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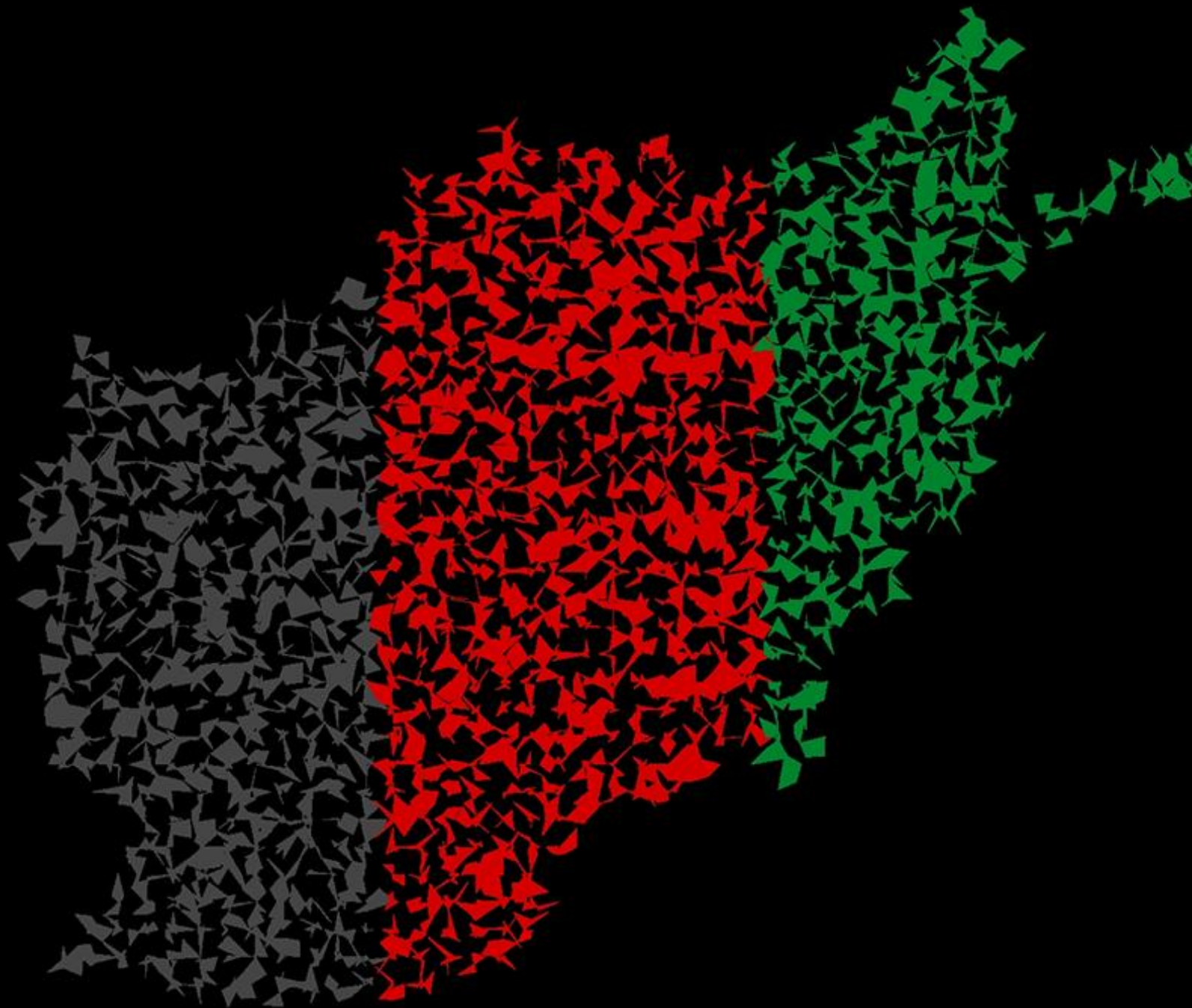## Monthly

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Christianism: The Elephant in the Extremism Room

Matthew Feldman
July 1, 2021

Religious extremism is not unfamiliar to other faiths but has yet to be named as such among mainstream Christian confessions.

I contend that my subject matter is something of an elephant in our global room, but I should warn that it is equally a thoroughly unhappy one: religiously-inspired, revolutionary political violence. For nearly 20 years now, scarcely a day has gone by without reportage on Islamism. This type of extremism remains present in our global room, and no one can claim it is unseen.

That is of course with good reason: On 9/11, nearly 3,000 people were brutally murdered by violent jihadi Islamists in the worst sub-state terrorist attack in history. But there is something that has long vexed me, in keeping with the New Testament injunction to take the "log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." I have referred to this phenomenon for more than a dozen years but have never had the opportunity to properly delineate what I think is again becoming an urgent subject matter, namely Christianism.

Perversion of Christianity

As I have written earlier, "Whereas religious politics, in a banal sense at least, may be observed wherever clerics become directly involved in politics, the term 'Christianism' is intended to denote a more radical, revolutionary approach to secular politics." Christianism may have Christian connotations and indeed draw upon Christian language but, like Islamism, it is essentially appropriative. It allows an entirely secular Anders Behring Breivik (now known as Fjotolf Hansen) who murdered 77 in Norway on July 22, 2011, to term himself a "cultural Christian" — not on account of any metaphysical belief, but because he believed it was a useful framework with which to attack Muslims and Europe and, using an anti-Semitic dog whistle, "cultural Marxists."

Christianism, therefore, is a secular doctrine that is different from, alternatively, evangelicalism, political Christianity and fundamentalism. Joas Wagemakers makes a similar claim about the distinction of Islamism from types of religious fundamentalism such as Salafism. This is a political ideology appropriating religion, not the other way around. But I would go further than Wagemakers does in describing Islamism as "a political application of Islam." Instead, I would suggest that both violent and non-violent forms of Islamism, in their very nature, reject pluralism and advance a doctrine of supremacy that is the hallmark of extremism — whether ethnic, national or religious.

Moreover, it is precisely the political violence exemplified by the horrors unleashed by Breivik that Christianism is intended to denote. In short, this is a distinct, ideological perversion of Christianity that is, at the same time, distinct from older and more familiar forms of Christian nationalism and even from the theologically-based exclusion or persecution that has marred Christianity no less than other monotheistic faiths. One need not be a Christian to be a Christianist, nor is Christianism driven by the same impulse as the regrettably all too familiar instances of tribalism in Christian history.

It scarcely should need saying, but Islamism is an extremist perversion of one of our world's leading faiths. As a revolutionary ideology born of the 20th century, it can be directly traced from the interwar Muslim Brotherhood under Hasan al-Banna, for example, and the doctrines of Sayyid Qutb in postwar Egypt to the quasi-state terrorism of the Islamist death cult, Daesh. For all of its supposed medievalism, then, Islamism is a product, and not merely a rejection, of modernity.

A similar perspective can be taken on Christianism. So, first, a banal point: Believers

have politics, just as do non-believers. For this reason, I am wary of constructions like "political Christianity" or "political Islam" for the same reason I'm only marginally less wary of constructions like "apolitical Christianity" or "apolitical Islam," though I accept, of course, that different forms of hermeticism stretch across most faith traditions.

Thus, Christianism doesn't refer to a form of Christian nationalism that is evident in the contemporary US (although not only there). One might observe the heart-breaking scenes in early April of Protestant loyalists rioting in Belfast with the frightening implications for the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, or indeed the conflict acting as the midwife for the long struggle over the six counties, the Great War. Throughout that conflict, scholars have clearly shown that both Protestant and Catholic confessions anointed or, better, armed their nations with justifications of a holy war. Christian churches' injunctions to fight for God and nation is but one example of Christian nationalism, and there are countless others like it in the Christian tradition as there are in other faith traditions. It is far from new.

Sacrazlied Politics

This particular sense of Christian nationalism, likewise, has been extensively studied in the American context, with particular focus on white evangelicalism. In the compelling empirical account, "Taking America Back for God," Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry conclude that "those who embrace Christian nationalism insist that the Christian God formed, favors and sustains the United States over and above the other nations in the world." It is in this sense that Rogers Brubaker refers to adherents of Christianism in a 2017 article, whereby "Christianity is increasingly seen as their civilizational matrix, and as the matrix of a whole series of more specific ideas, attitudes, and practices, including human rights, tolerance, gender equality, and support for gay rights."

Yet here too we may be seeing a case of old wine in new bottles, whereby reactionary and even tribal expressions of a faith — in this case Christianity — which seem to belong to a tradition that, in American terms, stretches from John Winthrop's "city on a hill" to the televangelists of our day. Even cast in such civilizational terms, these forms of Christian tribalism are of a different stamp than the tradition I'd like to indicate. It is first and foremost ideological and emerged between the two world wars to afflict all three principal confessions in Europe: Protestantism, Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

To take but one example of from each of these confessions, consider first the Romanian Orthodox ideologue, Ion Moţa, a key leader of militant fascist mystics, the Legion of Archangel Michael. Just before he was killed by Republicans in what he understood as a holy war in Civil War Spain, Moţa declared: "No force, no love exists which is higher than that of the race (and can only be realized in the race), except for the force of Christ and love of him. We are defending Christianity in a foreign land, we are defending a force which wells up from the force of our people, and, spurred on by our love for the Cross, we are obeying here in Spain our love for the Romanian people."

Underscoring that his views were scarcely marginal, a mortuary train carried Moţa's body from the Spanish battlefield across Europe in winter 1937 into Bucharest, where he was received by hundreds of thousands of devotees, helping to nearly triple the mystical fascist party — the Romanian Iron Guard — membership to 272,000 by the end of that year. No doubt many of these supporters later took part in the earliest massacres during the wartime Holocaust, murdering more than 100,000 Jews in pogroms across Romania in 1940.

