then, the Colorado Party has regained power in Paraguay. Nonetheless, Fernando Lugo has served as senator in Paraguay since 2013 and is still a popular figure amongst the country's progressive bases.

More recently, in 2017, President Horacio Cartes tried to modify the post-Stroessner constitution to allow his own reelection, but this move sparked a wave of protests that forced the proposal's withdrawal. Constitutionally barred from seeking reelection, President Cartes passed the party's leadership and nomination to Mario Abdo Benitez, himself a descendant of the traditional Colorado lineage from the days of the dictatorship.

Domestic and Regional Agenda

Both Cartes and Abdo Benitez have focused on making Paraguay a fiscally attractive and economically stable destination for foreign investment. Efforts to achieve this have been so successful, that earlier this year Paraguay placed \$1 billion in a dollar-denominated 10-year (weighted average life) government bond issuance to support the country's recovery from COVID-19. Paraguay's strong fiscal and macroeconomic fundamentals led to an

oversubscribed offering and a favorable net interest cost for the landlocked South American nation.

Nevertheless, low tax rates and lax fiscal controls have also created headaches for Paraguay's national treasury, compliance and other financial institutions as they seek to curb money laundering and the financing of illegal actors. In addition to smuggling and contraband, Abdo Benitez's government has faced the mounting challenge of addressing the presence of illegal groups such as Hezbollah and the Paraguayan People's Army (EPP), a leftist guerilla founded in 2008 with an estimated force of 100-200 members.

On the diplomatic front, President Abdo Benitez has been an active leader within Latin America's Lima Group and was one of the first heads of state in the region to recognize Juan Guaido's proclamation as interim president in Venezuela, breaking ties with the Maduro regime. In 2019, President Abdo Benitez also announced Paraguay's withdrawal from UNASUR, an increasingly moribund multilateral institution that was created by the continent's leftist "pink tide" leaders between 2008 and 2011 as South America's alternative to the Organization of American States, which they perceive as too influenced by Washington.

Meanwhile, Paraguay has maintained stable relations with its neighbors, particularly as they seek greater regional integration and policy coordination. Nonetheless, porous borders, particularly at the tri-border region with Argentina and Brazil, remain a challenge in terms of tax evasion, drug and human trafficking, and money laundering.

Global Projection

Paraguay is currently one of the few remaining countries in Latin America — and the last one in South America — to diplomatically recognize Taiwan as the legitimate representative of the Republic of China. To this end, Asuncion hosts one of Taipei's last embassies in Latin America after Panama and the Dominican Republic

switched their diplomatic recognition to Beijing in recent years, driven largely by the promise of trade and investment benefits.

Nevertheless, President Abdo Benitez is also exploring the possibility of following the path that US President Nixon opened up for Latin America back in 1972 by recognizing Beijing at Taipei's expense. Intentions by the region's Mercosur trade bloc, which includes Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, to sign a trade agreement with Beijing are also putting pressure on Asuncion to switch its diplomatic recognition.

A relatively small capital city for the Southern Cone region, Asuncion doesn't host many diplomatic missions from countries outside of the Western Hemisphere because many European and Asian governments fold representation to Paraguay into their embassies in larger capitals such as Buenos Aires or Brasilia. However, in December 2018, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Asuncion for the first time, following the opening of a new Turkish Embassy there, and announced plans by both countries to increase trade and commercial exchanges.

Part of a diplomatic waltz, Turkey's government inaugurated its new embassy following Abdo Benitez's reversal of his predecessor's decision to relocate the Paraguayan Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on the heels of the Trump administration's controversial move.

COVID-19 and the Itaipu Dam

Like most countries around the world, Paraguay has taken measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For example, Abdo Benitez's government has suspended in-person classes nationwide until at least December. In recent weeks, given the low infection numbers, the national government began a staged reopening of the Paraguayan economy after months of quarantine. While seeking aid from the International Monetary Fund, in addition to the debt emission, President Abdo Benitez has allowed the reactivation of small and mid-sized

businesses in specific sectors throughout Paraguay.

Although Paraguay's Constitution only allows heads of state to serve a single term, the Colorado Party's hold on power and President Abdo Benitez's legacy will be tied to two key issues: the handling of the COVID-19 crisis and the renegotiation of an accord with Brazil that governs the joint Itaipu Dam. A central policy issue in Paraguay since its inception in 1973, Itaipu is Latin America's largest hydropower generator. Located on the Parana River, this mega-dam was constructed jointly with the Brazilian government and, at the time, the Stroessner regime didn't negotiate as favorable of a deal as it could have on the partition of the electricity generated, which represents over 90% of Paraguay's energy consumption and about 20% of Brazil's energy mix.

Under the current treaty, which is set to expire in 2023, Paraguay sells its excess Itaipu electricity to Brazil on terms that are very generous to Brazil while short-changing the Paraguayan people and its economy. Thus, for decades, Paraguayans have regarded the unfavorable terms of the Itaipu Treaty as a source of national shame and as one of the dictatorship's lasting failures. Paraguay negotiated the terms of the Treaty in 1973 from a position of weakness vis-à-vis Brazil, and it is still unclear whether President Abdo Benitez will be able to negotiate from a stronger position than the Stroessner regime. Whatever happens across the table from Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, this final year in office will shape the Paraguayan president's legacy, giving him a unique opportunity at historical redemption of the Abdo Benitez surname in Paraguay.

***Glenn Ojeda Vega and German Peinado Delgado** are international relations professionals based in Washington, DC and Bogota, respectively.

Modi's Fantasy Versus Xi's Reality

Mauktik Kulkarni
July 7, 2020

In its ongoing standoff with China, Modi's focus on narratives for domestic consumption has left India with three unsavory options.

By banning TikTok and 58 other Chinese apps, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expanded its ongoing military confrontation with China to include trade. While it will keep his voters happy, the brewing stand-off has exposed the yawning gap between global geopolitics and Modi's propaganda.

Since coming to power in 2014, Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) formidable social media wing — the so-called IT cell — have gained notoriety in pushing nationalistic narratives. Jingoism, Islamophobia and fake news have created a bizarre sense of national grandeur and projected Modi as a peerless global leader.

China's recent military moves on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India in Ladakh have not only negated these narratives about India's global stature, economic might and social policies, but also left India with three bad options to choose from.

No Tangible Gains

Notwithstanding the "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump" rallies, India plays a negligible role in United States' foreign policy. While intelligence sharing has reached unprecedented levels, it is primarily because of American self-interest. The ongoing US-India trade war shows no signs of abating, reducing India to requesting the US to reinstate its Generalized System of Preferences status and remove import duties on several Indian products. On immigration, Modi has failed to eke out any benefits for Indian visa holders.

EU-India FTA talks, languishing since 2013, have not progressed under Modi. Security ties with Australia have improved, and Japan is partially financing India's first bullet train. While Australia, Japan, India and the US are forming a "Quad" of democracies to contain China, it is not clear how it will strengthen India's economy. Modi cannot ban all Chinese imports in the short term. Even if it begins to slowly disengage, India accounts for only 2% of Chinese exports and has no leverage over China. On the contrary, by financing several infrastructure projects in India's neighborhood, China has opened a multi-pronged attack on India's security interests.

The world is granting Modi the photo ops to impress his voters without offering any substantial trade benefits. The BJP's IT cell spreads tales of Modi's economic wizardry, but India's weakened economy is the primary reason behind its diminished global standing. Repeated business disruptions due to demonetization, botched Goods and Services Tax roll-out, frequent e-commerce policy changes, annual announcement and retraction of draconian tax measures and a nationwide lockdown without any pandemic containment strategy indicate to the world an impulsive leader with little understanding of modern-day businesses and global supply chains.

The BJP's Hindu victimhood narrative has placed blame for all socio-economic problems of today's India on Nehruvian socialism and the idea of minority appeasement. While erstwhile governments of the rival Congress party enacted some laws favoring minorities, Modi's majoritarian solutions have made things worse. Criminalizing the triple talaq and the controversy over the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens have polarized society without any tangible gains. Article 370 of India's Constitution, granting special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, was dying a slow death. Its abrupt scrapping and the subsequent statewide lockdown have destroyed the local economy. Marginalizing India's 200 million Muslims might be a good electoral strategy, but

outsiders see it as detrimental to a vibrant economy.

China's military moves seem to have begun soon after India's scrapping of Article 370. India's massive infrastructure projects along the LAC, combined with sending two members of Parliament to the recent swearing-in of the Taiwanese president, might have led China to escalate the confrontation. India's military is battle-hardened due to frequent run-ins with Pakistan and could prevail over China's, but both sides cannot afford a full-scale war.

Good Long-Term Bet

Geopolitical alignments are not created overnight, and earlier governments share some blame for India's predicament. It is equally true, though, that Modi has focused on propaganda and socially regressive policies at the expense of building a strong economy. It has left India with three unsavory options, the least likely of which entails India accepting China as the dominant Asian power in exchange for troop withdrawal.

India can maintain its strategic autonomy — keeping its military cooperation with Russia, civilizational ties with Iran and the Middle East, and the newfound friendship with Western democracies intact — and independently fight a long-drawn diplomatic war with China. Given China's opaque, undemocratic system, this may not sound like a good option. However, considering America's unsustainable fiscal trajectory and the mantle of the creditor of the world shifting from colonial-era Europe and post-World War II United States to China, neutrality might be a good long-term bet.

It will come with short-term pain. India's government debt and deficit have skyrocketed since 2014, making a quick turnaround unlikely. Foreign currency reserves of over \$500 billion might guard against a short-term economic collapse and help India tide over the expensive military build-up. Even if India attracts manufacturers looking to move away from China — a tall ask given its archaic land and labor laws — it is unlikely to offer exponential job growth.

Since the first Industrial Revolution, manufacturing has been the growth engine of several economies, but automation and AI are rewriting that playbook. Recent agricultural reforms to remove middlemen and privatization in space and defense industries are positive steps. Unfortunately, India lacks the fiscal space for massive education as well as research and development infrastructure upgrades for creating a productive, innovation-based economy.

It can align with the US in its brewing Cold War with China, compromise on trade issues and integrate its economy with other democracies. In stark contrast to the aftermath of surgical strikes in Pakistan and the scrapping of Article 370, the muted global response to the ongoing standoff indicates China's clout.

Since a manufacturing-led revival is unlikely, India can abandon its protectionist mindset and focus on services, pharmaceuticals, tourism and other sectors. It will have to clamp down on Islamophobia, reform its judiciary and offer a stable, rule-of-law based social climate for growth. With four more years to go and high approval ratings, Modi can undertake this massive realignment and emerge as a transformative leader. His early moves under the recently announced "Atmanirbharta," or self-sufficiency, campaign, along with his continued religion-baiting and destruction of democratic institutions, inspire little confidence.

Either way, China has caught India at its lowest ebb since its balance-of-payments crisis of 1991. China is unlikely to succeed in grabbing land on the Indian side of LAC, but India could now take a decade or two longer to catch up with China. It probably explains the timing of China's military moves.

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Has Putin Won the Vote on Constitutional Amendments?

Dmitri Gorelov
July 8, 2020

After a controversial vote on constitutional amendments, Russian President Vladimir Putin has reset his presidential terms but risks losing legitimacy.

On July 3, the Russian central election commission announced the results of the nationwide vote on constitutional reforms, the biggest shake-up of the constitution since it was adopted in 1993. According to official data, 77.92% of voters, or 57.7 million people, cast their ballots in favor of the reforms, with a 67.97% turnout.

The vote took place between June 25 and July 1, with the voters being asked to decide on a myriad of unrelated amendments to the Russian Constitution — 206 to be exact — in a single package. For example, the proposed amendments included a passage on “marriage as the union between a man and a woman,” a stipulation of the primacy of the Russian law over international treaties but, most importantly, a “zeroing” of Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms. The latter allows Putin to disregard his 20-years-long tenure and run for two more terms in 2024 and 2030.

The voting turned out to be an unapologetic attempt to pull the wool over the public eye. While achieving the figures he wanted, Putin may have sacrificed popular trust in the electoral system for good. From now on, any elections in Putin’s Russia will be treated with skepticism and can hardly remain a source of legitimacy for his protracted tenure.

Why a Nationwide Vote?

The nationwide vote was the most salient but the least decisive part of the constitutional reform procedure. It must be noted that, according to

Russian law, the amendments to the constitution do not require a popular vote. Any amendments to Chapters 3 through 8 of the constitution come into force after being approved by legislative authorities of at least two-thirds of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. In fact, the constitution had already been amended four times using this procedure before 2020: Two amendments came into force in December 2008, a third in February 2014, and a fourth in July 2014. To amend chapters 1, 2 and 9, which effectively determine Russia’s political system, a new constitution must be adopted through a more rigorous process, which includes a nationwide referendum.

Similar to the previous four cases, the 2020 amendments concerned Chapters 3 through 8 and did not require a referendum. However, when Putin first proposed the new amendments during his annual address to the federal assembly on January 15, he stressed that the amendments should be subject to approval by Russian citizens. The Kremlin and state-owned media claimed that this showed Putin’s willingness to go the extra mile and to showcase his confidence in national support for the reforms.

By late February, the Russian parliament proposed the so-called nationwide vote, a special voting procedure, not subject to the Russian law on referendums. The head of the central election commission, Ella Pamfilova, suggested that the vote should be an “exclusive, one-time, unique event” to avoid questions regarding the vote’s compliance with existing legislation. Instead of references to the existing laws, the procedure for the nationwide vote was described in the same draft bill as the constitutional amendments.

Wrong Timing

The amendment procedure was seemingly designed as a “special operation,” and its timing was carefully planned. It was initially scheduled to be completed before the May 9 military parade dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. If passed quickly, culminating with the parade, the whole procedure

might have played well in Putin's favor and would have been perceived by the public as victorious and unifying reform. This was important, as a prolonged public discussion would inevitably attract attention to Putin's attempt to reset his presidential terms in 2024.

The legally required procedure unfolded smoothly, as it was well planned and executed by all parties involved. Following Putin's address to the federal assembly, the draft bill of new amendments was fast-tracked through three readings in the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, and approved by the upper house, the federation council, on March 13. The next day, Putin signed the law, which was subsequently published on the government's official website. Russia's constitutional court approved the amendments on March 16.

The nationwide vote was initially scheduled for April 22, with the intention to finalize the procedure before May 9. While the amendments had passed all the legally required stages and entered into force by mid-March, the vote was intended to legitimize the process and create a perception of popular approval. However, the neat plan was disrupted by a factor outside of Kremlin's control: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Russia's health-care authorities reported first coronavirus cases on January 31, when work on the constitutional amendment in the Duma was already well underway. The number of cases in Russia was still relatively low in late February when Putin publicly announced the date of the vote. In March, infection rates both in Russia and around the world have become truly worrying, with the World Health Organization declaring a pandemic. The Kremlin had no option but to review its plans, and on March 25, Putin announced that the vote would be rescheduled for a later date.

As a consequence, the nationwide vote was transformed from an asset into a burden. It lost its symbolic flair as Putin's personal victory on the eve of Victory Day and instead started generating a sober public discussion. A mid-June survey by reputable Russian sociologist Sergey Belanovsky

indicated that zeroing of Putin's presidential terms was the least popular amendment in the proposed set of reforms, and the more people learned about it, the less likely they were to vote in favor of the reforms.

Combined with the dampening effect of COVID-19 on Russia's economy and health-care system, a favorable result suddenly became rather unlikely. It would have been equally problematic to abandon the vote, as not only was it promised to the public, but also specifically stipulated in the law on the amendment in question. Two months into lockdown, Kremlin was facing a timing dilemma: If the vote was not announced by the end of May, it would overlap with the regional election campaigns starting in July and August. This would shift the focus of voters and diminish the legitimizing effect.

Pressured by the deadline, Putin rescheduled the vote for July 1. Subsequently, the election commission unprecedentedly introduced one week of early voting, from June 25 to 30, citing the need to minimize social contact during the pandemic. On June 1, when the vote was announced, Russia's authorities reported over 9,000 new cases. The official numbers decreased to around 7,000 new cases per day during the voting week.

PR Exercise

The long preparation did not prevent the vote from turning out to be dubious both in form and in substance. From the very first day, social media was flooded with images of polling stations arranged on tree stumps, park benches and even in car trunks. After all, the central election commission encouraged outdoor balloting under the pretext of COVID-19 precautions. To mobilize voters, authorities organized lotteries, with prizes including apartments and cars. Every person turning out for the vote was also eligible to receive vouchers valid at supermarkets, museums and restaurants. Journalists have found that they were able to cast their vote twice, while the head of the election

office in Omsk happened to win an apartment in the lottery.

Independent monitoring became next to impossible due to the duration of voting, while ballot boxes were left unattended after closing hours. Monitoring was often obstructed by authorities in broad daylight. During one incident, a policeman broke the arm of David Frenkel, a journalist who was covering the vote at a St. Petersburg polling station.

When the result was announced, it came as little surprise. While the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, described it as a triumphant vote of confidence in Putin, opposition politicians, independent observers and electoral experts have been far more critical. Russia's largest and most reputable election watchdog Golos reported that the vote failed to meet both Russian and international standards due to the lack of legal framework, procedural violations, forced voting and mass falsification of votes. Golos described the vote as a PR exercise aiming to spin public perception. Sergey Shpilkin, a well-known Russian electoral statistics expert, published evidence of widespread fraud. He identified over 22 million cases of irregular voting, which might indicate that around 45% of all votes were falsified.

The Big Picture

The constitutional reform is only the first step in a larger political process currently taking place in Russia. Putin is about to enter a transition period as his fourth presidential term is scheduled to end in 2024. He also desperately needs the United Russia party to secure a comfortable majority in the elections to the Duma in 2021. Without overwhelming control over the legislature (now the United Russia has over two-third seats in the Duma), he might face many unpleasant risks, including that of being impeached.

The referendum has demonstrated that the upcoming parliamentary and presidential campaigns will become increasingly stressful for Putin's system. Surveys by all major Russian sociological research centers (FOM, VTsIOM,

Levada) indicate that both Putin and United Russia's approval ratings have been steadily decreasing since 2016 in the context of a stagnating economy and a series of unpopular decisions made by the government. There is little indication that the constitutional reforms will have a positive impact on this dynamic.

On the contrary, the nationwide vote has raised questions about Putin's legitimacy and authority, not just among the general public but also the regional elites. Thus, the Nenets Autonomous District became the only region to openly rebel against the constitutional reforms: 55.25% of local voters opposed the amendments, according to official data. Most importantly, this figure demonstrates that local elites who were entrusted with delivering the results were not eager to achieve success by any means necessary. After the vote, the district's governor, Yury Bezdudny, pointed out that the people used this opportunity to vote against the Kremlin's policies in the region, especially the recently proposed merger with neighboring Arkhangelsk.

The nationwide vote leaves Putin with a delegitimized voting procedure as well as significant cracks in his image of a popular leader. Going forward, this will certainly create uncomfortable situations for the Kremlin around upcoming elections.

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Han and Hindu Nationalism Come Face to Face

Atul Singh, Glenn Carle & Vikram Sood
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The heirs to the Qing and the British empires both fear encirclement and are locked in a tense struggle for geostrategic advantage with

ever increasing risk of another military conflict.

As dusk fell on June 15, a bloody clash broke out between Chinese and Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley on the northwest China-India border, where a tributary of the Indus flows westward from Aksai Chin to Ladakh. In line with China's recent expansionist policy elsewhere, its military had been pushing forward into territory claimed by both nations, altering facts on the ground. In line with India's status quo policy to maintain its territorial integrity, its troops moved against Chinese intrusion, and a clash ensued. It was a throwback to the past. No one used guns, grenades or bombs. Men fought hand to hand, with fence posts, clubs wrapped in barbed wire, rods studded with nails, knives and even bayonets.

The fight took place on craggy cliffs at icy Himalayan heights. At least 20 Indian soldiers died, including a colonel. China has not revealed its casualties, but reliable sources estimate them to be higher than India's. Satellite images show that China had been building bunkers, tents and storage units for military hardware near the site of the clash. The Chinese struck the first blow at a time and place of their choosing. They were surprised by the ferocity of the Indian response. Clashes between troops of both countries have occurred regularly along the contested border, but this is the first deadly one for 45 years.

For thousands of years, empires based in China and India did not clash. The mighty Himalayas acted as an insurmountable barrier. The bitter cold and low oxygen levels of the highest mountains in the world were too high even for a Hannibal or a Napoleon. Chinese armies that conquered Tibet were already at the limits of their supply lines, and the Himalayas were more forbidding than the Great Wall of China even for the dreaded Mongol hordes. For the Indian armies, the fabled riches of spice-laden south India were more alluring than the barren, frosty peaks of the north. Hence, many independent Himalayan kingdoms survived until

relatively recently. The Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan is the last of the Mohicans and still acts as a buffer state between two Asian giants.

Tensions between China and India are a recent phenomenon. Both are new postcolonial states. The former is heir to the expansionist Qing Empire and is a revisionist power. It seeks to rewrite the rigged rules of the game of the international order. European powers and the United States forced this order down Chinese gullets when it was going through decline, disorder and disgrace. India is the child of the British Empire that seeks to preserve the status quo. It no longer identifies with the Mughal Empire, Britain's predecessor.

Hindu India now sees the Mughals as Muslim oppressors who smashed temples, killed spiritual leaders, made Farsi the language of their empire and looked to Central Asia or the Middle East for inspiration. Today, India's official language is English. Its laws, political systems and bureaucratic structures are legacies of the British, not of earlier empires. It has inherited the British conflict with the Qing.

At its essence, tensions between the two Asian giants boil down to one simple fact: India seeks to preserve British boundaries, while China seeks to reassert Qing ones. To make sense of what is going on and what might happen next, we have no choice but to go back into the past.

String of Pearls

China and India share a 3,440-kilometer border. Each claims territory controlled by the other. This territorial rivalry has led to only one war, in distant 1962, when Jawaharlal Nehru was India's prime minister, Zhou Enlai was Nehru's Chinese counterpart, and Mao Zedong was the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). India lost that war ignominiously.

Since then, India and China have been uncomfortable neighbors. In 1963, Pakistan ceded Shaksgam Valley to China and commenced a relationship that has strengthened over time. Starting from 1969, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger used Islamabad as a

backdoor to Beijing. In July 1971, Kissinger made a secret trip to China while on a visit to Pakistan. Islamabad was receptive to American blandishments, while New Delhi started the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the height of the Cold War. Its Marxist-tinged view of Western imperialism clashed with the American Cold War view of international relations. Naturally, the US sided with Pakistan against India when the two countries fought later that year.

Things have come a long way since 1971. The Soviet Union has fallen. China has become the workshop of the world. Pakistan is perceived more as the hiding place for Osama bin Laden than an entryway to Beijing. In 1991, India began a political, economic and philosophical transformation. Until recently, it was progressively rejecting statism. In its own gradualist manner, India has become less fearful of American neocolonialism and evolved into a more confident world power. India and the US have now made up. Both increasingly fear the rise of the Middle Kingdom.

In fact, India has real fears of a two-front war. What happens if Pakistan and China gang up against it? There are also concerns about the “string of pearls” China has built around India — ports in the Indian Ocean in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. New Delhi fears that Beijing might use its string to garotte India. Then there is another tiny little matter: In remote Tibet, looming high above the Indian plains, lies the source of the Brahmaputra, the Indus and other important rivers. Chinese dams could pose an existential risk to hundreds of millions living downstream.

Just as India fears China, the Middle Kingdom fears an alliance of India, Japan, Australia and the US — the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), also known as the Quad. The Chinese still face what then-president Hu Jintao termed “the Malacca Dilemma” in 2003. About 80% of their oil goes through the Strait of Malacca. A visit to this strait is shocking for a geostrategist: At any given time, dozens of ships are visible, funneling their way for 900 kilometers through a body of

water that at its narrowest point is no more than 2 kilometers wide.

If geography is destiny, then China and India seem fated to clash. After all, how can two rising giants with competing strategic interests fail to clash? Graham Allison of the Harvard Kennedy School has popularized the term “the Thucydides Trap.” As per Allison’s argument, the probability of bloodshed runs high when a rising power confronts a ruling power. Allison posited that the US and China might be facing the Thucydides Trap. In the Asian context, China and India might be walking into the very same trap.

History Matters

If we were to view the world through Samuel Huntington’s prism, both China and India have laid claim over Tibet’s soul. After the Tibetan Empire collapsed by the 9th century, Lhasa frequently fell under Beijing’s yoke. Both the Mongol Yuan and the Manchu Qing dynasties exercised suzerainty over Tibet. However, Tibet has always been connected to India culturally. The founder of Tibetan Buddhism arrived from Nalanda, the legendary university of the fertile Gangetic plains. Nalanda no longer exists — the Turks sacked it. Buddhism is a religion practiced in certain regions and limited sections of Indian society. Yet Tibetan philosophy has more in common with its Indian counterpart than with the philosophies of Confucius, Mencius or Lao Tzu.

Indian philosophy might have found fertile ground in the barren Tibetan Plateau, but it was China that took charge of this territory. Often confused as a nation-state, the Middle Kingdom was, in more ways than one, an empire. In 1998, Nicola Di Cosmo published an iconic paper analyzing Qing colonial administration in Inner Asia. He concluded that “the modern notion of China as a timeless union of many ‘nationalities’” obscures “the tensions and internal contradictions inherent in the process of Chinese empire building.”