This form of sacralized politics was not limited either to the laity or to Orthodox fascists. In Nazi Germany, the regime initially supported the mistitled German Christians as an expression of what was termed "Positive Christianity" in the

NSDAP program. Under Reichsbishop Heinrich Müller, the German Christians promoted the Führerprinzip in the country's Protestant churches, aiming for complete coordination between a totalitarian state and a totalitarian church.

A picture of what this looked like can be glimpsed from these selections of Muller's 1934 rendering of Christ's "Sermon on the Mount". Thus, "Blessed are the meek" becomes "Benevolence to him who bears his suffering manfully," while "Blessed are the peacemakers" is mongered into "Benevolence to those who maintain peace with the members of the Volk." Most sacrilegiously, the categorical "turning the other cheek" is turned to the following: "I say to you: it is better, so to live with other members of your Volk that you get along with each other. Volk community is a high and sacred trust for which you must make sacrifice. Therefore come out to meet your opponent as far as you can before you completely fall out with him. If in his excitement your comrade hits you in the face, it is not always correct to hit him back."

So far did this heresy go that the German Christians even sought the "liberation from the Old Testament with its cheap Jewish morality" by attempting to simply expunge it from the Bible. The genocidal analogue of this attempted erasure was the Holocaust, which was powered by what Saul Friedlander has aptly called "redemptive antisemitism."

Clerical Fascism
Yet fighting a holy war against socialists in Spain or advocating genocide from the pulpit was not Christianist enough for the Independent State of Croatia, the Catholic wartime ally of Nazi Germany under the rule of the Ustasa, rightly described as "the most brutal and most sanguinary satellite regime in the Axis sphere of influence." The Ustasa methods of killing were so sadistic that even the Nazi plenipotentiary based in Croatia recoiled. For instance, consider the words of Dionizije Juričev, the head of State Direction for Renewal, from October 22, 1941:

"In this country only Croats may live from now on, because it is a Croatian country. We know precisely what we will do with the people who do not convert. I have purged the whole surrounding area, from babies to seniors. If it is necessary, I will do that here, too, because today it is not a sin to kill even a seven-year-old child, if it is standing in the way of our Ustaša movement … Do not believe that I could not take a machine gun in hand just because I wear priest's vestments. If it is necessary, I will eradicate everyone who is against the Ustaša."

These words were targeted not only at the demonized victims of Nazism such as Jews, Roma and Sinti Travelers, but also at the Orthodox Serbs who were the largest victims of the Ustasa "policy of thirds" — kill one-third, expel one-third and forcibly convert one-third of their enemies. This sacrilege culminated in the only extermination center not directly run by the Nazi SS — the Jasenvocac camp, less than 100 miles from the Croatian capital Zagreb.

Jasenovac, where some 100,000 ethnic or religious victims were brutally murdered, was commanded by Miroslav Filipovic-Majstorovic, a serving priest. Though he was later defrocked and ultimately hanged in 1946, both his wartime actions and the escape of so many of his allies on the Catholic "ratline" to South America, including the Ustasa leader, Ante Pavelic — who spent more than a dozen years hidden in Argentina after the war — suggests that, in much the same way that fascism could appeal to seduced conservatives, Christianism could also appeal to Christian tribalists.

The case of such priests during the fascist era led to the useful term "clerical fascism," characterized as a hybrid between the Christian faith and fascism. Yet in a manner inverse to Christian nationalism, which can be entirely secular, clerical fascism suggests a phenomenon from, and within, Christian churches. With respect to Christianism in our (arguably) secularizing world, this would exclude self-described "cultural Christians" like Anders Breivik, whose 775,000-word manifesto is clear

on his secular appropriation of Christianity for the purposes of attacking cultural Marxism.

So too with the civilizational frame adopted by conspiracist proponents of the "great replacement," which alleges a Muslim plot to destroy Christian civilizations from within. The convicted terrorist Brenton Tarrant, the murderer of 51 Muslim worshippers at Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, was aimed at countering this so-called "white genocide," itself a neo-Nazi term coined by the convicted race murderer David Lane (also notorious for popularizing the "14 words": "we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children"). Like Breivik, Tarrant's 74-page manifesto, "The Great Replacement," specifically addresses itself to Christians:

"Let the fire of our repentance raise up the Holy War and the love of our brethren lead us into combat. Let our lives be stronger than death to fight against the enemies of the Christian people. ASK YOURSELF, WHAT WOULD POPE URBAN II DO?"

Pope Urban declared the First Crusade in 1095, opening one of the darkest chapters in Christian history.

Although modern and revolutionary, Christianism need not be defined as a theological stance. One can be agnostic on the issue of faith and still be a Christianist. More important is the Durkheimian religious behavior toward the sacred and the profane, which closely links clerical fascists with cultural Christians of Tarrant and Breivik's stripe. This leads to the definition of Christianism as a modern, ideological appropriation of Christianity based upon a secular vision of redemption through political violence against perceived enemies.

Relevant Again
While it might be tempting to think that the era of fascism has left Christianism in our bloody past, this construction feels relevant again in the wake of the Capitol Hill insurrection earlier this year in Washington, DC. True, Identity Christians, the

Army of God and many similar groups emerged after 1945, but these were tiny and fringe extremist movements. By contrast, what makes Christianism today the elephant in the room is precisely how widespread it appears to be developing in a new guise — and radicalizing.

In the US, for instance, according to recent polling reported by The New York Times, nearly "15 percent of Americans say they think that the levers of power are controlled by a cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles, a core belief of QAnon supporters." That equates to some 50 million Americans. That this ideological crusade is "infecting" Christian churches, indeed conquering them, is borne out by a similar Axios report indicating that this virus stretches across confessions: "Hispanic Protestants (26%) and white evangelical Protestants (25%) were more likely to agree with the QAnon philosophies than other groups. (Black Protestants were 15%, white Catholics were 11% and white mainline Protestants were 10%.)"

We should not delude ourselves that this is, or will always be, a non-violent movement. Already, nearly 80 "conspiracy-motivated crimes" can be laid at the QAnon Christianists' door — and that's before ascribing to them a key role in the January 6 insurrection, also partly fomented by then-President Donald Trump. The fusion of QAnon with Christianity — an exemplary case of Christianism — is chillingly evidenced by a professionally shot video released this New Year's Day, just days before the attempted coup in Washington. Even if this ideological call to battle ends with the canonical Lord's Prayer familiar to Christians, salvation is emphatically this-worldly and focused on a "reborn" US in a manner quite familiar to scholars of fascism.

It is for this reason that Christianism is very much the elephant in the room. As such, it needs to be confronted and rejected both politically and theologically — first and foremost by Christians themselves. This repudiation would not simply be for the sake of the self-preservation of the faith in the face of its heretic form and not just for the

protection of life that will be an increasing concern in the months and years to come. It is necessary because this is a syndrome not unfamiliar to other faiths but has yet to be named as such among mainstream Christian confessions.

We must not look away from this. Let us not go back to the genocidal years of clerical fascism in Europe, spawned by ideology and bloodlust, and let us stand tall against what is so obviously sacrilege. Both faith and civic duty command it. That is because, put in more familiar terms in William Faulkner's "Requiem for a Nun," "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

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How China's Growing Dominance Will Impact Sino-Gulf Relations

Nada Aggour
July 1, 2021

Willingly or unwillingly, recent global events have further pushed China and the Gulf states into each other's arms.

The COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves through energy markets. Since March 2020, lockdowns around the world have led adults to work remotely and children to learn virtually. Last year, according to estimates, global energy demand and investment fell by 5% and 18%, respectively.

Yet as restrictions ease and economies pick up pace, the sense of normality that many hope for is one of the few luxuries energy producers cannot afford. In the race to comply with mounting political pressure to reduce carbon emissions while simultaneously securing their energy futures, the Sino-Gulf alliance may become the new center of gravity for global energy markets.

The pandemic has undoubtedly cast a dark shadow on energy. The International Energy Agency (IEA) recently revealed that energy demand will not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2023 in its most optimistic outlook or 2025 in the case of a delayed economic recovery. However, a return to pre-COVID demand does not necessitate a return to pre-crisis growth. Predicted growth in demand between 2019 and 2030 is estimated at 4% in the delayed recovery case, compared to 12% in a COVID-free world.

Nevertheless, the pandemic has also highlighted the importance of a reliable and accessible electricity supply. The IEA predicts that the electricity sector, whose demand outpaces other fuels, will support economic recovery and account for 21% of global final energy consumption by 2030. This push for electricity is widely driven by the various global emission reduction targets, increased use of electric vehicles and heat sources in advanced economies, and greater consumption from emerging markets.

Leader of the Pack
Of the countries driving this growth, China is leading the pack and is predicted to be the main driver of energy demand over the next decade. Following his call for an "energy revolution," President Xi Jinping has sought to reposition China as a key player in global energy markets. While the Chinese are currently the world's biggest consumers and producers of coal-fired electricity, Xi's pledge to make China carbon neutral by 2060 means that energy demands are increasingly being met via renewables.

China is predicted to account for 40% of global renewable expansion, leading in the realm of nuclear power, biofuel production and will account for almost half of globally distributed photovoltaic power. In addition to this, Chinese demand is also predicted to account for 40% of global electricity sector growth by 2030, up from 28%. It was as a consequence of East Asia's

growing appetite for clean energy that, in 2016, global electricity investment outpaced that of oil and gas for the first time in history.