The Qing were Manchus. Like the Mongols, they were outsiders who seized control of Beijing in 1644. A peasant rebellion led by Li Zicheng

gave these northern barbarians their chance. They purported to ride in to rescue the Ming and promptly took over. Like previous conquerors, the Qing made enormous efforts to assimilate into Chinese culture, retained Han officials who served the Ming and promoted Confucian values.

Remembering how they had taken over Beijing, the Qing recognized the threat of a Mongol-Tibetan alliance. They embarked on an empire-building project of territorial expansion, which “was accompanied by military occupation and a new administrative structure.” The empire of the Qing came to comprise thrice the size of the empire of the Ming. Its population grew from about 150 million to over 450 million.

Mongolia, Central Asia and Tibet were all annexed. In 1720, the Kangxi Emperor sent troops to Lhasa. The Lifan Yuan, the court for the outer provinces of Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang, sent two ambans, or frontier specialists, to Lhasa. The powers of the ambans gradually increased through the 18th century, but the Qing ruled Tibet with a light touch.

Even as the Qing were expanding, the mighty Mughals were declining. Akbar died in 1605, and his successors did not prove as able. His grandson Shah Jahan took charge in 1628 and is famous for building the Taj Mahal, but it was paid for by oppressive taxation. The English traveler Peter Mundy observed “putrefying corpses of the victims of famine” and paints a sorry picture of the Mughal realm during his journey through the country.

In 1658, Shah Jahan’s fanatical son, Aurangzeb, killed his brothers and imprisoned his father. He smashed temples, persecuted non-Muslims and triggered widespread rebellion. Until today, Aurangzeb is one of the most hated names in Hindu and Sikh families with children told tales of his cruelty. The last of the mighty Mughals died in 1707, and the empire disintegrated. Just five decades later, Robert Clive won the historic 1757 Battle of Plassey. An expansionist British India replaced a crumbling Mughal India.

The Many Games and the Great Game

In Rudyard Kipling’s “Kim,” the eponymous hero of the novel becomes the chela, the Hindi word for disciple, of a Tibetan lama. Together, they wander through dusty plains and the invigorating Himalayas. Indeed, it is the lama who pays for Kim’s education. The former seeks enlightenment while the latter learns the art of espionage, a sine qua non to play a role in the Great Game. The spellbinding yarn of Kim has some basis in reality. Like the Ottomans and the Mughals, the Qing were declining precipitously by the 18th and 19th centuries. Internal disorder and external invasion threatened the dynasty. The Qing military had become pathetic and its mandarins useless. Corruption stalked the land, and the peasants were grossly overtaxed.

During this period, Warren Hastings, the first governor general of India, dispatched George Bogle to Tibet. The Scottish adventurer met the third Panchen Lama in 1775 and established friendly relations. He purportedly went on to marry a close relative of the lama. Bogle’s mission was not followed up by much. The British had the rest of India to conquer and consolidate. The 1857 uprising and transferring sovereignty from the British East India Company to Queen Victoria put Tibet off their agenda in the 19th century.

Even as the British kept themselves busy in India, they eyed China. The British thrashed the Middle Kingdom in the First Opium War of 1839-42. The war was fought on the principle of free trade. The British insisted that they have the right to export opium to China. Naturally, they grew poppy in India to make the opium. As spoils of victory, the Chinese ceded Hong Kong to Great Britain to serve as a comptoir to China. The British extracted a hefty indemnity as well. More importantly, they now had the legal right to export opium to the Middle Kingdom — perversely about the only “good” the Chinese seemed willing to buy from the “barbarian” British.

The Chinese capitulation to British arms demonstrated that the Qing emperor had no

clothes. The Taiping Rebellion, with its fanatical local version of Christianity but fundamentally a manifestation of a China in utter disarray and decay, broke out in 1850 and lasted until 1864. Even as this revolt raged, China lost the Second Opium War of 1856-60. Both Britain and France teamed up to carve out the Chinese carcass.

It was the era of mercantile imperialism, and the Europeans rivaled with each other even as they cooperated to divide up the hopelessly self-absorbed and utterly sclerotic but potentially lucrative Chinese empire. The Europeans wanted to expand the opium trade to the interior and, of course, more reparations. At home, European leaders justified much of their expansion to their own peoples by demanding freedom to preach Christianity. Sometimes, they were even sincere about advancing the word while planting the flag. In 1860, the two reigning European superpowers, Britain and France, achieved total victory in what *The New York Times* called a “dashing little campaign.”

Lord Elgin, the son of the man who took away the Elgin Marbles from Greece and later the viceroy of India, commanded an overwhelming British-French force that involved some Indian troops. When his messenger was killed by the Chinese, the great lord responded in a manner befitting none other than the great Genghis Khan. European troops torched the magnificent Summer Palace to the ground and engaged in an extraordinary orgy of loot. Patriotic Chinese still feel a burning sense of shame about this incident. Many still “resent and distrust” the West.

Barely had the dust settled on the ruins of the palace when the Dungan Revolt broke out in 1862. This time it was Muslims instead of Christians who struck out against Beijing. Riots broke out between the Hui minority and Han majority in many areas after Taiping rebels invaded the northwest province of Shensi. Ethnic cleansing became par for the course, and the rebellion lasted 15 years. What the scholar Weng-djang Chu wrote in 1958 stands true today: This revolt covered 3,191,680 square kilometers and is still “greatly underestimated.” The surge of

Muslim revolts in the far west of China in fact was more responsible for the final collapse of the tottering Qing dynasty than the red-haired barbarians from the West.

Ripe for the Picking

Like the Ottoman Empire, the Qing Empire was ripe for the picking. Internal revolt was the order of the day. Foreign powers sensed their chance. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan joined the party. The First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 ended in calamity for China. Japan’s British-trained navy and Prussian-modeled army crushed the Qing forces, altering the balance of power in East Asia and whetting Japan’s appetite for empire. Now, the land of the rising sun was the rising Asian power.

Tibet increasingly enjoyed *de facto* independence after the First Opium War, as China struggled to stay afloat. This was also a time when Tibetans had to deal with invasion from the west, not the east. A new Sikh Empire emerged in the east. Its Dogra generals conquered Kashmir. Zorawar Singh Kahluria, the most dashing of the Dogras, led audacious campaigns in high altitude to conquer Buddhist Ladakh, a tributary of Tibet.

Kahluria tried conquering western Tibet but in 1841 ended up with a lance in his chest. The Dogras avenged their general by winning the 1842 Battle of Chushul and then signed a treaty establishing the status quo ante bellum. The Sikh story did not last long — by 1849, the British crushed them. The new masters of India’s northwest gave Kashmir to the Dogras for having stabbed their Sikh overlords in the back. Notably, the Dogras still retained some territory in Tibet, especially in areas holy to the Hindus.

The British seemed to reach the limits of their power of expansion to the north of India in the disastrous First Afghan War of 1839-42. The Afghans killed the entire British expeditionary force of 4,500 soldiers and 12,000 camp followers under General Elphinstone. Only one person survived. He was an army doctor who rode into Jalalabad to tell the sorry tale. Despite

this disastrous British defeat, the Great Game continued without. Both Britain and Russia continued to expand their influence into Afghanistan. Eventually, the Second Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1878. From the British point of view, it was an opportunity to avenge the rout of 1842 and contain Russian expansion.

Now, the theater of the Great Game shifted to Tibet. Ngawang Dorjee, a Russian-born monk, was received by Tsar Nicholas II at St. Petersburg as Tibet's special envoy in 1901. Naturally, this made the British nervous. In 1904, Colonel Francis Younghusband appeared at the gates of Lhasa with a significant body of troops on a so-called diplomatic mission, designed primarily to forestall Russian inroads to Britain's sphere of interest extending north from India, Britain's "crown jewel." The 13th Dalai Lama, the predecessor to the current one, fled to Mongolia.

The British did not build upon their success in Lhasa. They did not want an international incident. Tensions in Europe were rising, and Britain was coming to view an alliance with Russia as desirable. Therefore, the British government ignored Younghusband's Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904. Instead, they took the indemnity China offered on Tibet's behalf and signed an Anglo-Chinese convention in 1906, recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. A year later, an Anglo-Russian agreement on Tibet affirmed the 1906 accord.

The European intervention in Tibet provoked a response. After nearly two centuries of ruling with a light touch, the Manchu Qing, even though it was on its last legs, decided to reassert control over Tibet. Ethnic Tibetan areas east of the Yangtze River were put under Beijing's direct administrative control. They are now a part of Sichuan Province. In 1909-10, an army led by Zhao Erfeng arrived in Lhasa.

The 13th Dalai Lama fled to exile again, this time to Darjeeling, a lovely hill station in British India. He developed a close friendship with Sir Charles Bell, the British political officer in the then Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim. It was here

that the 13th Dalai Lama organized a military force to win back power. Destiny would smile on him soon. The 1911 Revolution led to the end of the Qing dynasty by 1912. The very next year, the 13th Dalai Lama expelled Chinese troops and officials from Lhasa. He also declared complete self-rule, and Tibet achieved de facto independence. It was to last nearly four decades.

Han Nationalism Replaces Manchu Empire

It is important to note that none of the Chinese leaders of the 1911 Revolution accepted Tibetan independence. Yuan Shikai, the man who took over from the Qing, claimed "the Five Races [Han, Tibetan, Manchu, Mongol, Muslim] deeply united into one family" were all part of "the Yellow Church." Sun Yat-sen, the "father of the revolution," called for "the creation of a strong Chinese state that would expel the Japanese from Manchuria, the Russians from Mongolia and the British from Tibet."

Thanks to the 1911 Revolution, the Han were back in the emperor's palanquin. The Manchus were out after a 268-year rule. It was time to restore China to its millennial greatness. Regaining control of Tibet became an article of faith. Luckily for the Tibetans, the Chinese disintegrated into yet another civil war and then had to deal with a brutal Japanese invasion. Tibetan elites ran the country the way they deemed fit.

However, Tibet was unable to gain formal independence. Unlike Sikkim or Bhutan, Tibet did not end up as an Indian protectorate. The British summoned Chinese and Tibetan representatives to Simla, the de facto capital of British India in 1913. After months of discussion, the Simla Convention was signed in July 1914 by Tibet and Britain. China refused to sign this agreement even though it acknowledged Chinese suzerainty over Tibet.

Like most British treaties, this one was rather advantageous to them. It obtained for British India a vast territory east of Bhutan that now forms the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Tibetans lost Tawang, a large Buddhist monastery they

revere greatly. Only in 2008 did the Dalai Lama finally accept Tawang to be a part of India. In 1914, Britain was curiously willing to accept vast territory from Tibet without Chinese approval but was unwilling to recognize Tibet's independence.

Such lack of formal recognition came to haunt Tibet, starting on October 1, 1949, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded. Mao's communists were good Chinese nationalists and wanted to reunify the disparate parts of China under a strong central government. The Red Army invaded Tibet's eastern province in October 1950, posing as an army of liberation from Western imperialism. This was roughly as accurate as European claims about 90 years before that Christ must accompany the flag into China. In May 1951, the Dalai Lama signed the Seventeen Point Agreement with the Chinese. For the first time, an agreement formally recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

Initially, the CCP followed the Soviet Union's nationality system. As Melvyn Goldstein observed in 2004, the communists even "allowed the feudal system, with its serflike peasantry, to persist," allowing the Dalai Lama to rule with relative autonomy. The CCP officials presented themselves to Tibetans as the "new Chinese," who were in the country to develop, not exploit. As soon as it had consolidated its power, however, the CCP reverted to its guiding principles. In 1955-56, officials launched socialist land reform in the Kham and Amdo regions of Sichuan and Qinghai provinces. This effectively meant the abolition of private property. Bloody rebellion followed. Starting in 1957, Tibetan refugees streamed into Lhasa. By this time, the Cold War had been defining international relations for over a decade. The US had fought China in Korea from 1950 to 1953. It sensed an opportunity to create a problem for the Chinese.

The CIA began training and arming Tibetan guerrillas. Despite the fact that monasteries and feudal lords still controlled their estates and serfs in Tibet, an anti-Chinese uprising erupted in March 1959. The Chinese government crushed

the Lhasa uprising. The Dalai Lama renounced the Seventeen Point Agreement and wearisomely fled Tibet yet again — to India, where he remains to this day.

This was a bad time for China. The Great Leap Forward resulted not in progress but in the Great Chinese Famine of 1959-61. As Cormac Ó Gráda wrote in 2015, it was "the greatest famine in recorded history." Like Joseph Stalin's first five-year plan of 1928-32, Mao's forced collectivization resulted in cataclysm. Estimates vary widely but, as per modern demographic analyses, between 20 and 30 million died.

Han nationalism did not die, however. The more "revolutionary" CCP cadres blamed Mao's moderation in Tibet for the Dalai Lama's duplicity. They remembered how his predecessor had also fled to India and plotted to overthrow Chinese rule. They feared an encore. Emulating the Dalai Lama, the CCP abandoned the Seventeen Point Agreement, terminated traditional Tibetan government, confiscated monastic and aristocratic estates and closed down thousands of monasteries. Out went the gradualist policy of accommodation, in came domination by Han CCP apparatchiks promoting class warfare and proletarian solidarity. Under Mao, this was inevitable. Like the laws of physics, Maoist ideology has proven to be totalitarian, inexorable and inescapable over time.

A Historically Undefined Border

Just as the CCP is the inheritor of the Qing empire, India is the successor to British India, the jewel in the crown of the once-global British Empire. Neither the British nor the Qing came to an agreement over the border. Once the Qing fell, its successors rejected the Simla Convention of 1914, which the British and the Tibetans agreed upon.

The British themselves were never clear as to the border. To begin with, W.H. Johnson drew an expansive line in 1865 that included all of Aksai Chin in what was then the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1873, the British drew a Foreign Office Line, which stands largely

forgotten. In 1897, Major-General Sir John Charles Ardagh followed suit. In the light of China waning and Russia waxing, he proposed a boundary line along the crest of the Kunlun Mountains north of the Yarkand River. This line is now known as the Johnson-Ardagh Line.

Barely was the ink dry on the map, when George Macartney, the consul general at the oasis city of Kashgar in Xinjiang proposed a revised boundary to the Qing in 1899. Lord Elgin, the sacker of the Summer Palace turned viceroy of India, took a fancy to Macartney's idea. The new border was to run along the Karakoram Mountains, forming a natural boundary. British India and its allies would control the Indus River watershed, while the Chinese would be in charge of the Tarim River watershed. Colonel Sir Claude Maxwell MacDonald, Queen Victoria's minister in China, authored a diplomatic note proposing the new border to the Chinese. This line is now known as the Macartney-MacDonald Line. Notably, the Qing court never responded to MacDonald's note.

After the 1911 Revolution, the British reverted to using the Johnson-Ardagh Line as the border in official documents. However, they did not attempt to establish posts or exercise actual control over Aksai Chin. As if these lines were not confusing enough, the Simla Convention that led to an Anglo-Tibetan agreement forged a new boundary named after Lieutenant Colonel Sir Vincent Arthur Henry McMahon, a swashbuckling multilingual military man-turned-diplomat in charge of the British delegation. This line lay to the east of the Foreign Office Line and the west of the Johnson-Ardagh Line, which India claims as its rightful border on the northwest. Each of these lines matters because choosing one or the other as a reference point might make China or India gain or lose valuable strategic territory.

McMahon went on to serve in the Middle East as World War I raged. His career ended when the newly formed Soviet Union revealed the secret Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement to carve up the Ottoman Empire. This revelation came

when Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence — the famous Lawrence of Arabia — was promising independence to the Arabs to get them to fight the Turks, and McMahon himself was championing a pro-Arabist policy. His reputation was now tarnished. Therefore, the British quietly dropped references to the McMahon Line with Tibet, which now enjoyed de facto independence. Lhasa even controlled territories such as Tawang that the Simla Convention had deemed a part of India.

Only in 1935 did the colonial British government resuscitate the McMahon Line. It feared renewed Chinese interest in Tibet. When Tibetan authorities arrested English botanist Francis Kingdon-Ward for entering the country illegally, the British made their move. In 1937, the Survey of India published a map showing the McMahon Line as the official boundary. As if on cue, Captain Gordon Lightfoot marched to Tawang in 1938 but met fierce Tibetan resistance. For the moment, Tawang remained in Tibetan hands. This changed during World War II. In 1944, James Philip Mills, a noted colonial administrator, took charge of the area south of Tawang.

After India became independent in August 1947, Tibet protested British acquisitions. In October 1947, it demanded that India return Ladakh, Sikkim and Darjeeling. It did not. In October 1950, Chinese troops routed Tibetan forces at Chamdo. When India demurred, China brushed aside its protests. This led to a rift in the Indian government. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the deputy prime minister, wrote a letter to Nehru expressing anxiety over "the problem of Tibet." Patel's views mattered. He was a close associate and friend of Mahatma Gandhi. Under Patel's leadership, India had assimilated the more than 500 princely states that comprised 40% of the area of pre-independence India and 22% of its population. It had earned the deputy prime minister the epithet of the "Iron Man of India."

A month after the People's Liberation Army (PLA) invaded Tibet, Nehru categorically declared, "Our maps show that the McMahon

Line is our boundary and that is our boundary — map or no map.” With this parliamentary statement on November 20, 1950, the die was cast. In February 1951, Indian troops took over Tawang town and removed the Tibetan administration.

Line of Actual Control

Patel saw Chinese action against the Tibetans as “little short of perfidy.” Chinese officials had assured India they would settle the Tibetan question peacefully but had gone back on their word. Patel felt betrayed because India had been the first non-socialist country to recognize the new communist regime and was championing China’s entry into the United Nations. He worried about China as a threat to India’s borders and that it was encouraging communists within the country to foment a revolution.

Even at that early stage, India was facing insurgency from armed communist groups, and many in its intelligentsia were seduced by the success of the communist revolutions first in the USSR and then in the PRC. Presciently, Patel warned against “Chinese irredentism and communist imperialism.” He took the view that the Middle Kingdom’s “ideological expansion concealed racial, national or historical claims. Patel recommended a “reconsideration of [India’s] retrenchment plans to the Army in the light of the new threat” as well no longer advocating Chinese entry into the United Nations.

Nehru disagreed with his older deputy. On November 18, two days before declaring the McMahon Line as the international boundary, the prime minister responded that India could not lose its “sense of perspective and world strategy and give way to unreasoning fears.” The idealistic, anglicized Kashmiri Brahmin and the realpolitik-oriented, earthy member of a Gujarati landowning caste seemed headed for a showdown over China. Patel’s death on December 15, 1950, averted this crisis. From now on, the Nehruvian view occupied the commanding heights of Indian foreign policy.

In 1954, India published maps showing Aksai Chin as part of the country, setting the Ardagh-Johnson Line as its northwest border with China and adding 37,244 square kilometers to its territory. The Middle Kingdom had never accepted this to be its border and claimed this territory as its own. In 1957, India was incensed to discover that China had built a road through Aksai Chin, connecting Xinjiang to Tibet. China National Highway 219 is a marvel of civil engineering. The Chinese began work on it in 1951 and completed it in 1957. Today, this 1,455-kilometer road runs from Yecheng in Xinjiang to Shiquanhe in Tibet and is known as the Sky Road because it goes through vertigo-inducing elevation of 5,248 meters above sea level. Right from the start, this road had a military purpose and increased India-China tensions.

To cool down these tensions, Zhou Enlai wrote to Nehru on September 8, 1959, about “the Sino-Indian boundary question.” He argued that the current boundary was a result of British imperialist aggression and was “therefore decidedly illegal.” Zhou declared that the Chinese government “absolutely [did] not recognize the so-called McMahon Line.” He complained that Indian troops were trespassing into Chinese territory and harboring Tibetan rebels. Instead, Zhou proposed maintaining “the long-existing status quo of the border” and resolving the issues step by step over time. This disputed border has come to be called the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

It is poorly defined. Indian and Chinese troops constantly patrol it and occasionally clash over what neither Beijing nor New Delhi accepts as a legitimate boundary. Writing on June 22, 2020, Lieutenant General P.J.S. Pannu observed that both India and China are still “defending a historically undefined border line.” Both sides still control the territory that the other claims. At stake are thousands of square kilometers of the Himalayas.

Realpolitik Versus Romance

A simple question arises: Why was Nehru so naive about China and communism? In a magisterial piece, M.J. Akbar explains the basis of the Nehruvian view. India's first prime minister was a passionate anti-imperialist who believed in the solidarity of the subjugated peoples. Very early, he saw India and China as two ancient civilizations emerging as modern nations and acting as harbingers of a more just world. Nehru romanticized not only China but also communism.

During a 1927 visit to the USSR, he was deeply impressed by Soviet economic policy, which became an exemplar for Nehruvian socialism. Notably, Nehru considered Vladimir Lenin to be the greatest man of action in the 20th century — and the most selfless. In contrast to Patel, Nehru was fascinated by communism and thus blind to its dangers.

The key to understanding Nehru's benign view of China comes from his youth. As a student at Cambridge and a barrister in London, he had sought inspiration from thinkers of the Fabian Society. In an age of empires, he felt the pull of the left. In 1927, Nehru attended the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels. It rightly discussed Britain and presciently warned against American exploitation of Latin America. The conference designated three nations to lead the world out of oppression: China, Mexico and India.

Nehru was a member of the presiding committee and an inaugural speaker. It was a heady experience for this Harrow-educated dreamy-eyed idealist. For most anti-imperialists of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, communism was the obvious champion for colonized peoples. More importantly, Nehru made some Chinese friends in Brussels. One of them was Soong Ching-ling, the widow of Sun Yat-sen. Soon, Nehru became friends with Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen's successor. Nehru saw China as "India's sister in ancient history" and closer relations between the two countries as a civilizational imperative. In 1937, he declared

September 26 to be China Day. In opposition to Japan's invasion of China, he called for the boycott of Japanese goods and for donations to support the Chinese war effort. He went on to visit China in August 1939 as Chiang Kai-shek's guest.

When Nehru became the head of the interim government before independence in September 1946, the first conference he organized was not on national unity but on Asian relations. It was here that Indian romance would first crash against Chinese reality. When Nehru's old friend Chiang Kai-shek learned that Tibetan delegates were attending, he threatened to pull China out of the conference. Nehru promised that Tibet's status would not be raised and instructed Tibetan delegates to hold their tongues.

Nehru's generosity to the Chinese soon turned excessive. In 1950, the US offered India China's permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. In 1955, the Soviet Union made a similar offer. Nehru spurned both offers because he did not want a break between India and China. In the 1954 Sino-Indian Treaty on Tibet, Nehru agreed to withdraw Indian troops from the country. He also gave away postal, telegraph and telephone facilities that India had operated in Tibet. China gave India precious little in return.

In 1954, India and China signed the Panchsheel Treaty, which comprised five principles of peaceful coexistence. Zhou Enlai showed up in New Delhi to sign some form of peace treaty and to rally India against a potential American invasion of Vietnam. The slogan "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai," which means "Indians and Chinese are brothers," was in the air. Nehru visited China later that year and was cheered in the streets. It did seem that India and China would lead an Asian resurgence together as per Nehru's statesmanly vision. Everyone loves a parade.

Yet trouble was brewing. Noted historian Neville Maxwell records that neither side raised the boundary question. China did not bring it up because it wanted to avoid any discussion about Tibet. India assumed that the "boundary was

well-known and beyond dispute, and there could be no question regarding it.” In 1954, its maps showed Aksai Chin as part of Indian territory. As mentioned above, the discovery of the road through Aksai Chin in 1957 and the Dalai Lama’s flight to India in 1959 hardened positions on both sides. India’s romance with China started souring. The first border clash occurred at Longju in August 1959. Nehru’s romance was dead, Patel’s realpolitik was back.

War and Peace

In 1959, Zhou proposed maintaining the status quo in his famous letter proposing the LAC. He followed up with a visit to India in 1960 with an offer: China would recognize India’s claim to the 84,000-square-kilometer area that now comprises Arunachal Pradesh despite its historical connections to Tibet if India accepted China’s claim to the 38,000-square-kilometer area of Aksai Chin. Nehru rejected Zhou’s offer.

In 1961, Nehru took two bold decisions. On November 2, 1961, he kicked off the so-called “forward policy.” Indian troops were to patrol as far forward as possible toward the international border recognized by India. The next month, he ordered troops to liberate Goa after years of diplomacy had failed. Portugal had conquered this coastal state in 1510 and held it for 451 years. Western powers such as the US and the UK condemned Indian action, but African and Asian countries supported it wholeheartedly. Nehru’s stock was flying high.

In 1962, Nehru continued with his foreign policy. Once inconvenient generals were replaced by pliant ones, he no longer met any opposition from the army high command. Indian troops set up forward posts on the China border, some even north of the McMahon Line. This riled Beijing, and by mid-summer tensions were running high. Domestic criticism of Nehru was rising by the day. Many accused him of being too conciliatory with China. So, Nehru put a key precondition to talks: India’s boundaries were non-negotiable.

Yet even as Nehru took what he believed to be a hard line, every Indian forward post was being

outmatched by more numerous Chinese garrisons. India’s position was increasingly untenable. China called India’s bluff. After a limited action on October 20, 1962, Chinese troops waited for a few days. Then, between November 15 and 19, they destroyed or broke up every organized Indian force in the disputed areas at key points across a front more than 3,000 kilometers wide. Then, Beijing announced a unilateral ceasefire on the same terms as Zhou had suggested in 1959.