However, as with everything, there will be winners and losers. While electricity is on the up, sluggish global oil demand has led to falling oil prices. With demand predicted to plummet in the 2030s, there is a growing urgency for Gulf Arab states to diversify as oil becomes more of a burden than a blessing. Yet, in their hurry to claim their stake in the new energy world order, Gulf countries may begin to look east rather than west for a friend to rely on.

China and the Gulf

Sino-Gulf relations are not a new occurrence. As the world's largest importer of oil and natural gas, these two commodities dominate Chinese trade relations and have been the basis of the Saudi-led Gulf alliance. The Gulf Cooperation Council supplies over 30% of China's oil imports, with Saudi Arabia topping the list, accounting for over 16% of the oil import total. Nevertheless, in a world that is increasingly turning its back on oil, GCC states and China may increasingly look to each other to secure their respective energy futures.

From the establishment of the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) in 2004 to the China–GCC Strategic Dialogue in 2010, Sino-Gulf relations have grown from strength to strength. As such, it was hardly surprising when China gave the GCC a starring role in its Belt and Road Initiative. Announced in 2013, this global infrastructure project that seeks to boost physical connectivity, financial integration, trade and economic growth has become the core pillar of China's increasingly active foreign policy approach under Xi.

During the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the CASCF in 2014, Xi spoke about the Gulf Arab states as "natural cooperative partners in jointly building" the BRI. This set the stage for a flood of multi-billion-dollar investments and agreements between China and the Gulf states,

advancing the Belt and Road Initiative in the Arabian Peninsula and deepening economic ties.

Chinese investment activity in the Gulf has followed the "1+2+3" Sino-Arab cooperation framework. This features energy cooperation as its central axis, investment and infrastructure, and accelerating breakthroughs in three high-tech sectors, namely aviation satellite, nuclear energy and new energy. However, there is no doubt that the BRI aims primarily to strengthen this central pillar of energy cooperation. Aptly described as "oil roads," the initiative will enable China to establish the necessary infrastructure, transport and refinery facilities needed to secure its energy future and keep GCC coffers full.

These ambitious plans will be of greater significance in the years to come. Despite the economic and energy market turmoil triggered by the pandemic, Sino-Gulf relations show no signs of slowing. Rather, the pandemic may have made way for a greater mutual dependence between China and the Gulf states. This is particularly true for the GCC, whose economic wellbeing depends heavily on the revival of global oil markets. China may prove to be the answer to Gulf ministers' prayers, stimulating growth by providing a guaranteed revenue stream for the region's main export, no doubt stabilizing GCC economies.

Beyond the energy sector, however, the two regions offer a wealth of investment opportunities that will likely deepen relations, particularly as the GCC economies realize their various diversification plans. The synergies between the GCC's various "vision" agendas and China's BRI are extensive, thus acting as a major point of collaboration. The two are already in the final stages of concluding the long-awaited China–GCC free trade agreement, a move that would no doubt propel economic cooperation and open the doors to a vast array of trading opportunities. Saudi Arabia has already taken active steps to consolidate this BRI-vision cooperation by signing various agreements and memorandums of understanding with China. Riyadh has since considered the BRI to be "one of the main pillars

of the Saudi Vision 2030," consequently making China "among the Kingdom's biggest economic partners."

Closer Partners
It is thus clear that, willingly or unwillingly, recent global events have further pushed China and GCC into each other's arms. Sino-Gulf relations can be expected to gain serious traction in the next few years, especially in the realm of energy cooperation, which is likely to continue to spearhead this strategic alliance as a sector of great mutual importance. Meanwhile, as China seeks to entrench itself in the Gulf, it may find itself caught in the middle of the regional power struggles that threaten stability, namely the Iran-Saudi rivalry. President Xi, however, shows no intent of mixing business with politics, as seen in his recent regional tour, which saw him visit both Saudi Arabia and Iran among others.

Nevertheless, if China wishes to grow its presence in the Gulf, ensuring regional peace will undoubtedly become a priority for Beijing. Chinese neutrality may be exactly what is needed to defuse regional tensions and maintain a level of accord that keeps the feud below boiling point. Yet despite Sino-Gulf relations taking center stage in the near future, China will not be replacing the United States as the dominant foreign power in the Middle East any time soon. Beijing's focus on economic rather than political matters makes China, to use the words of Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud, "not necessarily a better friend, but a less complicated friend."

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The Libyan Government Faces Numerous Challenges

Anouar Jamaoui
July 5, 2021

To succeed, the interim government will need the support of Libyan officials, the public and the international community.

On February 5, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), a 75-member body, supervised by the United Nations, approved Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh's list of officials to temporarily run national affairs. Their mandate will last until presidential and parliamentary elections take place on December 24. The list includes Mohammed al-Manfi as chairman and Musa al-Koni and Abdullah Hussein al-Lafi as members of the Presidential Council. Dbeibeh became the prime minister of Libya.

On March 10, Dbeibeh presented his cabinet to members of parliament and won the confidence of 132 deputies out of the 133 who attended the session in Sirte. The internationally recognized national unity government based in Tobruk was subsequently sworn in, but it faces many challenges. These include political, military, economic, and social and human rights issues.

Political Challenges
Dbeibeh is a businessman-turned-politician from Misrata, a port city that is around 200 kilometers to the east of Tripoli, the Libyan capital. During his time in business, he was involved in political circles as a trusted person of the ruling Arab Socialist Union. In 2007, Muammar Gaddafi, the ruler of Libya at the time, charged Dbeibeh with the task of running the state-owned Libyan Investment and Development Company (LIDCO). The firm was responsible for some of the country's biggest public works projects. After the Libyan revolution of 2011, which led to the

overthrow and subsequent death of Gaddafi, the Libya al-Mustakbal (Libya Future) movement was founded by Dbeibeh.

The prime minister has succeeded in forming a broad-based coalition government that has brought together representatives of most stakeholders from the political, regional and tribal scenes in Libya. Dbeibeh crystallized a state of relative consensus between the different parties that have lived during a state of dissonance and a raging power struggle. This culminated in Major General Khalifa Haftar's declaration of war on Tripoli in April 2019. Haftar's heavy losses, his failed coup against civilian rule, the suffering of Libyans from war and their forced displacement pushed the bickering parties to negotiate and reach a political agreement. This deal was endorsed by the United Nations mission, under the pressure of countries such as the United States, Germany, Britain and Italy. The formation of the new Libyan government is based on a fragile consensus dictated by necessity. The sustainability of this is a challenge in itself, requiring a high degree of governmental harmony and solidarity.

Dbeibeh's team now faces the challenge of bridging the gap between the various actors on Libya's political scene and bringing them together under a single banner. This national project entails the extension of state sovereignty over the whole of Libyan territory and the consolidation of civil peace, taking into account public interest. The new government is also required to implement the roadmap drawn up by the LPDF. Most importantly, this includes the unification of sovereign institutions to elect new leaders to manage the transitional phase. It also involves creating conditions for organizing legislative and presidential elections at the end of the year.

The formation of the national unity government represented a historic moment that was the result of talks between the most prominent political actors in Libya. It served as a political solution to the Libyan crisis and a transition from a situation of war to one of peace.

Despite the peaceful transition of power from Fayez al-Sarraj, the prime minister under the Government of National Accord (GNA), to Dbeibeh, some political figures have not fully grasped the scope of change taking place in Libya. Instead, they have resisted the shifts in government to preserve their influence and personal and factional interests.

An example of this is the case of Aguila Saleh Issa, the speaker of parliament and president of the House of Representatives (HOR). Issa was expected to vacate his role, as decided by the forum, to allow a new figure from the south to be head of the legislative body. The aim is to create a balance between the different regions of Libya. Yet the speaker has clung on to his position.

Issa has a long history of obstructing the path for a peaceful settlement to the Libyan crisis. In 2016, the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) adopted sanctions against him. He was accused of being "complicit in, actions or policies that obstruct, undermine, delay, or impede, or pose a significant risk of obstructing, undermining, delaying, or impeding, the adoption of or political transition to the GNA." In addition to this, parliament remained divided and suspended during his term and only met on rare occasions.

Military Challenges

On the military front, the UN Security Council has called on all parties to abide by the ceasefire agreed in Geneva under the UN in October 2020. Yet in March this year, a UN report stated that the arms embargo in Libya is "totally ineffective." The Geneva agreement issued a 90-day deadline for foreign mercenaries to leave the country. The stated period has since passed, but Libya is still teeming with local and international armed groups.

This complex situation poses a major challenge to the national unity government. Officials are primarily concerned with forcing all parties to respect the ceasefire and stop the imports of weapons by land, sea and air. In

addition to this, millions of weapons — smuggled or stolen — are handled illegally in Libya.

The state needs to regain its authority and have a monopoly on the use of weapons. This requires forcing the armed brigades in the east and west to hand over their equipment to the Ministries of Defense and Interior. This approach calls for dissolving Libyan militias, draining their sources of funding, rehabilitating their members and reintegrating them into official security and defense structures. This includes institutions such as the police, army, civil protection or border control, which have specific laws and codes of conduct and a clear hierarchy subject to civilian leadership.

The government will likely face resistance from armed groups. The brigades loyal to General Haftar, who considers himself above the state and does not accept the command of civilian leadership, will present a particular challenge.

Mercenaries also pose a risk. There are an estimated 20,000 foreign fighters in Libya, according to former UN Envoy Stephanie Williams. Most of them are stationed in the east of Libya and in the oil crescent, a coastal area that hosts most of the country's oil export terminals. The fighters include Sudanese, Chadian, Syrian and Russian nationals earning high salaries.

Their deportation presents a further challenge because the groups are part of a network of power relations involving other countries. Russia, Turkey, Egypt and France have used fighters and technical experts as bargaining chips to ensure their share of reconstruction projects and natural resources in Libya. The Libyan government needs to create a situation where locals reject the presence of mercenaries and put pressure on them to leave.