The 1962 war is still a source of shame in India. Its troops were ill prepared and lost badly. Nehru made far too many blunders. He first viewed China romantically and gave it a carte blanche. Then, Nehru embarked on an ill-advised forward policy, with insufficient force that left Indian troops exceedingly vulnerable. Perhaps the biggest blunder of all was Nehru’s appointment of Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon as defense minister in 1957.

Energetic, eloquent and brilliant, Menon had made a name for himself in London and New York as a passionate advocate for India’s independence, Nehru’s policy of non-alignment and freedom for long-oppressed colonies. Like Nehru, Menon was a great champion of China and was convinced that India’s only threat came from Pakistan. This line of thinking proved to be disastrous. He sidelined outstanding officers like General Kodendera Subayya Thimayya and Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. Menon shamelessly promoted sycophants like Pran Nath Thapar and Brij Mohan Kaul, both relatives of Nehru. Menon also weakened India’s defense production, which had been the best in Asia when the country won independence in 1947. After India’s defeat along the McMahon Line, Menon resigned but Nehru did not. Like Mao and unlike George Washington, this Harrow and Cambridge man would die on the throne.

Only five years after the 1962 war, Indian and Chinese troops clashed again at the passes of Nathu La and Cho La connecting Sikkim to Tibet. In 1967, India had increased the number of its mountain divisions, improved equipment and

beaten Pakistan in 1965. Indian troops held the higher ground, and China had just embarked on the Cultural Revolution. As a result, China came off worse in this brief battle, bolstering Indian morale. In the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, China sided with Pakistan. Its support for Pakistan was, and remains, an obvious way to put pressure on India. In 1975, India absorbed the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim as an Indian state. Soon thereafter, the Chinese ambushed an Indian patrol, killing four soldiers. Those were the last soldiers on either side to die for 45 years — until the evening of June 15, 2020.

Starting from 1978, relations between the two countries improved. That year, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then foreign minister and later prime minister, visited Beijing to reestablish diplomatic ties. China softened its stand on both Sikkim and Bhutan. Tensions flared in 1986 when Indian troops encountered Chinese occupation of Sumdorong Chu Valley. The following year, India created the new state of Arunachal Pradesh, angering Beijing in the process.

Tensions eased in 1988 when then-Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China. The two sides established better relations, which improved further after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1993, India and China signed a peace and tranquility border agreement. For the next two decades, India and China avoided any major confrontation. In 1996, both sides even agreed not to “conduct blast operations or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometers from the Line of Actual Control.” Leaders visited each other’s countries, increased trade and signed mutual cooperation agreements. Yet despite 22 rounds of talks, they have failed to settle the boundary question.

National Renaissance

In recent years, confrontations between Chinese and Indian troops have been on the rise. Scuffles, fistfights and stone-throwing often break out between patrolling platoons. Both sides have embarked on infrastructure projects such as roads, tunnels and bunkers along the poorly

defined LAC. Each side views the other’s steps as threatening the “correlation of forces” and capabilities. Both sides refuse to accept the other’s measures. This has led to three major confrontations: at Depsang in northern Ladakh in 2013, at Chumar in eastern Ladakh in 2014 and at Doklam on the China-Bhutan border in 2017. Now, in 2020, Indian and Chinese tensions are at their highest since 1962. Two questions arise: Why, and why now?

China has become more assertive globally since Xi Jinping took charge in 2012. Xi has consolidated power and launched a personality cult reminiscent of Mao. Indeed, he is the son of a Maoist and has dethroned Deng Xiaoping’s more moderate acolytes from the CCP throne. Xi had the rubber stamp congress in Beijing remove term limits for the numerous positions he occupies. He is modernizing the military and adopting a more muscular foreign policy. In 2013, Xi launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and has invested billions into projects in numerous countries. China is becoming a great power once again. However, for the first time in history, China is seeking to assert its power beyond its traditional borders.

In 2018, former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd gave a lecture at West Point on understanding China’s rise under Xi Jinping. Rudd is a career diplomat, speaks Mandarin and studies China closely. He made a very important point: Xi looks closely at the past for inspiration. Since the very day Xi came to power, he has declared China’s national mission to be *guojia fuxing* — a national renaissance. This red engineer, an alumnus of the fabled Tsinghua University, has concentrated enormous power in his hands and in his party. The CCP now plays a bigger role in daily life, business and even the military than at any time since perhaps the death of the Great Helmsman in 1976. Xi has “cleaned up” the government and, in the process, eliminated all his political opponents.

Superficially, Xi may appear to be a technocrat. Importantly, however, Xi’s father was aligned with the “left” revolutionary wing of the

CCP. This leftist faction opposed the economic and political reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping and his allies. Xi's views on the role of the state and the supremacy of the CCP are far closer to his father's and to Mao's than to any of his post-Mao predecessors. Additionally, there is the weight of China's history and culture, despite the CCP's often murderous efforts to stamp it out. Xi's views on the role of the state, harmony, and social and personal hierarchy are closer to those of a mandarin or an emperor in the Forbidden City than to reformists like Deng.

For 40 years following the death of Chairman Mao, all Chinese leaders have moved away from the cult of personality. But, in a touch of hubris, Xi has formally enshrined Xi Jinping Thought in the constitution. Xi is now chairman of everything and the great atheist god of China. In this brave new China, blasphemy does not go unpunished. Those who post seemingly innocuous photos online comparing Xi to Winnie the Pooh find themselves in jail for "creating a negative social impact." After decades of incremental liberalization, Xi has turned back the clock. He has destroyed any alternative power or authority to that of the CCP. It seems that Xi and the CCP fear that their communist state lacks legitimacy. Also, like all previous Confucian leaders, they believe that the exercise of power by the masses would disturb the harmony of the state and could destroy it.

The solution, again as with all totalitarian states, is to identify the legitimacy of the regime with that of the nation. Chinese nationalism is now arguably the essential component of CCP ideology. Confucius has been incongruously married to Marx to legitimize a strong, modern, authoritarian hierarchical state. Xi's CCP subjects people to constant propaganda and consummate censorship.

In Xi's and the CCP's version of the world, China is "encircled" by revanchist imperial powers. Chinese greatness and strength will return by rectifying all the wrongs to China's borders, and that government and society suffered during the century of humiliation. China

has always been the Middle Kingdom, the center of the world, and has to resume its rightful place in it. To do so, China cannot be passive. It must extend its direct influence beyond its borders. This will win Xi the support of China's population, affirm the leadership of the CCP and assure the stability and increasing strength of his country so that in the coming decade or two China assumes its rightful place as the world's greatest power.

Emperor Xi

Yet something is not quite right in the realm of Emperor Xi. The domestic security apparatus has a larger budget and employs more people than the PLA. Like the Qing, the CCP worries deeply about separatism, disorder and downfall because it seized and continues to maintain power through the barrel of a gun. It remembers the lesson of 1989, when on the night of June 3, tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square, crushing student protests and massacring some 10,000 pro-democracy protesters to preserve communist rule. In contrast, German and Soviet communists capitulated on November 9, 1989, when millions flocked to the Berlin Wall.

The specter of communist collapse and Soviet disintegration haunts the CCP to this day. Rudd tells us that the CCP's top two priorities are to continue its stranglehold on power and maintain the unity of the motherland.

Under Xi, the CCP has tightened screws on Tibet, Xinjiang and, most recently, Hong Kong. Human Rights Watch tells us that "new regulations in Tibet now criminalize even traditional forms of social action, including community mediation by religious figures." In Xinjiang, over 1 million people have been detained in China's infamous "reeducation camps." They are mainly Uighurs. Under Chinese communism, reeducation is merely a sick totalitarian euphemism for the destruction of Muslim Uighur culture that is seen as a threat to the unity of China.

Xi's CCP has been forcibly "Han-icizing" the entire Uighur population, which simply put is a

policy of cultural genocide. As per a recent report by China scholar Adrian Zenz, the Chinese authorities have been forcibly sterilizing Uighur women or fitting them with contraceptive devices. Zenz also calls China's coercive birth control a "demographic campaign of genocide" against the Uighurs.

For quite some time, China's security services have been kidnapping book store owners, journalists, students and other dissenters from Hong Kong. Selling books or sponsoring gatherings or making speeches that the CCP considers threatening to its primacy brings swift and severe retribution. Beijing has passed a security law giving it new powers over Hong Kong. In the name of national security, the CCP can now curb free speech, the right to protest and undermine Hong Kong's largely independent judiciary. Hong Kong's autonomous status no longer exists. Winnie the Pooh is no more safe in Hong Kong now than in what used to be called mainland China.

Even as China tightens the screws at home, it is now acting more aggressively abroad. There is a new nationalism in and an excessive prickliness to Xi's China. The Middle Kingdom now squabbles more with its neighbors. A new "wolf warrior" diplomacy has emerged. It is building artificial islands and air bases in the South China Sea. It is making all sorts of territorial claims and alienating its neighbors. China now challenges more openly and aggressively the legitimacy of international agreements, boundaries or conventions when they do not serve its national objectives. Beijing denounces them as unjust impositions by an imperialist West. International rules were made without China's fair input and, therefore, are invalid. Thus, woe to states with border or maritime disputes with China and to any state that dares challenge a position that the CCP takes on Chinese domestic issues such as Hong Kong's civil rights or international issues such as the sovereignty of the South China Sea. To be fair, China has resolved some border disputes peacefully, but that was in the pre-Xi era.

Perhaps increasing economic pressures also contribute to China's new nationalism. China's phenomenal growth has been centered on global integration and strong exports. The Middle Kingdom became the workshop of the world because of three key factors. First, China's leaders have allowed the Chinese to engage in de facto private enterprise and investment. Second, the state invested heavily in public infrastructure in the form of telecommunications, broadband, road, rail, port, power generation, transmission and distribution. Third, small enterprises took to low-wage, labor-intensive manufacturing.

This Chinese model can no longer drive economic growth as it once did. When Deng Xiaoping embraced market economics in 1979, wages were low. Today, China has become a higher wage economy with numerous low-wage rivals and has a declining, aging workforce that peaked in 2011. By 2018, it had shrunk by 2.8%. Besides, the country has now reached economic and scientific maturity in many sectors. Its high catch-up growth rates are bound to slow down.

In manufacturing, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Indonesia are emerging as new rivals. They have lower wages than China, making them more competitive for labor-intensive industries. Also, a new form of smart manufacturing is emerging in Europe and the US, threatening Chinese dominance. High-quality products are increasingly manufactured through a combination of research, robotics, new materials, additive manufacturing and cheap computing. A new economy based on interdisciplinary collaboration, international talent and cutting-edge technologies has emerged.

In geopolitical terms, China threatens the US, and the ruling superpower is determined to stay top dog. President Barack Obama negotiated a gargantuan trade deal in the form of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He sought to create a free-trade regime to strengthen the economic system that has underpinned international economic relations since 1945. Pointedly, the Middle Kingdom was not part of the TPP because the trade deal was meant to counterbalance

China's rise and to pressure China to adhere to and embrace these hard-won free trade, free market norms. Obama's Asia Pivot was also designed to check China.

Unlike Obama's collaborative, multilateral effort, Donald Trump has opted for a bar fight by unleashing a full-fledged trade war on Beijing. He is following mercantilist and isolationist policies. Trump has steadily withdrawn the US from the Pacific, weakening its post-World War II role as global hegemon. Nonetheless, Trump has directly, if in a ham-fisted way, called China out on decades of intellectual property theft and unbalanced domestic market protectionism. It is increasingly clear that the US-China trade war has rattled the CCP leadership. As if these pressures were not enough, there are persistent fears that China's gigantic debt bubble might burst. This could cause huge numbers of bankruptcies, a crash of the renminbi, a fall in growth rates and a potentially destabilizing surge in unemployment.

Ratcheting Up Pressure

Xi might appear serene, but he must be deeply worried about the stresses and creaks in his realm. With many nations, internal tensions have often led to external aggression. This phenomenon might be contributing to China's aggressive actions against India. There are six other proximate reasons why China might be ratcheting up the pressure on India's borders.

First, China has been touchy about Tibet, Aksai Chin and its border with India since the days of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. In 1962, it taught India a lesson after it refused to back down on its forward policy and turned down its boundary deal. Last year, India ended the special status for Jammu and Kashmir. New Delhi also carved out a brand new union territory of Ladakh. Official maps show Pakistani-held Gilgit and Baltistan as well as China-held Aksai Chin to be a part of Ladakh. In 1954, Mao's China was not pleased with India's maps. In 2019, Xi's China is similarly displeased.