The support of the European Union, the United States and Britain is also important. Such global powers must intensify diplomatic and field efforts on these armed groups to surrender their positions and weapons to the Libyan government. If this can be achieved in a manner that guarantees the sustainability of peace and stability, foreign investors might view Libya as a safe country for commercial and economic activity.

Economic, Social and Human Rights Challenges

The Dbeibeh government has inherited an economy that has been weakened by war and financial and administrative corruption. The economy has been severely affected by the deliberate halting of oil production and export by tribes and militias loyal to Haftar. It has also been impacted by depleted parallel institutions and informal trade as well as the smuggling of fuel and other basic materials. "Due to the closure of oil wells and restrictions put by pro-Haftar armed groups, the Libyan economy suffered a loss of $5 billion in January 2020," Mucahit Aydemir reports. "From 2016-2019, the country has already lost more than $100 billion, as Ibrahim Cadran, an Haftar ally interrupted the oil excavation in the east of the country."

It is assumed that the national unity government will set an audited public budget and liberate oil fields from foreign, tribal or militia domination. The interim leaders should also seek to restore the export of oil, the country's primary source of income. Undertaking these urgent, necessary reforms will allow the provision of cash liquidity, secure salaries and help the Libyan dinar (LD) recover, if only relatively. According to the World Bank, the dinar "continues to suffer in the parallel market because of political uncertainties and macroeconomic instability. In the first two quarters of 2020, the LD in the parallel market lost 54 percent of its value."

On the social and human rights front, it is imperative for the new government to provide citizens with essential services, such as clean water, electricity, gas, medicine and basic foodstuffs, and to fight the wastage of public money and increasing prices. In March, UN Special Envoy Jan Kubis said the "country is facing an acute electricity crisis this summer and there are risks to its water security as well." He added that "UN agencies estimate that over 4

million people, including 1.5 million children, may face being denied access to clean water and sanitation if immediate solutions are not found and implemented."

In addition, the coronavirus was confirmed to have spread to Libya on March 24, 2020, when the first case was reported in Tripoli. Libya is vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic due to the impact of the last civil war, which led to a dire humanitarian situation and the destruction of the country's health infrastructure. In April, Libya launched its vaccination program against COVID-19, but, as with most countries in Africa, the supplies of doses remain low. At the time of publishing, the country had recorded more than 195,000 infections and over 3,200 deaths.

In light of risks to the country's health care, an effective strategy must be implemented to combat COVID-19. This must take into account sufficient steps to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, import the necessary number of vaccine doses and guarantee access to health services for those suffering from the COVID-19 disease.

It is also important for authorities to release political prisoners, deal with cases of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and end impunity for those committing crimes. Those forcibly displaced during the civil war must also be allowed to return to their homes and resume their professional lives in a safe environment. The building blocks for a project of transitional justice as a prelude to a practical, inclusive and fair system of reconciliation must also be pursued.

The time available to the Dbeibeh government is limited and the challenges it faces are plenty. But this should not prevent the interim administration from being able to introduce changes and pave the way for political, economic and human rights reform.

However, this will be possible only if officials are united and cooperate to serve the public and if international support continues for the national unity government. Most importantly, to succeed, the government will need the support of Libyans themselves.

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Britain Must Protect Afghanistan's Chevening Scholars

Meetra Qutb
July 5, 2021

__The scholarship the UK government granted to promising Afghan students has now become a noose around their necks.__

On June 1, the UK defense and home secretaries announced that the local staff who worked for the British government in Afghanistan, including many interpreters for the British military, would be eligible for expedited relocation to the UK under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

The new policy states that "any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation to the UK regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served." To date, more than 1,300 Afghans and their families have been relocated to the United Kingdom. Another 3,000 more are expected to relocate.

Scholars Under Threat
The ARAP rightly assesses that the local Afghan staff who have worked for the British over the past 20 years are at risk. However, it fails to recognize that Afghan graduates of British universities face a similar threat. These graduates have been one of the main drivers of

development in Afghanistan. They have worked for the United Nations, the World Bank and various government entities around the country. They have also promoted British cultural values in Afghanistan. Naturally, the Taliban does not view them favorably.

In particular, the Chevening scholars attract the ire of the Taliban. Over the years, the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has given out scholarships to some of the most promising Afghan students. Their identification with Britain has attracted special attention from the Taliban, who have called them the "spies of the Englishmen" and "children of the devil " among other things. Such sayings have not been reported in Western media, but Afghans know this only too well.

International forces have just withdrawn from the Bagram airbase. The Taliban are gaining ground and have even captured the main border crossing to Tajikistan. The Afghan government forces are crumbling. Kabul is already a dystopian city. The progress Afghanistan made around human rights, women's empowerment, education, economic development and in other areas is already being rolled back. The Taliban view of the world is almost medieval. Harsh Islamic law that bans modern banking, women's rights and fundamentals such as freedom of expression will soon hold sway again. Chevening scholars are likely to be hunted down and slaughtered, often publicly, because they are tarred by their association with Britain.

The Taliban have a terrible track record. In the past, they have killed thousands of people, closed down schools for girls and imposed draconian punishments, often as a public spectacle. It is an open secret that al-Qaeda used Afghanistan as a base during the reign of the Taliban. Those dark days are about to return, and anyone associated with the West will be targeted. Those associated with the US and the UK are already paying with their lives.

Three Good Reasons

The British government has a moral obligation not only to the local staff but also to the Chevening scholars. The ARAP should cover the latter too. The very scholarship the FCDO granted to promising Afghan students has now become a noose around their necks. The Chevening scholarship has opened new doors for Afghan graduates, but it has also marked them down as Western collaborators in the eyes of the Taliban. Women scholars in particular face a risk. They are often seen as corrupted by Western values and a threat to the traditional Islamic order. Abandoning these scholars to their fate would be the wrong decision for any fair-minded British government.

There is also an economic argument for admitting Afghanistan's Chevening scholars. In the post-Brexit era, the UK wants to be a global hub for talent. It is in the self-interest of the British government to attract highly skilled and driven professionals from around the world. The Chevening scholars have been trained in the finest British universities. Many of them have also worked abroad or have professional experience with international organizations. They have the skills, the resilience and the initiative to contribute greatly to the British economy.

There is a social argument for Chevening scholars too. They are some of the most cosmopolitan and cultured people in Afghanistan. While studying in the UK, many were active in student life, organizing discussions, volunteering with charities and hosting cultural events. They have an ability to assimilate into the British culture while adding a distinctive flavor to an increasingly multicultural nation. The Afghan scholars are likely to contribute to the arts, civic engagement and the communities they join. They will be an asset to the UK just as the Huguenots, the Jews, the Pakistanis, the Indians and countless others have been in the past.

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Will Women Return to the Office?

Kiara Taylor
July 5, 2021

Men are more likely to return to the office than women. What does this mean for gender equality?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns have spawned a lot of changes in workplace norms. As it turns out, these norms have had both positive effects and unintended consequences concerning things like remote work and how it impacts employees. While there has been some room for growth and increased flexibility, it is possible that the pandemic has undone some of the more progressive developments of the last decades. Nowhere is this more visible than in the issue of gender equality in the workplace.

As some of us begin to return "back to normal," a new threat is emerging. Research indicates that men are far more likely to want to come into the office than women, threatening to bring back the days when office spaces were dominated by men. What does this mean for the future of gender equality in the workplace?

After the Storm

First, let's look at the raw numbers. A recent UK-based poll of over 2,000 business leaders, office managers and employees shows that almost 70% of mothers want to work from home at least once a week when the pandemic is finally over, versus just 56% of fathers. Given that many employers are keen to accommodate the wishes of their staff when it comes to work format, this means within a few short years, we could see offices that are less gender-balanced than they are at the moment.

It could be contended, of course, that this does not matter so much. The experience of the pandemic has proven to many employers that it's more than possible to build a productive remote workforce without interrupting business operations. There are numerous tools that allow most things to be done virtually, and many people are more productive at home than in the office. Similarly, working from home doesn't appear to be correlated with lower wages in itself. For example, the average US freelancer makes $45 an hour, a figure that hasn't changed that much over the pandemic period.

However, there are some real concerns exposed by the research. Chief among them is the fact that, for women, career development appears to be positively correlated with in-person work. In other words, while working from home doesn't appear to affect men's prospects of getting promoted, it does for women.

In-person attendance at the office can boost an employee's career prospects, if only because they are more visible in the workplace. Given this, it's easy to see what may begin to happen if women work from home more than men. Not only will individual women be passed over for promotions, but companies will start to see increases in the gender disparity in leadership roles. Even more problematically, some research suggests that this effect is cumulative in that high-ranking executives are more likely to work from the office rather than home, thus exacerbating the problem further.

The Cost of WFH

The research also raises some troubling questions about the way in which employees see their responsibilities. Implicit in many women's responses to the survey was the idea that they need to balance domestic responsibilities with their professional lives. In other words, more women may choose to work from home, not because they actually want to, but because they are already disproportionately burdened with things like childcare responsibilities. This risks exacerbating the long-standing gender gap when it comes to unpaid labor like domestic work.

The problem here is that many companies are (rightly) presenting a choice to workers to either continue working from home or come back to the

office. And while this is presented as a choice primarily related to wherever a worker thinks they will be most productive, the choice is made more complicated for many women by gendered expectations.

There is a well-established link between domestic labor and professional career advancement. It is well known that unpaid household labor has always been a barrier to women advancing at work as the majority of domestic and childcare responsibilities continue to fall on women. This has only worsened in the pandemic when mothers were, for example, more likely to take on the responsibility of educating their children when schools were closed.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we may be exacerbating these damaging stereotypes. It would be very troubling, for instance, to return to a world in which many families feel that men "belong at the office" and women "belong at home." Even if the women at home are working, it doesn't hide the fact that this attitude reminiscent of the 1950s will now result in women working full time as well as shouldering most of the household work.

This effect may be even worse among minority groups. There are already many barriers to entry for minorities in business, tech and numerous other fields independent of gender, so these communities could be even more greatly affected by the gender gaps left over from the pandemic.

It is important, of course, to recognize women's agency in making the choice to work from home. For many women, the last year has been a revelation because it has given them the flexibility they've long been asking for when it comes to balancing professional and domestic responsibilities. For many women, this flexible schedule is a major advantage and is one of the reasons why they may be reluctant to return to the office.

Not All Bad

While we must recognize these hidden costs, it is equally important to admit that the pandemic hasn't been entirely bad news, even when it comes to gender equality. The normalization of remote work has saved many women hours in commuting time and given them back control of their schedules. These short-term gains should not be ignored.

Similarly, this normalization of remote work may allow women to advance their careers in other ways. We've seen a spike in online businesses being founded over the past year, as there are now more types of businesses that can be run entirely online than at any time before. Subsequently, many women have taken advantage of working from home to research the different types of online businesses they can start.

Also, having men home from work — especially for couples who follow more old-fashioned gender roles — may also have had a positive effect on how involved men are in childcare and domestic labor. Many couples have been able to divide these tasks more evenly over the past year, adopting more egalitarian strategies in the division of labor. These strategies, it has been suggested, can improve couples' performance and well-being, and even their professional productivity.

Still, challenges remain. We should remember that not all households are headed by heterosexual couples — or couples at all — which may complicate an approach that seeks to use existing gender stereotypes to reach a more equal division of labor. Similarly, in a social environment where even the radical right is trying to use feminism as a rallying cry, raising the issue of gendered labor risks polarizing the debate. We must be careful not to get bogged down in such polarization lest it cloud the facts of the matter and prevent progress.

It is possible that some of these concerns will not come to pass. There is, in fact, a school of thought that argues that the post-pandemic period will be much like the times we thought may never return. Nevertheless, given the hard work and the bravery that it took to reach the still-incomplete state of gender equality at the end of

the previous decade, it would be wise to pay attention to issues like these moving forward.

It may be the case that family and childcare policies will be the way toward post-pandemic recovery. Ultimately, we should be careful to ensure that the pandemic doesn't reverse the progress we've made on gender equality while also recognizing that working from home can be a positive step for many women.

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America, the Stumbling Giant

Glenn Carle
July 8, 2021

The US is facing its gravest combination of crises since 1861, challenging the framework of American democracy.

The United States has been the most powerful country in the world for 130 years and has actively led the international community for 75. With only 4.25% of the world's population, the US still accounts for a little more than 24% of the world's GNP. Its military is by far the world's most powerful, with a budget larger than the next 12 biggest militaries combined. The US has the highest per capita income of any major country and the most diverse and creative economy the world has ever seen. It leads in virtually every technology critical for economic and military predominance, from artificial intelligence to materials science. Its democracy has set a standard the world has looked up to for 240 years.

But the American giant is stumbling. Today, Americans fear that the US is in decline. Its economy is progressively skewed to the ultra-rich. Its national government is almost paralyzed.

China is challenging Washington's international power and leadership. American society is more divided than at any time since the Civil War, with up to 40% of Americans believing that a "strong man" leader — a fascist — is preferable to democracy.

Almost all Americans worry that for the first time in history, their children will be poorer than they are. Many of America's political moderates and progressives fear that America's democracy will be replaced by fascistic autocracy and consider former president Donald Trump and the current Republican Party fascist. Yet on the other side of America's political divide, an NPR/Ipsos poll in December 2020 found that 39% of Americans believe that the country is controlled by a sinister "deep state," and this enrages them.

Social Stresses
My family and I are literally what made America. Since my ancestors arrived in 1620 on the Mayflower off the shore of Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, America was created by "White Anglo-Saxon Protestants," popularly known as WASPs. The culture that shaped the United States for 350 years was overwhelmingly English, then Western European, with a dominant Puritanical, Protestant ethos.

For 15 generations, America was also culturally and legally a society for whites. Even for my generation growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, many Americans still changed their surnames to sound more "Anglo" — dropping the last vowel, say, from the Italian (and Catholic) "Lombardi" to "Lombard," to appear more WASP-like and less "ethnic" or un-American. Fully 10% of the population was black, but they were excluded from power and lived on the cultural periphery. Half the nation still lived in an apartheid "whites only" regime, the legacy of centuries of white domination and black slavery. In the media, one saw only white faces like mine, except in subordinate or, rarely, in "exotic" roles. And, of course, America, like the rest of the world since time immemorial, was only a man's world.

But with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, America began a stupendous social change, with blacks and women gaining unprecedented rights. Furthermore, non-WASP immigrants have arrived in the US by the tens of millions. When I was born, America was over 88% white. By the year 2045, under 50% will be white. The trend has already been clear for decades. In the past dozen years, the US has elected a black president twice, a black-Indian female vice president, and its second Catholic president.

Today, the US has a vibrant black middle class. Its Asian population is growing rapidly. Asian and Indian Americans hold many prominent positions in the country's economic and scientific establishments. Women now hold countless key positions in all sectors of the US economy, including boardrooms. This demographic and social revolution has diversified America but also engendered a nativist, racist reaction and the rise of a fascist: Donald Trump.

Socially conservative whites — especially the least educated — have literally taken to the streets to "save" their country from these changes. Donald Trump voices their anger and their demands. Having lost the presidential election of 2020 yet having refused to accept verified results, the Republican Party has taken dozens of measures to restrict voting access for non-whites. There has been talk of civil war, and there has been an insurrection.

Economic Stresses

Real incomes have largely stagnated for about 40 years. Globalization has destroyed entire sectors of America's middle-class economy. Much of US manufacturing has moved abroad to lower-wage economies. In the 1960s, the single male income earner could provide a middle-class life for most families. Today, 60% of families require two full-time incomes to maintain a middle-class life. According to a Brookings paper, women account for "91% of the total income gain for their families."

In 2019, a Federal Reserve study found that almost 40% of Americans "wouldn't be able to cover a $400 emergency with cash, savings or a credit-card charge that they could quickly pay off." With $41.52 trillion in assets, the top 1% of households control more than 32% of the country's wealth. With just $2.62 trillion in assets, the bottom 50% own a mere 2%. This concentration of wealth is creating social and political strains.

The Republican Party has based its appeal on these grievances for decades, and Trump, the classic demagogue, exploited them all the way to the presidency. Blaming stagnation and increasing economic insecurity of ordinary Americans — and their loss of white social status — on globalization has been a ploy of Republicans since the mid-1960s. The party has progressively based its appeal on such tropes and fears since.

Today, Republicans systematically oppose any action by the federal government as a threat to "freedom." They seek to reduce taxes, gut economic regulations, lower investments in infrastructure and slash expenditure on education, which they deem to be a means of dangerous social engineering.

Political Stresses

As McKay Coppins has pointed out in The Atlantic, after emerging as the leader of the Republican Party in 1994, "Newt Gingrich turned partisan battles into bloodsport, wrecked Congress, and paved the way for Trump's rise." As speaker of the House of Representatives, Gingrich sought to demonize and destroy the Democratic Party. He refused to cooperate, let alone compromise with the Democrats at any level either in the White House or Congress.

When Barack Obama was elected president, Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell acted ruthlessly to oppose everything the Obama administration proposed. Before the 2010 midterm elections, McConnell declared: "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president." Today, McConnell has stated that

"100% of his focus is on blocking" President Biden's agenda.

Since the mid-1990s, American politics has turned increasingly polarized, its federal government almost paralyzed. There are two principal reasons the US suffers from political rigor mortis. First, the Republican Party has become increasingly intransigent and partisan. The Democratic Party remains more moderate and open to compromise but has gotten little in return from the Republicans. Second, America's electoral structures accord a disproportionate weight to rural districts, which is where the anxious, angry and reactionary WASPs and other whites live. The more ethnically diverse, urban and educated citizens tend to live in the major cities, heavily concentrated on the country's Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

On July 1, 2019, Wyoming's population was 578,759 while California's numbered 39,512,223. In the presidential elections, Wyoming receives three electoral college votes; California receives 55. This means a vote for president in Wyoming is worth more than 3.72 times a vote in California. However, it is in voting for the US Senate where Wyoming really has an edge. Every state in the US elects two senators, regardless of its population. This makes a vote in Wyoming 68.27 times more valuable than a vote in California.

This structural bias toward less populous rural states gives Republicans a tremendous political advantage. It has enabled them to triumph in two of the last six presidential elections despite winning a minority of the popular vote and to frequently hold a majority in Congress and Senate, despite receiving lower overall votes. America is so evenly divided politically that one party often controls the White House while the other dominates Congress, or at least one of its two chambers. Given the partisan gridlock in the US, this virtually brings legislation to a halt.

The consequences of this electoral and institutional schizophrenia are everywhere to see and experience: American roads, bridges, water mains, harbor facilities and education now lag far behind most developed countries and even many emerging economies. Some foreign visitors to the US have commented that American infrastructure reminds them of the 1950s — which is precisely when much of it was built. The Shinkansen, Japan's bullet train network, awes Americans, including myself, and it is 50 years old. America has always been a "third-world country" for the ethnically excluded. Now, the strains and failures of America's social, economic and political paralysis extend more broadly through society. Even the WASPs are not spared.