Furthermore, India has built the world's highest airfield at Daulat Beg Oldi, a spectacular feat of effort and engineering. Once this was an old campsite on the base of the strategic Karakoram Pass that leads to the Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang. It lies on the fabled Silk Route where travelers rested on their long journeys from Beijing to Constantinople. Located at 5,065 meters above sea level, this airfield is close to Siachen Glacier, where Indian and Pakistani troops face off. After 20 years of work, engineers also have built the 255-kilometer Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie road that offers India far better access to the LAC.

India has been belatedly building its border infrastructure to match its Chinese counterpart. Naturally, the CCP wants to preserve its advantage. Ma Jiali, an India analyst at the China Reform Forum, a think tank affiliated with the CCP's elite Central Party School, blames the June 15 clash on India's "forward-moving posture" in the disputed area. He claims India's infrastructure development triggered a Chinese response.

Second, Pakistan was incensed by India's fait accompli in Jammu and Kashmir but wishes to avoid a full-out war in response. For decades, China has maintained close relations with Pakistan, which it uses as a lever to pressure India. China's increasing pressure on India along the border is a way to help Pakistan meddle in Kashmir, and both China and Pakistan want to make India pay some price for its unilateral action.

Third, China is always touchy about Taiwan. Under Xi, Beijing has been increasing pressure on Taipei and on all other nations to hew to China's claims to Taiwan. In May, two Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members of parliament virtually attended Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's swearing-in ceremony. This was an affront to the CCP's "One China" policy.

Fourth, India opposed the BRI last year on the grounds of territorial sovereignty. The Doklam confrontation in 2017 occurred when India did not attend the first BRI summit earlier that year.

In 2019, not only did India categorically oppose BRI, but it also won American support for its stance.

Fifth, India has questioned China's suppression of information and China's influence on the World Health Organization (WHO) in the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indian health minister is now the chairman of the WHO's executive board. So, India's stand and comments on the pandemic gall China.

Sixth, India has made noises about attracting manufacturing away from China in the post-COVID-19 world. It has made a big deal about a higher trust factor. It is a democracy with a free press. It has a multidecade experience of peaceful transfer of power through the ballot box, and foreign investment has lower long-term risk. China is particularly sensitive to this argument.

Why Is the Asian Teapot Boiling Again?

On the Indian side, New Delhi has grown tired of Beijing undercutting it repeatedly. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has met Xi 18 times. He has visited China five times, more than any other prime minister in the past. Modi has personally invested in a good relationship with Xi. Now, critics are painting him to be another Nehru. China's actions have inflamed Indian public opinion. Modi has no option but to stand up to the Middle Kingdom.

India also sees China's behavior on the LAC as yet another betrayal. Over the years, the Chinese have been developing their infrastructure on the Tibetan Plateau as well as the LAC, expanding their operations and following salami-slicing tactics to claim more territory. In the words of Ashley Tellis, the Chinese have been "singularly mischievous" not only by gobbling up strategic territory on the LAC but also renegeing on their commitment to exchange maps that define each country's positions. Since last year, China has also belligerently backed Pakistan in international forums against India's policy in Kashmir — an issue as sensitive for India as Tibet is for China.

There is another matter that irks Indians. All sorts of Chinese goods flood the Indian market, from active pharmaceutical ingredients to cell phones. As a result, China had a significant trade surplus of over \$58 billion with India in 2018, accounting for 16% of China's 2018 overall trade surplus. Only the US and the EU account for greater shares of China's trade surplus. Indians feel they have contributed to making China richer only to be maltreated again. All these events have occurred at a time when the Indian government has adopted more clearly nationalistic policies than at any time since India won its independence.

Over the last few years, India has been going through a democratic version of a political revolution. After decades of dominance, the Congress Party led by the Nehru family lost power in 2014 and was replaced by the Hindu nationalist BJP. It believes Hindus have been soft for centuries, and numerous invaders have taken advantage of them. The BJP disdains the Congress for being soft on national security. It has promised to end decades if not centuries of national diffidence. Modi, who styles himself as a strongman, has claimed to have a 56-inch chest. His willingness to use military force against Pakistan has made him wildly popular and contributed to his resounding reelection in 2019. Modi has brilliantly tapped into a new mood of nationalism. Hindu India no longer wants to roll over when invading armies appear. To maintain its winning brand, the BJP must appear strong, so it wants to fight back. Hence, a call to boycott Chinese goods has proved immensely popular.

Partly in response to public sentiment, the Indian government has restricted Chinese investment, and Indian Railways has canceled its contract with a Chinese company. It has banned 59 Chinese apps, including TikTok, Helo and WeChat. Global Times estimates the total number of active users of the 59 Chinese apps in India to be over 800 million, with TikTok alone claiming an estimated 120 million. This ban is a big blow, and a bigger one may be about to come. India might soon bar Chinese 5G equipment and

join the US in checking Huawei's global ambitions. China cannot be too pleased.

Some say that India's trade war on China was long overdue. Chinese firms had access to cheaper capital, government subsidies and other unfair advantages, dumping its cheap goods on India. While India opened its market for goods where China has an advantage, the Middle Kingdom never reciprocated for services where its southern neighbor is a better choice. The trade war will cut India's trade deficit, force it to focus on manufacturing instead of the opiate of cheap Chinese goods and perhaps emerge with more robust domestic industries.

This argument has some merit but overlooks the pain, even if only short term, that the Indian consumer will experience as a result of higher prices of everyday goods such as cell phones and nail cutters. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that Chinese investment in Indian startups grew from \$381 million in 2016 to \$4.6 billion in 2019. India is short on capital, and cutting off a growing source of capital will hurt. Yet China will suffer too because it is the country running a trade surplus and, if China keeps turning the screw militarily, India will keep responding economically.

What Happens Next?

Many believe that the two nuclear-armed neighbors could not possibly go to war. The threat of uncontrollable escalation is appalling. Others think that India is no match to China. India's GDP is just under \$3 trillion and China's has crossed \$13 trillion. India's per capita GDP is a little more than \$2,000, while China's is a bit under \$10,000. When it comes to defense, India's budget this year is about \$57 billion while China's is almost \$179 billion. In a long war, Chinese economic might, industrial production and defense superiority would guarantee victory.

The Belfer Center of the Harvard Kennedy School and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) make a different argument. India has an advantage in the air because of superior aircraft, better bases and greater combat

experience. Chinese air bases are at high altitudes in Tibet and Xinjiang. Their fighters can only carry half their fuel and design payload. Furthermore, geographic and weather conditions are difficult. Indian jets can take off from bases at lower altitudes in better conditions.

Many soldiers and intelligence professionals in Israel, the UK and the US have a similar view to the Belfer Center and CNAS. So do Indian military men who are confident that 2020 is not 1962. India has fought low-intensity conflict for decades. Its infantry is battle-tested, seasoned and hardened. Its officers lead from the front in keeping with their British colonial tradition. With their rural roots, Indian soldiers are tough, hardy and brave. India's all-volunteer army is professional and well trained, which does not suffer from political interference. Also, modern wars between sophisticated militaries may be of higher intensity but shorter duration than past wars, given changes in the technology of weapons and doctrine. That may give India an edge.

In contrast, the PLA suffers from politicization. Loyalty to the CCP is often more important than mastery of warcraft. Many soldiers are conscripts and have little combat experience. Their performance under pressure and the ability to take casualties is untested. Furthermore, conscription and corruption often damage morale. Officers in the PLA tend not to lead from the front.

The last time China experienced conflict was in Vietnam. In 1979, David gave Goliath a bloody nose. When it comes to 1962, however, there is an argument to be made that China was David. At that time, it had just experienced a terrible famine. India was faring better economically, and its top officers had been trained by the British. Like the 1979 Vietnamese forces, the PLA of 1962 was battle-tested. It had the experience of the Long March, combat with the Japanese, the conquest of Tibet and war in Korea. The fervor of the revolution still ran strong in 1962 and Chinese soldiers were willing to die. That fervor has abated in 2020.

It is on sea where India commands the most advantage. Its navy has been the most professional of India's three armed forces. Its size is small and the scale of its operations is limited. However, it has one major geographical advantage. The Strait of Malacca lies within striking distance. It is here that India could cause China most pain, severely disrupting its energy supplies. To escalate the decades-old border dispute to the Malacca Straits, however, would have powerful national and global repercussions, and is hard to imagine. Yet Mars is known for his fury, not his judgment.

China's aggression on the border demonstrates a staggering lack of understanding of its southern neighbor. This is a classic error in diplomacy. The BJP, India's ruling party, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), its parent organization, have constantly viewed Pakistan as India's mortal foe. Buried deep in their consciousness is the memory of Islamic invaders sacking temples, seizing women and imposing jizya, the infamous poll tax that Hindus paid their Muslim rulers until the 18th century. The BJP and the RSS have never seen China as a foe. Culturally, they see the Middle Kingdom as a kindred civilization and would prefer trade over war with it. Some even dream of adopting China's Xinjiang policy in Kashmir. The CCP has been unwise in alienating, instead of cultivating, the BJP and the RSS.

The CCP might have overestimated India's internal weaknesses. Protests are common in India's rambunctious democracy. Demonstrations against a new citizenship law continued for months. Riots broke out in New Delhi during Donald Trump's visit. COVID-19 is spreading fast as the economy continues to shrink. With 50% of the population under 25, protests could have erupted against the government. Instead, an enemy at the gates has unified a nation and given its people purpose.

From COVID-19 to border transgressions, many Indians now blame China for everything, and a significant number of nationalists want to go to war with it. Ominously, the government has

permitted ground commanders to use firearms in "rare" cases. The 1996 agreement not to use firearms or explosives at the LAC stands suspended.

On July 3, Narendra Modi has given a rousing speech to troops on the border. He has declared an end to the era of Chinese expansionism, vowed not to cede an inch of territory and saluted "Mother India" as well as the mothers of valiant soldiers. Using a Sanskrit phrase, "Veer Bhogya Vasundhara," which literally means "the brave enjoy the earth," Modi evoked Lord Krishna and declared India was ready for war.

Despite rising nationalism and angry public sentiment, both countries know that war would be expensive. They would lose blood and treasure. Both have lost face during the recent border tensions. The Chinese have gobbled up territory Indians believe to be theirs. In response, the Indians have given the Chinese a bloody nose in a brutal brawl. Since 1962, tensions have never been higher. Han and Hindu nationalism have come face to face. Yet peace is still possible. It would involve a quid pro quo of the sort Zhou proposed to Nehru in 1960 in closed rooms over endless cups of tea.

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Respectable Voyeurism: "Big Brother" Turns 20

Ellis Cashmore
July 15, 2020

"Big Brother" launched in the UK 20 years ago. It changed everything — and not just on TV.

Imagine it's 1997, and you're leaving a TV studio in Chicago where you've been part of an audience for the recording of "The Jerry Springer Show." You've watched, judged and laughed at people from super-dysfunctional families talking through their "issues," as personal problems are now called. Sex, drugs, religion, mid-life crises, more sex — they're all up for discussion. Like the rest of the audience, you loved it. On the way home, you say to your friend: "We could do a European variation on this, except go one better: We could lock people away, install cameras and mics in every room and let them ... well, do as they please."

"What?" your friend fires back. "It sounds like one of those American psychological experiments of the 1960s." You nod: "That's right: we could set them tasks or challenges of some kind and watch how they react. A natural experiment." Your friend is skeptical. "Another one of your bright ideas. But, as usual, you're forgetting to ask one crucial question: Who the bloody hell would watch it?" But your idea is timely: People are becoming unselfconscious and relaxed about talking frankly, even about aspects of their lives that make audiences blush. What if you could make them not just talk but behave in a way that would register the same reaction?

Big Brother had an answer. Over 4,000 miles away from Chicago, a Dutch TV producer, John de Mols, seems to have experienced a eureka moment and come up with a wildly inventive, convention-breaking format that could have been (and probably was) designed for attention-deficient TV audiences who found long fictional narratives exhausting and anything else aggravating. "Big Brother" had no script, no workshop, no roles: It just thrust people from different backgrounds together in a secure space from which there was no obvious escape and installed cameras and microphones in every room, turning every private moment into a public spectacle.

Well, I Never!

The British version of "Big Brother" launched 20 years ago, on July 18, 2000, on Channel 4. No one could have predicted that it would become one of the most influential TV shows of the century so far. It has spawned dozens of imitators and inspired an entire genre of reality television. Even today, the likes of "Love Island" (a casualty of the pandemic this year) draws huge audiences and sparks arguments that are usually splattered across the tabloids. "Big Brother" was more than a TV show: It was a phenomenon.