Global Stresses

Two global issues in particular shape American public life and self-doubts.

First, the US is no longer the only great power. China's rise has been breathtaking. Beijing challenges American preeminence in trade, technology, diplomacy and military strength, posing the greatest challenge to the US since World War II. Many Americans fear that China's rise is a sign of American decline.

Second, global warming threatens the American way of life and shapes much of the political debate about the environment, the economy and the role of government. Signs of a literal cataclysm are already upon us. The West Coast has experienced the worst forest fires in recorded history and is living through the worst drought in 500 years. In 2012, the US Geological Survey estimated that sea levels would rise on the East Coast by nearly 50 centimeters by 2050. In 2021, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association projects the same level of sea rise in Boston and Massachusetts. By 2050, the spot where my Mayflower ancestors began the American experiment 400 years ago will be swallowed by the sea.

Yet even global warming divides America. Most of the Republican Party believes that global warming is a hoax perpetrated by the "deep state" so that scientists can have jobs. Some even assert that the California wildfires are linked to "Jewish space lasers." These Republican beliefs are an amalgam of lunacy and old fascist tropes. That

one of the country's two major political parties believes such dangerous lies and delusions bodes ill for America's future.

During his campaign and since becoming president, Joe Biden has declared that the next four years will be a "battle for the soul of the nation." He and his party have to end the paralysis of America's public institutions and democracy, heal social divisions, and reduce growing economic inequality. They must rebuild America's crumbling infrastructure and rise to the challenge of China as a fast-emerging peer competitor in international and economic affairs.

The Republican Party and nearly 40% of the American population will oppose every step Biden attempts. The rural bias in the country's political structures consistently grants this 40% control of about half the House of Representatives and Senate. Biden must win majorities to implement his transformative economic, social, political and diplomatic policies with only the slimmest majority possible in the legislature.

Furthermore, this majority is fragile. Of the 100 seats in the Senate, Republicans have 50, Democrats 48 and independents two, both of whom caucus with the Democrats. The vice president presides over the Senate and supports the president but may only vote in the event of a 50-50 split. Historically, most presidents have struggled to enact their agenda even with strong electoral majorities.

No president since Abraham Lincoln in 1861 has had to deal with such an array of grave social, political and economic crises. Throughout history, many states have proven unable to address structural, systemic problems with legislation and policies that do not profoundly alter these structures or systems. In most instances, however, this requires major social and political upheaval, sometimes even revolution. This has happened before in America — in 1776, when there was revolution, in 1861, when there was civil war, and in 1929, when there was economic collapse.

Within the current framework of American democracy, Biden can probably only succeed in radically addressing America's daunting democratic, diplomatic, social, political and economic challenges if his party wins a more solid majority in both chambers of Congress. Thus, all eyes, hopes and fears turn to America's congressional elections of 2022, now only 16 months away. This historic vote may well decide who wins the "battle for the soul of the nation."

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A Contentious Election Deepens Peru's Crisis

Erik Geurts
July 16, 2021

A fragmented congress and a disputed presidential election have worsened a political crisis that began in 2016 and could unfold ugly scenarios for Peru's future.

Peruvians went to the polls on June 6 to elect a new president. Pedro Castillo is leading Keiko Fujimori by 44,000 votes in an election in which 17.6 million cast their ballots. The result is yet to be confirmed by the election authorities.

A newly-edited book by one of the greatest Peruvian historians gives clues as to the future. Jorge Basadre's intriguing "Risk in History and Its Limits" was first published in 1971 and examines the role of chance in history. Basadre magisterially applies this theme to Peruvian independence. He was fully aware of the latest developments in game theory and anticipated the power of computers to apply this theory. This

great thinker is honored today with his portrait on 100 soles banknotes.

Inspired by Basadre, there are five scenarios that could unfold once the election authorities proclaim the winner. Although scenario analysis and game theory are distinct concepts, scenarios allow for a simulation of the role of chance in history and in determining the future. The Peruvian case is an exciting starting point for such analysis because the country is deeply divided and each candidate appeals only to a small minority of the population.

The Two Candidates

Keiko Fujimori is the daughter of the former authoritarian president Alberto Fujimori. He is currently serving a 25-year prison sentence for human rights abuses committed during his tenure. The former president inherited a bloody insurgency led by two terrorist groups. The larger group, the Shining Path, espoused Maoist ideals similar to Cambodia's infamous Khmer Rouge. The other group was the Marxist-Leninist Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. Both groups were most active in the 1980s and early 1990s. Alberto Fujimori is credited with crushing them.

Keiko Fujimori still attracts public support because many Peruvians continue to be grateful to her father for navigating the country out of what seemed to be an intractable crisis. Along with the insurgency, Peru suffered chronic hyperinflation. The authoritarian elder Fujimori ended both insurgency and inflation. In the current election, his daughter won 13.41% of the vote in the first round, reaching the final round in the presidential election for the third time.

Keiko Fujimori lost the 2016 presidential election to a liberal candidate by a mere 41,000 votes even though her party won an absolute majority in the congressional election. Her deep unpopularity among a large number of Peruvians probably explains why she lost while her party won. The divided mandate — with Fujimori's party dominant in congress and the presidency in her rival's hands — was a recipe for disaster.

Following the 2016 election, the country went into a political free fall. New congressional elections and constitutional changes followed. Within one presidential term, four presidents have come and gone. The constitutional changes backfired spectacularly. Members of congress are no longer allowed to stand for reelection. This was supposed to make them more honest. Instead, they treat their one term as the only chance to extract their pound of flesh. Almost invariably, Peruvian members of congress have furthered their own personal interests over the interests of society. Naturally, voters are tired of the current political situation with its unresolved tensions between regions and classes. This benefited Fujimori's unlikely political rival who could cast himself as an outsider.

Pedro Castillo is a rural school teacher and union leader. His parents were illiterate peasants; he is the third of their nine children. Castillo comes from one of the poorest regions of the country. As a relatively unknown presidential candidate, he remained under the radar of the mainstream press during the first round of elections. With 20 candidates competing to get into the second round, Castillo won a surprising 18.92% of the vote. His victory caught the Lima elites by surprise.

In Peru, political parties largely center around their founders. Castillo's party, Perú Libre, revolves around Wladimir Cerron, who used to be the governor of a region in the Andean part of the country. Cerron draws inspiration from Cuba's Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro. He is believed to support surviving members of the Shining Path. Two former members of the Maoist terrorist organization will now take their seats in congress for Perú Libre.

Cerron shares legal troubles relating to corruption and campaign finance with the Fujimori family. Whereas Fujimori herself is still awaiting trial, Cerron has already been sentenced to four years and eight months. He is currently out on parole.

A Mess That Keeps Getting Messier

Even though the vote was held over a month ago, the election authorities are yet to declare an official winner. Fujimori has challenged the election outcome. She claims irregularities in the voting districts in the Andean region where she is extremely unpopular. The independent election authorities have rejected most of the challenges, some on entirely technical grounds. According to law, challenges must be lodged within three days of the election. The polls closed at 8.00 pm on July 6. Fujimori filed some of her challenges after 8.00 pm but before midnight on July 9.

To her supporters, the extra four hours do not matter because July 9 was still the third day after the election. The election authorities are mindful of this perception and perhaps this contributes to why they have yet to proclaim a winner. However, we can safely assume that Castillo will be proclaimed president-elect before July 28. That day marks 200 years of Peru's independence and is the day the constitution provides for the swearing-in of a new president.

Even though Castillo is highly likely to take charge, wild speculation dominates both the news and social media. He has frequently made contradictory remarks about his future plans. His erratic comments and improvisational team-building have made many nervous. Tensions are rising while confidence in the economy is falling. Just three months after Castillo won the first round, Peru's foreign exchange reserves have dwindled by 11%. They have largely been spent to prop up the country's falling currency that has fallen by 8.4% against a weak dollar despite the measures.

Capital is also fleeing the country. Even before the second round of elections, the business elite was "looking to get money out of the country." Reportedly, $13 billion in bank deposits have left Peruvian shores in the last few months. Castillo's plans to nationalize or heavily tax major industries such as mining, oil and gas have caused tremors among investors and the business community. The Andean leader has continued to call for a constitutional convention despite a majority in congress or among voters

who oppose such an elaborate and expensive exercise.

Castillo's call for a new constitution has fueled economic anxiety. There is a fear that the rules of the game could change and Peru might retreat from a market economy. This could create massive problems for the country. Previous administrations have signed trade agreements and international treaties that commit Peru to certain market-friendly policies. Castillo's incoming administration does not have as much leeway as it imagines, and ideological policies could have costly consequences for the economy.

Ironically, Peru's economy was recovering from the COVID-19 crisis faster than those of neighboring countries. Rising commodity prices would have given the new government more money to redistribute to the rural and Andean areas that historically lag behind Lima and other coastal cities. Instead, a close election in a fragmented society has exacerbated a protracted ongoing crisis. There are five scenarios that could play out at this point in time. Let us go through each of them.

Scenario 1: Cooperation

The government and the people they govern could come together to address the main problems affecting the country. These include ramping up the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, improving Peru's ailing health care and public education systems, creating employment for the millions who lost their jobs due to lockdowns, increasing prosperity in poor areas practicing subsistence agriculture, building more infrastructure and improving resilience against climate change.

Under this scenario, Castillo would successfully earn the confidence of the majority of congress. Instead of drafting a new constitution, members of congress would agree on amendments to improve governance.