The format of what we now call reality TV had been around since at least 1992, when MTV introduced "The Real World," and possibly as far back as 1973 if we include PBS' "An American Family," which was a nascent form of the genre. The uniqueness of "Big Brother" was its timing: Its premise of interning people in a house and setting them tasks, while viewers voted on who they wanted to evict, would have suited one of the previously mentioned experiments of the 1960s. But in 2000, when voyeurism was newly respectable, it was perfect for TV.

The beauty of "Big Brother" was that it didn't expect audiences to sit respectfully and gasp "shameful ... shocking ... well, I never!" It drew them into the program, until they effectively became part of the narrative as it spontaneously unwound, a bit like the experimenters who administered the electric shocks to non-compliant participants in Stanley Milgram's project. It was an attempt to be interactive before even the internet had become properly interactive. Audiences didn't know it at the time, but the most profound change in television since its inception in the 1950s was going on — the division between performers and spectators was being dissolved.

"Big Brother" was first to exploit this but, in 2009, America's "Jersey Shore" wrung it dry. It became MTV's most successful show ever, with an average of 9 million viewers at the height of its popularity, spiking after cast member Nicole "Snookie" Polizzi got punched in the face. Presumably, some insightful producer made a causal connection: disclose aspects of human

behavior that viewers find disgusting or nauseating and audience figures rise. “Big Brother,” like “Jersey Shore,” was lambasted by the media. Yet, paradoxically, this actually assisted its rise. The more audiences glared at ordinary people, the more the effects became extraordinary.

Discovery of Jade

“Big Brother” found its ideal housemate in Jade Goody, a woman who posed some awkward but interesting questions, the main one being: Are we really as cruel as the newspapers we read? The redtops were merciless in their contempt, ridiculing her looks, grammar and indiscretions with an abusiveness that would be intolerable today. Viewers found her compelling — in one way or another. She exited the “Big Brother” house in fourth place in 2002, then found herself in clover with well-paying assignments that kept her busy for years and lent permanence to what might otherwise have been ephemeral renown.

Over the next few years, Goody featured in over 20 reality shows, licensed her own fragrance, released DVDs, published a biography and wrote her own magazine column. She also returned to the set for “Celebrity Big Brother” in 2007 and made disparaging and, for many, racist remarks about housemate Shilpa Shetty. In 2008, she collapsed on the set of a reality television show in India and was later diagnosed with cancer. She died in 2009, the last few weeks of her life filmed as a TV documentary.

Channel 4 never found another Jade Goody, who could keep journalists ranting and viewers gossiping. Audience figures dwindled from their 10-million peak, and, in 2010, the channel dropped the show, leaving Channel 5 to reboot it, though never with the same success it had in the early 2000s. Its final series drew less than one million viewers. Like every TV show that subverted the formulaic, “Big Brother” succumbed to formula.

End of Privacy?

The effects of “Big Brother” and other reality shows like Britain’s “Geordie Shore” provide a sort of index to our changing sensibilities. Entertainment is not just entertainment. It can enlighten, inform and edify; it can also prod, upset and annoy. But we, the audience, decide for ourselves what we like rather than rely on others to dictate to us. Audiences who warmed to “Big Brother” didn’t so much ignore the critics as discovered reward in disagreeing with them.

Television has been the dominating medium of the past 70 years or so. Obviously, it now has a serious challenger, but, in a sense, TV has been the life form that emerged in the middle of the last century and proceeded to change all other life forms. No one guessed back then that we were so fascinated with the lives of others. Reason: We probably weren’t. TV has contributed to the cultivation of that new taste. Aided by celebrity-oriented publications and a mainstream media fighting for relevance in a changing market, reality TV transformed us all into guiltless snoopers into others’ private lives. And, if you stare for too long at private lives, they eventually cease to be private. Then, the whole concept of privacy becomes uncertain. Privacy meant something like a state in which we were not the focus of public attention and others couldn’t listen to our conversations. Does such a state even exist now? Next time you are on a train or bus, listen to the conversations (thanks to speakers, you can often listen to both ends of the conversation) and wonder if, 20 years ago, people would have discussed anything, let alone personal matters, in anything but hushed tones.

Is “Big Brother” responsible for this? Partly. Should we be offended? Again, partly. But only in the same way we are offended when we look in the mirror and see someone we partly like and partly hate. “Big Brother” offered an ambitious and innovative way of holding that mirror. Critics complained it wasn’t “reality.” Of course it wasn’t: It was televised entertainment that dared to reflect what happens when common people wind up in uncommon circumstances. The results

were sometimes dull, sometimes explosive, always instructive. Just like reality, in fact.

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Student Visa Debacle: All One Needs to Know About Trump's Presidency

Gary Grappo
July 16, 2020

The decision to impose restrictions on visas for foreign students is a textbook example of the incompetence, ignorance, hubris and blundering of a misguided president and ineffectual administration.

Let's assume you had decided that American politics in the age of Donald Trump was simply too much, a risk of non-stop heartburn, high blood pressure and elevated angst. So, you checked out, perhaps burying yourself in literature or art, binging on TV or simply retreating somewhere off the grid. But November is fast approaching and, not wishing to neglect your patriotic duty to vote, it's time to catch up now. But how?

Just try digesting the bile fed the country and the world by Donald Trump! If only there were some way or some single issue that would make up for that time lost in your sublime isolation and could encapsulate all you needed to know about the leadership of Donald Trump without reading back issues of The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Economist or this fair publication.

Lucky for you, there is. Consider the US decision on July 6 to cease student visa issuances to foreign students intending to study at any one of America's 4,000-plus universities and colleges and hundreds of boarding and secondary schools

in the event those institutions went to all-online classes as a result of the pandemic. The decision affected not only those first-time students starting their schooling in the US in the fall. It also would have impacted those already here studying, or perhaps in their respective countries or elsewhere abroad for the summer for jobs, internships, research or family and would not be able to return to complete their studies if their respective institutions moved toward all-online instruction.

It's All About Reelection

The first lesson one would learn is that for Donald Trump, it's all about his reelection in November. Obviously, schools out of session or forced to resort to online classes to minimize pandemic health risks would not be a good look for his campaign. Among so many other things, it's imperative for him that students are back in school and parents and guardians are back on the job, creating the vital economy on which he's staking his reelection. He has no other achievement on which he can count.

How does he do that? That is the second lesson of this sordid affair. His administration has utterly failed to present a cogent, effective plan for combatting the virus, which would have reduced infections, hospitalizations and, most importantly, deaths, and would have allowed these institutions to reopen in the fall, as those in Europe are planning to do. In fact, he's effectively surrendered to the virus and resorted to a trademark of his presidency: bully the target group into submission.

For elementary, middle and high schools, that has meant threatening those that resort to online classes with loss of federal support monies. That could mean billions in lost income for public schools already facing horrendous budget cuts. For colleges and universities, it was the visa suspension or cancellation policy. That is, institutions open classrooms or lose the income from more than a million foreign students who study in the US annually. That amounts to some \$41 billion in tuition, fees, boarding charges, etc. Some 425,000 jobs may also be at stake.

A third lesson in understanding the US administration is how it approaches major policy decisions affecting the nation and its people. There was no consultation, no outreach to university presidents or educational organizations, no public vetting in advance, no intergovernmental policy deliberation, not even proforma sounding of businesses to get their thoughts. Rather, Trump brandished the blunt club of student visas and held it over the heads of these institutions. It was Trump's way, or pay.

Moreover, little thought was given to the economic contributions of these foreign students to the economies where they live and study. Restaurants, bars, apartment complexes, car rentals and dealers, shops, barbers and hair salons, grocery stores and many other businesses had already suffered when the majority of these institutions closed in late winter and the spring to minimize the risk of COVID-19 on their campuses. Now, Trump was going to foreclose any possibility of these businesses salvaging the year. It was a thoughtless, self-centered push to bend others to his misguided, ham-fisted will.

Put Up a Wall, Even Against Legal Visitors

Lesson four, and not surprising, is that there was also no thought given to the intangible contributions that foreign students make to their institutions and communities in terms of exposure to different cultures, languages, ideas, values and perspectives, all of which contribute to the uniquely enriching experience of university study in the US. Inability to understand this contribution is another characteristic of the Trump presidency, its xenophobia. That was always evident from his constant drumbeat over erecting a wall along the US-Mexican border.

There was yet a fifth lesson, this administration's patent inability to foresee the secondary and tertiary effects of its decisions and resultingly to be caught flatfooted when they arise. In this case, the administration was clueless to the firestorm of reaction that followed the announcement of the visa policy. Institutions such as Harvard and MIT immediately mounted a

legal challenge. Universities in 20 states and the District of Columbia joined together to file a lawsuit against the Department of Homeland Security. Petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of foreign and American students — the latter of whom vote, by the way — flooded the administration and Congress.

Major professional associations representing university admissions and counselors also issued strong statements in opposition to the administration's ill-considered move. Media had a field day pelting the administration with all manner of justified criticism of the policy. Even administration supporters, including Republican members of Congress, were left scratching their heads in wonder how this would make Trump look good or benefit the country.

Of course, it didn't. At all. The administration was forced to back down from the visa edict only days after issuing it. The decision to announce it in the first place was a blunder of colossal proportions and emblematic of a presidency and administration foundering, heedless to the needs of the nation or to the damage it does when it acts on virtually every policy issue based on distorted impulse or dyspeptic gut instinct.

So, to our somnolent citizen seeking to exit the torpor of three and a half years of escapism, there you have it. While you blissfully slumbered, America was led by a bullying, single-mindedly reelection-obsessed, blundering, club-wielding, visionless xenophobe. Now, ponder those and the many other failings of this president and apply them to foreign policy, national security, economic policy, racial equality and justice, trade, climate policy and more, and you've got a pretty fair idea of the state of the country under Donald Trump. You're all caught up!

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Hosting Refugees and Migrants Is a Global Public Good

Diego Chaves & Olivier Lavinal
July 16, 2020

Multilateral support can help countries in Latin America overcome challenges and reap immigration's rewards.

On June 20, we celebrated World Refugee Day. This was an opportune time for us all to pay attention to the challenge of forced displacement today. Strikingly, the world is facing the largest forced displacement crisis since World War II, with nearly 80 million people having fled their countries because of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events that have seriously disturbed public order. All continents now face forced displacement crises, and migratory problems cross state and community boundaries.

Forced displacement has hit Latin American and Caribbean countries particularly hard, highlighting existing vulnerabilities such as increased levels of violence and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Latin America is now home to one of the largest forced displacement crises in the world. As of March 2020, more than 5 million Venezuelans were reportedly living outside of their country, with 4 million of them in other Latin American countries: Colombia (1.8 million), Peru (1 million), and Ecuador and Chile (for a total of 1 million).

Since the beginning of the Venezuelan crisis, most Latin American nations have tried to accommodate these recent arrivals, providing migrants with basic education, emergency health care services and legal status. These neighboring countries have provided a global public good by hosting millions at the risk of overwhelming their services and systems. But how will these nations be able to withstand the pressure?

Hosting countries face the new challenge of integrating larger numbers of migrants and refugees while dealing with the effects of the coronavirus outbreak. When taking into account that more than 60% of Venezuelan migration in Latin American countries is irregular and targets the most vulnerable populations, this crisis is now becoming a question of public health and safety and, ultimately, of regional security. It is time for the international community to provide a collective response that matches the magnitude of the crisis.

A first step was taken on May 26, with the virtual — livestreamed on YouTube — pledging conference for Venezuelan refugees and migrants that helped raise \$2.79 billion in total commitments. This included \$653 million of grant funding for the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, which is a United Nations' appeal to largely address the emergency needs of the migrant population.

The situation in Latin America calls for enhanced international support across the humanitarian-development nexus. In other words, the response should address pressing immediate needs —such as temporary shelter and emergency medical services — as well as the medium and long-term imperative of economic and social development through institutions, resilient local systems and service delivery. This is precisely what Colombian President Ivan Duque called for when advocating the shift from “emergency response to medium and long-term development and integration.”

Five Priorities

To help countries mitigate the impact of the crisis and charter a pathway to growth and stability, there are five development priorities to focus on.

First, new ways should be explored to provide regular status to refugees and migrants, including through targeted regularization or employment-based programs. There have been several efforts to provide regular status to recent refugees and migrants arriving from Venezuela.

Colombia, Peru and now Ecuador stand out for their ambitious regularization programs for hundreds of thousands of irregular refugees and migrants. Amid rising public anxieties over migration in some countries, it may become harder to implement such mass regularization programs or offer regular status to most who seek to enter. The approach followed by Colombia in providing regular status to those who have employment in specific sectors may provide another alternative. Similarly, Peru has been trying to regularize students in the country's educational system — another strategy that Colombia and Ecuador seem likely to adopt in the future and one that may prove more politically viable in some countries.

Yet these approaches risk leaving out the vast majority of recent refugees and migrants who do not attend school or work in the formal economy, or the families of those who do benefit from such measures. Policymakers should, therefore, be thinking about the medium and long-term effects where providing legal status to refugees and migrants would produce optimal labor market outcomes — for themselves and the country overall. The details of implementation in each case will matter enormously, but there is room for reiterative efforts that focus on specific different groups over time.

Second, health care barriers should be tackled through clear policies on access and financing. Almost all countries in the region, at least in theory, offer emergency health care to immigrants regardless of regular status. Still, specific policies are often unclear, and measures are not always implemented effectively at the local level, which means that migrants often have difficulties accessing health care in practice. In countries where local and regional governments pay part of health-care costs, financial burden sharing is also often unclear, leading local hospitals to cover costs that may never get reimbursed.

Creating clear policies and procedures defining both the services offered and what amount of costs will be covered and by whom are

critical. In some countries, such as Colombia, Peru and Costa Rica, where residents need to enroll in the health care system to be eligible for benefits, it is vital to find agile ways of ensuring that new immigrants can register and sometimes to find ways of covering the costs of their care.

Third, access to education should be improved through flexible enrollment practices and ongoing support. One of the most critical decisions of countries has been to offer primary and secondary education to all students regardless of their status. In some countries, this was already embedded in the constitution, but others have more recently adopted these measures.

This helps avoid a generation of young people growing up without education and supports receiving countries to take advantage of the potential human capital of immigrant children who will likely grow up in their territory. In many places, however, strict registration requirements involving documents that are difficult for migrants and refugees to obtain can prevent some from enrolling their children in school.

There is also an urgent need to work with schools on policies, procedures and curricula to facilitate the integration of Venezuelan children, who may face challenges adapting to their new schools and need additional support to develop critical skills (e.g., history, culture and other country-specific knowledge). In several countries, access to college, graduate education and trade schools is also restricted for those who do not have adequate documentation, which risks wasting the human capital of immigrant youth who aspire to enter professional and technical careers, including in fields that are in demand in their new countries.

Fourth, migrants' skills should be unlocked to boost labor market integration and local economies. The majority of Venezuelan adults suitable for paid work in countries across the region were already working before COVID-19. In fact, more than 90% of Venezuelan migrants in Peru and 8 in 10 Venezuelan migrants in Colombia were employed before the pandemic.

While recognizing that the labor markets of many countries in the region are characterized by a high degree of informality, care should be taken to ensure that immigrants do have pathways to better-paid and more stable employment in the formal economy and to avoid creating conditions where employers can pay immigrants less than the prevailing wage, to the detriment of both newcomer and native-born workers.

There is no more important determinant for long-term positive labor market outcomes than ensuring regular status, which helps immigrant workers improve their wages over time and also helps avoid unfair wage competition between native-born and Venezuelan workers. Refugees and migrants tend to be relatively well-educated, which means that there is a wealth of highly skilled human capital that could benefit receiving countries.

To effectively leverage this potential, countries will need to create agile ways for immigrants to get professional and technical degrees earned in their home countries validated and recognized by employers. Argentina has done this through provincial universities, which has allowed the country to encourage professionals to leave the capital and settle in other provinces where their skills are in demand. Creating expedited credential recognition pathways for applicants willing to settle in an area of the country where their skills are most needed could also help fill labor market gaps.

Fifth, constructive narratives about immigration should be developed to highlight opportunities while not ignoring its challenges. There is no question that the sudden outflow of 5 million Venezuelans constitutes a migration crisis, and one that host countries are keenly aware of. But this migration is also an opportunity for host countries, as illustrated by increased predictions by the World Bank of regional future economic growth as Venezuelan immigration drives labor market expansion.

Immigrants, when they have access to legal status, education, health care, financial services and pathways to validate their studies, tend to

become net contributors to innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth over time. Several governments in the region have gone out of their way to maintain their focus on these long-term opportunities, even while dealing with the challenges that the sudden arrival of so many people creates for already overburdened public services. Policymakers require assistance to orient the public debate on migration by keeping an eye on the medium and long-term benefits (and designing policies to help attain them). Still, they must also acknowledge the real strains involved in dealing with sudden, large-scale inflows.

Inclusive Development

Multilateral support will be critical in helping countries in the region meet these policy challenges. While migration from Venezuela holds the potential to enhance economic growth in the long term, it is also creating real and tangible short-term costs for already overburdened schools, hospitals and infrastructure. Multilateral support can help countries of the region overcome these challenges and reap immigration's benefits.

This requires moving from emergency responses to long-term development and integration. While there is still a critical need for emergency services for recently-arrived migrants from Venezuela, as crises in these countries stretch on, it is also important to plan for the medium and the long term. The most important question in the future will be how to support inclusive development that can help host communities and immigrants build connections and improve their livelihoods together. Enhancing access to and quality of schools, health care facilities, housing and urban infrastructure in areas where migrants settle is vital. This is the key to successful integration and also an opportunity to turn a migration crisis into a net benefit for host societies.

While there is some need for temporary shelter and emergency medical services that international actors could help meet, the greatest

needs for support have to do with building local capacity for integration and service provision both to new arrivals and long-time residents. For this, multilateral organizations like the World Bank should continue to be actively engaged in helping better manage the forced displacement crisis, in support of its mission to reduce poverty and contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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Armenia and Azerbaijan Clash Again

Rejeanne Lacroix
July 17, 2020

After 30 years of a tense and barely tolerated relationship, it seems unlikely that any political or diplomatic solution will result from this latest round of tensions around Nagorno-Karabakh.

The on-again, off-again conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the border region of Nagorno-Karabakh became hot again on the weekend of July 11. Skirmishes are common in the contested region, which is known as Artsakh to the Armenian side, but this recent round of deadly attacks is the most serious escalation since the Four Day War in 2016 and is outside the typical point of contact. As usual, international calls for restraint and a diplomatic solution have been voiced, but internal politics between the two sides continue to amplify their serious disagreements. It seems as though the situation will continue to escalate, but the current

circumstances are unlikely to spark a full-scale confrontation.

As in the case of other post-Soviet frozen conflicts — as well as land disputes in the North Caucasus — the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh is intrinsically linked to the early history of the 20th century. Shifts of power resultant from the loss of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the collapse of the Russian Empire and the territorial delineations configured in the formative days of the Soviet Union and its subsequent break-up created borders that did not appease all sides of the local populations. Nagorno-Karabakh has an ethnic Armenian majority, but political maneuvering in the 1920s handed its jurisdiction, and thus international recognition, to Azerbaijan. Armenia continued to voice its discontent over this arrangement, but matters of borders and ethnicity remained contained while the territories were part of a wider empire with one central government.

As the Soviet Union neared its end, the question of Nagorno-Karabakh reemerged as Karabakh Armenians sought the reconnection of the territory with Armenia proper. Subsequent political actions, including an unofficial referendum and a petition to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to sanction the territorial transfer, infuriated the Azeri public. In 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh War officially broke out just as inter-ethnic relations deteriorated, killing between 20,000 and 30,000 people. A further referendum in 1991, boycotted by Azerbaijan, quashed the prior plea to join Armenia in favor of the pursuit of independence for Nagorno-Karabakh. Fighting escalated to the point that both Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of ethnic cleansing. It was at this point that the international community turned its attention to the regional conflict in the South Caucasus.

Contemporary Crisis

In 1994, the Russian Federation mediated a ceasefire between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (as of 2017, officially the Republic of Artsakh). For the most

part, this agreement has kept hostilities contained, minus the ongoing instances of low-level clashes and explicit violations by both sides. For example, the Four Day War in April 2016 witnessed Azerbaijan regain “two strategic hills, a village, and a total of about 2,000 hectares.” Nonetheless, Armenia has not fulfilled concessions required by UN Security Council resolutions, such as the withdrawal of its troops, leaving Azerbaijan perpetually frustrated.

There has been a continued push for engagement and peace talks by the international community, primarily the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe’s (OSCE) Minsk Group, chaired by Russia, France and the United States, since 1992. Still, there are no official relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result, and it has been difficult to breathe life into peace talks in a decades-long conflict.

It is unclear what exactly sparked the current round of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but both sides blame the other for the escalation. The heightened tensions came only days after Azerbaijan’s president, Ilham Aliyev, declared that peace talks to resolve the conflict had essentially have stalled. One key difference between the current situation and those in the past is that the deadly encounter between forces did not occur directly in Nagorno-Karabakh, but rather in the northern Tavush section of the Armenian border.

On July 12, the Defense Ministry of Azerbaijan announced that Armenia launched an offensive that consequently killed two Azerbaijani servicemen and left five others wounded. In retaliation, Azeri forces launched a counterstrike, setting the scene for yet another protracted spat. Attacks have continued almost on a daily basis since the outbreak of the current impasse, and there have been numerous reports of shelling, tank movements and the use of combat unmanned aerial vehicles and grenade launchers.

While actions on the ground may be dramatic, they remain at a low level. On the other hand, authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan up the ante

through heightened threats and verbal tit-for-tats. This is typical of ethnic spats that rely heavily on nationalist rhetoric to amplify cohesive public support for military actions, whether offensive or defensive. In a case of a highly provocative statement that should raise eyebrows, the head of Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Defense press service stated that “The Armenian side should not forget that the latest missile systems, which are in service with our army, allow hitting the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant with high precision, which can lead to a huge catastrophe for Armenia.”

A report by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that such possible violations of international law are “an explicit demonstration of state terrorism and genocidal intent of Azerbaijan” as well as “leadership of Azerbaijan acts as a menace to all the peoples of the region, including its own people.”

Too Late for Diplomacy?

After 30 years of a tense and barely tolerated relationship, it seems unlikely that any political or diplomatic solution will result from this latest round of tensions. Indeed, a significant diplomatic effort has been expended to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and wider disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan to no avail. At this time, it is simply enough that the sides generally adhere to the 1994 ceasefire and engage with the Minsk Group. For instance, the OSCE institution released a press statement that the belligerents of the conflict must “resume substantive negotiations as soon as possible and emphasize the importance of returning OSCE monitors to the region as soon as circumstances allow.”

International voices have all chimed in and called for restraint by both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Besides being a co-chair for the Minsk Group, Russia is understandably concerned about the clashes in its neighborhood. Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko reiterated sentiments similar to the OSCE, calling on “both parties to immediately ceasefire and

start negotiations in order to prevent a recurrence of these incidents.” On the other hand, Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called on Armenia to “pull its head together” and subsequently expressed that “Whatever solution Baku prefers for the occupied lands and Karabakh, we will stand by Azerbaijan.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh consequently slammed the Turkish position, condemned the destabilizing actions of Azerbaijan in the Tavush region, and echoed the need to return to the OSCE table. With numerous political actors and geopolitical interests at play, the fight over such a small but strategically important swathe of land becomes much more complex once compounded by the factors of ethnicity, history and national pride.

But it seems unlikely that the current situation will transition into another full-scale war. Rather, it is fair to assume that actions on the ground could escalate for the short term, but any protracted operation would be a serious regional blow to civilian populations and the energy sector. The Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1988-1994 displaced some 860,000 on both sides, and a similar outcome is possible today, with skirmishes occurring in populated areas.

Secondly, the Armenia-Azerbaijan borderlands are important transit points for oil and gas pipelines. Entities and media that follow energy markets have already raised concerns over the current fighting and how it may influence the flow of hydrocarbons. The ongoing situation around Tavush province is certainly more serious because it is closer to the South Caucasian Pipeline (SCP) that runs from the Azeri capital Baku to Tbilisi, Georgia, and then Erzurum, in Turkey. Furthermore, the SCP is part of the wider Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) — a network set to deliver gas to Europe upon completion later this year. These factors will obviously be taken into consideration by Azerbaijan’s strategists as they move forward with their plans in the region. It would be short-sighted to destabilize this network when diplomatic options are at hand to

at least keep the status quo for the sake of business.

Additionally, the South Caucasus is a busy neighborhood, geopolitically speaking. In the case that the situation escalates and interests are at risk, one could expect greater involvement from Russia and Turkey. Although the Turkish Foreign Ministry gave a statement in strong support of Baku, it does not mean that Ankara would be willing to send forces. Moscow has little taste for engagement in a military operation either. Further, even the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) — a military alliance composed of countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Armenia and Russia — promote a political solution rather than a military one. The international community and organizations openly promote a return to the Minsk Group’s negotiation table and, ideally, this will be the immediate result of the ongoing skirmishes.

The clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan are likely to continue in the short term just as their non-existent diplomatic relations will endure without the political will for an inclusive political solution. Tavush province has taken the spotlight between the foes right now, but the recent occurrences are being widely viewed as the greater Nagorno-Karabakh conflict due to the proximity and the historical antagonism over the border. While it is unfortunate that cross-border shelling and conflict has attracted international interest to the South Caucasus yet again, it is not unexpected as matters never really settle to a level of peaceful monotony in the region.

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