Although this would be an optimal scenario, it is unlikely to unfold. Peru's new congress of 130 deputies is splintered among 10 parties. Three of them, commanding 44 seats, represent the right

and the far right. Of these, 24 belong to Fujimori´s Fuerza Popular. Parties of the left hold 42 seats, with 37 from Peru Libre, the party of Castillo and Cerron. The remaining 44 seats are held by centrist parties. It is difficult to predict whom they'll support. Some might back the government in exchange for favors for their regions or for themselves. Others might ally with the right-wing opposition, which is expected to ferociously oppose what they view as Castillo's socialist experiments.

Scenario 2: Military Coup

The military could take over. Some retired officers have already appealed to the army to act against a Castillo government. Some of the 44 right-wing congress members might support such a coup. This scenario is also unlikely for now. Perú's institutions are still strong enough to follow a constitutional process.

The military has not been in power since 1980. By then, the armed forces were divided between their own left-wing and right-wing camps. The left had seized power in 1968 in hope of doing many of the things now proposed by Cerron and Castillo. The right took over in 1975 in response to the macroeconomic consequences of leftist policies instituted from 1968.

Between 1990 and 2000, the military supported the elder Fujimori. The army liked his strong, authoritarian leadership at a time of hyperinflation and insurgency. In the latter part of the 20th century, right-wing military coups typically took place when a country entered a political deadlock. Almost invariably, institutions failed, the government stopped functioning, the economy collapsed and violence increased, leading to a military takeover.

Peru has just had an election. A winner has emerged. A military coup — or even a civilian one supported by the military — would not fly. Only if Castillo and congress repeatedly fail to find a way to work together, govern the country and manage the economy, the military would risk an intervention.

Scenario 3: Hegemony Via a New Constitution

Cerron and Castillo could circumvent congress, appeal directly to the people and change the constitution. Such a scenario would give them unbridled power. Peru would emulate the Ecuador of Rafael Correa, who managed to grab absolute power despite lacking a majority in congress by ushering in a new constitution.

Correa came to power in 2007 as part of the so-called Latin American pink tide, a term that refers to the election of left-wing governments in the region. He allied Ecuador with Hugo Chávez's Venezuela and hoped to install a 21st-century style of socialism. Correa boosted agricultural subsidies, increased minimum wage and sought to improve the standard of living by raising spending on social programs, especially health care and education.

Castillo is not as popular as Correa. Peru is highly fragmented. He got under 20% in the first round and has barely squeaked through in the second. A third of the voters want a new constitution, another third support some amendments to improve governance and the remaining third oppose any change. Therefore, the hegemony of the left is possible but improbable.

Scenario 4: Hegemony Through Weakening of Institutions

Cerron and his hardcore comrades could make a grab for power with or without Castillo's support. First, they would appoint loyalists as employees of the state. Friendly prosecutors and judges as well as aligned teachers and generals would infiltrate different arms of the Peruvian state. With the help of loyalists in key positions, the left wing could circumvent congress and bend the constitution. Bolivia, Nicaragua and El Salvador are already experiencing this phenomenon.

Peru has huge mineral reserves and access to some wealth. Left-wing countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia in need of financial support could bolster their ideological counterparts in Peru. Even the likes of Argentina and Surinam could turn to Peru for

help. Peru could emerge as the new version of Chavez's Venezuela. As with the Chavismo experiment, such a scenario would eventually end badly. Peru's previous left-wing experiments have all failed.

Scenario 5: Impasse and Chaos

Castillo and the right-wing members of congress could clash bitterly. The latter are likely to oppose the new government with all the means at their disposal. Peru's right-wing media is likely to create a narrative of scandals.

Peru's present constitution has weaknesses pertaining to governance. It gives the president and congress ample opportunities to act against each other. The president could dissolve congress, which in turn could impeach the president. In fact, a supermajority could impeach the president in a single afternoon. Sadly, such bitter polarization is the most likely scenario. It could unleash chaos in Peru. Governance could fail and the country's long-standing problems would continue to fester.

It is important to note that four of the five scenarios are not in the interest of Peru. Yet such scenarios dominate because its democracy is immature. Voting is compulsory. Those who do not vote are penalized. Yet the country demonstrates that elections and voting by themselves do not lead to a functioning democracy.

Elected representatives have to learn to work together in the public interest. Putting private interest or ideological pursuits over public benefit invariably leads to disaster. Like voters in many other fraught democracies, Peruvians tend to opt for el mal menor, the lesser evil. It is increasingly unclear if such a choice even exists. A fragmented country desperately needs its politicians to end a savage knife fight and work toward a better future.

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The Elusive Importance of Sleep

Jennifer Wider
July 16, 2021

Deficient sleep is linked to a wide range of negative outcomes that affect our physical and mental well-being.

Sleep insufficiency is a universal problem, affecting millions of people each year in every corner of the globe. It is prevalent across all ages, genders, socio-economic groups and ethnicities. Many organizations consider it to be a public health epidemic with weighty economic costs.

The significance of the problem is often overlooked by the general public, with attitudes ranging from indifference to the glorification of sleep deprivation. It isn't uncommon for a medical resident or a new mother to brush off concerns of not getting a good night's rest, as it is equally common for pop culture to glamorize all-nighters. As a result, sleep hygiene is not regularly discussed and often goes under-reported by patients.

Health Consequences

But the health consequences are real and should not be ignored. Deficient sleep is inextricably linked with a wide range of negative outcomes that affect a person's physical and mental well-being and performance. In fact, the National Center for Health Statistics has shown that decreased sleep duration has been associated with seven out of the 15 top causes of mortality across the US. These include cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer, accidents, diabetes, hypertension and septicemia. Clearly, the impact of insufficient sleep has sweeping effects across global societies and constitutes a major public health concern.

The duration of sleep varies among people based on age. According to a state-based study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), fewer than 65% of adults reported the necessary number of hours per night. The survey revealed that over 80 million American adults were sleeping under the recommended seven hours each day.

The same pattern is pervasive among adolescents and young adults, and the consequences can be devastating. These years are especially formative, with the brain and body undergoing remarkable development. Although sleep is essential, research reveals that many teens and young adults get far less of it than their bodies require. As a result, mental health issues, a decline in academic performance, accidents and injuries, poor judgment, risk-taking and obesity are rampant among this demographic.

It's no coincidence that long-term sleep deprivation has been historically used as a form of torture, resulting in both negative physical and mental side effects. While chronic sleep insufficiency does not equate with institutionalized torture, it does result in a significant burden to public health, the labor force and academic performance.

Making Change

This begs the question: What are we doing as a global society to address this widespread and pervasive public health epidemic? How can changes in individual behavior, actions by employers and public policy measures be implemented in a meaningful way to make long-term, substantial change?

In the workplace, lack of sleep can put employees and other people at risk, especially if, for example, the duties include patient care, transportation or law enforcement. Sleep hygiene needs to be an integral part of every workplace program. Employers can utilize the CDC's Workplace Health Resource Center, which contains education, training and assessment tools, in addition to strategies to modify the workplace to increase alertness, incorporate dedicated breaks and spot warning signs of fatigue and exhaustion.

According to statistics from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, up to two-thirds of patients have not discussed their issues around sleep with their doctors, while a significant percentage of health care providers fail to ask. Sleep habits should be routinely discussed at yearly physicals and histories, and patients should be given ample tools to manage sleep difficulties. These must include more than just a prescription.

Colleges and universities should take measures to curtail the unnecessary glamorization of sleep deprivation. Students largely ignore sleep requirements as academic, social and extra-curricular pressures get in the way. Students of all ages are spending an inordinate amount of time on social media, and a study from the National Sleep Foundation revealed that nighttime social media use negatively correlates with a good night's sleep.

Schools and universities alike need to address these concerns that are so pervasive on school grounds across the globe. The inclusion of sleep education in health classes should be universal, as should education materials that include guidelines as to when to turn off electronic devices before bed.

The last 16 months have resulted in global upheaval, leaving policymakers struggling to catch their breath. The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing quarantine forced many of us to work from home. In doing so, it inadvertently helped many to reestablish a work-life balance that was off-kilter for a very long time. As we reexamine our world and our lives, a better balance for our collective health must include the prioritization of sleep.

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It's Time to Make India's Education Good Enough for All

Rhea Bhasin
July 20, 2021

If the government fails to reform the education system, India will become an even more unequal and divided nation than it is today.

The COVID-19 pandemic has detrimentally impacted education systems worldwide. Of the 1.2 billion children that the coronavirus has thrown out of classrooms, at least one-third have no access to remote learning and hence no access to education. The UN estimates that 24 million children will not return to school due to the fallout from the pandemic. Solving the education crisis needs to be a priority for governments.

This issue is of particular significance in India, where the pandemic has steeply, and perhaps irreversibly, increased education inequality. Over 1.5 million schools have closed down, depriving 6 million children of basic education. The government has been preoccupied with issues such as the pandemic, the migrant crisis, the farmer protests and state elections. It has failed to focus on education.

Exacerbated Negatives

Even as capitalist a country as the United States provides its populace with free public schooling. In contrast, a supposedly socialist India is unable to educate its children. India, currently in its youth-bulge phase, has 600 million citizens under the age of 25. The education of these young people can and should be India's catalyst for economic, social and political growth.

The socioeconomic benefits of education outweigh its costs. For example, the pervasiveness of child marriage among girls with no education is 30.8% versus 2.4% for girls who have received higher education. Bearing in mind the fact that more than one out of four Indian child brides become teenage mothers, providing girls with education could help solve the problem of child marriage, which would subsequently combat teenage pregnancy and high infant mortality rates. Education could also reduce the rampancy of child labor while also reducing rates of preventable diseases.

Unfortunately, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE) and India's new education policy have no provision for dealing with the current crisis. Its Constitution declares India to be a "sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic." Many politicians claim to be socialists. Yet the pandemic has proven that socialism is merely an empty slogan in India. Health and education are highly privatized. Citizens have to pay for basic treatments and for half-decent schools.

The education system had many issues long before COVID-19 made matters worse. The pandemic has only exacerbated the negatives. The RTE had noble intentions but mixed results. India needs a modern education system that expands both the minds of the young and the arc of their opportunities. The pandemic has been terrible for students, but it provides a great opportunity for reform. It remains to be seen if the government will grasp the opportunity.

Legislating Education

Under the current legislation, both the central government in Delhi and the state governments individually can pass laws concerning education. Generally, schools are administered by the state departments of education, while the central government dictates overall guidelines and policy. The Ministry of Human Resource Development oversees the education and literacy of the entire country, conducted in three types of schools: private unaided, private aided, and government-funded and government-run public schools. According to data from the Indian Education Ministry, 75% of all schools are government-owned, responsible for the education

of approximately 65% of all school students, or 113 million, across 20 states.

According to Oxfam India, 80% of students in government schools have received no education since the pandemic began. Furthermore, despite the government broadcasting certain classes on television, many students have been unable to access them because they lack basic infrastructure at home. Over 200 million Indians do not own a television, phone or radio. Additionally, this method of teaching and learning is not interactive, with students finding it difficult to grasp the material.

While poor government schools remain closed, private schools have adapted to virtual learning. However, only 23% of all Indian households have access to a computer. This figure drops to only 4% among the rural population. Rural areas in particular are struggling with the fallout from the pandemic such as the migrant crisis and rampant unemployment, so education ranks low on local governments' priority lists.

To make matters worse, the closing of schools in early 2020 translated to the effective cancellation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme that provided 116 million schoolchildren with hot meals. The central government has drafted guidelines for states and union territories to supply cooked meals or food-security allowances to schoolchildren. However, it is clear that various municipalities have failed to implement these guidelines. For instance, Bihar took 44.6 million tons of grains from the central government in 2019 to feed schoolchildren; in 2020, this figure dropped to zero. Children are not only missing out on education but also on nutrients. This is reversing years of progress that India had made in combating malnutrition. It is well known that malnutrition hinders intellectual development and can lead to poor academic performance, disease and even death. Children in poor families now face an increased risk of malnutrition as the gap between them and their more prosperous counterparts increases by the day.

But even children from more affluent families are struggling to cope with online learning. Depression and anxiety are on the rise. In India, board examinations — the final set of tests for students graduating from high school — have been canceled. This has left millions of students worrying about their future.

Misguided Provisions
One of the key problems with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act is that it is poorly drafted. It is unclear and repetitive. According to the District Information System of Education, as of 2016, only 13% of all Indian schools achieved compliance with RTE norms. As a national act, the RTE establishes certain parameters, procedures and standards for both private and public schools to follow. It places a primary emphasis on the idea of education for all by dictating that every child between the ages of six and 14 must be eligible to receive free education. However, Indian children are still struggling to obtain the education promised to them.

The most adversely affected are the children living in rural areas who make up 73% of Indian youth. About 90% of the facilities in these districts are government-run public schools that struggle with untrained teachers and poor infrastructure, failing to meet the standards set by the RTE. Schools that do not follow these standards are forced to shut down. In many cases, these schools are the only option available.

According to the India School Closure Report published by Centre for Civil Society in India, between April 2015 to March 2018, 2,469 schools were closed in 14 states due to RTE non-compliance, while 4,482 were threatened with closure and a further 13,546 were served closure notices. In line with Luis Miranda's analysis for Forbes India, if we assume an average of 200 students per institution in Punjab, the closure of 1,170 schools there as of August 2015 amounted to 234,000 students being unable to attend a school of their choice or to receive an education at all in just one state.

For several states, data on the extent of school closures remain missing. As of 2016, total enrolment in public schools was only 1% higher for elementary schools and 2% higher for secondary schools compared to 2000. Data from 2016 reveal that enrolment decreased in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal.

The RTE has misguided provisions that may be well-meaning but are highly damaging. The act mandates a 25% quota to be reserved at the entry-level of educational institutions for students from economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups. The law states that the central government must reimburse schools for the costs incurred due to the quota by either paying schools' per-child expenses or the fees charged, whichever is lower.

However, this provision has been implemented unevenly. In 2013-14, Madhya Pradesh filled 88.2% of the 25% quota and Rajasthan filled 69.3%, while states like Uttar Pradesh managed only 3.62% and Andhra Pradesh just 0.21%. Furthermore, corruption under the quota provision is also rampant. Parents often issue fraudulent income certificates to qualify under the quota, and schools do not oppose bribery as they favor students from affluent families. When wealthy private schools try to integrate economically weaker students, existing students often withdraw their admission due to a broad physical, infrastructural and cultural chasm between the classes. In India, there is still a stigma around studying with someone from a vastly differing economic background.

Adding Insult to Injury
There is another problem with the quota system for economically underprivileged children. The central government is supposed to reimburse state governments who fund schools for filling their quota. Unfortunately, there is no methodology for this. The central government decides on an ad hoc basis what any state is supposed to get. For example, in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, expenditure per child per year is 3,064 rupees, or approximately $41. However, the central government gives this state of 236 million people only 450 rupees, or around $6, for every poor child. Naturally, schools have little incentive to fill their quota for economically underprivileged children, meaning that a mere 3.62% of the seats are filled.

More significantly, the RTE has failed to address the fundamental issue of the lack of quality in Indian education. According to the 2018 "Annual Status of Education Report," 55% of fifth graders in public schools could not read a second-grade textbook. The quality of teachers tends to be poor. Their pedagogies are almost invariably outdated. Teachers often lack motivation and training. In 2015-16, 512,000 teachers — or one in six — in elementary government schools were untrained.

One nationwide survey revealed a teacher absentee rate of 23.6% in rural areas. In states like Uttar Pradesh, teachers are hired by paying bribes. Often, they are barely literate. When teachers are qualified, they often run private coaching businesses instead of teaching in the schools.

To add insult to injury, untrained teachers use curricula that have little relevance to the lives of poor schoolchildren. They champion rote-based learning and, more often than not, destroy creativity. Many schools lack proper buildings, decent roofs and proper toilet facilities, especially for girls. Blackboards, basic learning aids and even chalk can run short. In 2018-19, only 28% of all government schools had computers and only 12% had an internet connection. Despite the government campaigning for a digital India, it has done little to provide computers and internet connectivity to schools across the country.

Time for Reform
As of 2020, India spent just 3.1% of its GDP on education. Importantly, every national policy since 1968 has recommended a figure of 6%. Other developing countries such as South Africa and Brazil spend 6.5% and 6.3% respectively.

The government of India could start with emulating its BRICS counterparts in increasing the amount it spends on rearing the next generation.

Even the little amount India spends on education often does not reach schoolchildren, the intended beneficiaries of the system. Like all aspects of Indian life, corruption causes much harm to the most vulnerable of the country's citizens. The upper and middle classes almost invariably send their children to private schools, as do officials in charge of drafting India's education policy. It is only the children of the poor who end up in government education, with parents having little knowledge or influence to demand either accountability or quality.

Officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) preside over all ministries in India from finance and industry to culture and education. These IAS officers have little if any experience in education. These officers often spend their time trying to get postings to departments with more power and greater opportunities for corruption. They have little incentive to reform the broken system either at the level of the state or national government. Politicians see little gain from focusing on education either. They are always too busy with the next election.

India's citizens have to demand better use of their taxpayer money. The best use of that money in the long term is investment in education, not only in as funding but also good policymaking. Politicians must entrust this policy to educationists, not IAS officers. In the past, India's great institutions were set up by the likes of Rabindranath Tagore, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, not faceless bureaucrats.

India needs educational reform now more than ever. The pandemic has been devastating for hundreds of millions of students. If the government fails to act now, India will become an even more unequal and divided nation than it is today. Without high-quality mass education, the country will never have the skill or the knowledge base to be a truly dynamic economy.

India's government schools need to be good enough for the children of top politicians, not just for its poor downtrodden masses.

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The Hazaras of Afghanistan Face a Threat to Survival

Naweed Jafari
July 31, 2021

If Hazaras are to remain in Afghanistan, a political solution is required.

September 11, 2001, is internationally recognized as a date associated with terrorism and mass murder by al-Qaeda militants based in a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Yet the current situation in the country means that September 11, 2021, could see another tragedy: the ethnic cleansing of the Hazara minority. In April, President Joe Biden announced that US forces, and NATO troops along with them, will depart from Afghanistan after 20 years of conflict. This is despite the absence of a peace treaty between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents.

Unconstrained by the presence of foreign forces or the binding conditions of a peace agreement, Afghan civilians will be vulnerable to attacks by the Taliban and other terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Khurasan Province (IS-KP). Yet if history and the current situation are indicators, the Hazaras are at the greatest risk.

The Hazara of Afghanistan
Before the 19th century, Shia Hazaras were the largest minority in Afghanistan, making up 67% of the population. Between 1890 and 1893,

Pashtun Sunni leader Amir Abdur Rahman Khan declared jihad upon Hazaras, who resisted by declaring jihad against the ruling forces. Although their fighting was fierce, over half the Hazara population was killed or forced into exile, their lands confiscated and thousands sold via slave markets that remained active until 1920. Women were coerced into marriage with Pashtun men, a practice intended to destroy the cultural integrity and identity of Hazaras.

This period has been described as the "most significant example of genocide in the modern history of Afghanistan." The historic significance of Khan's jihad not only galvanized Pashtun and other Afghan tribes against the Hazaras, but it institutionalized their relegated status within Afghan society to an inferior position. This continued until the invasion of US and NATO forces in 2001.

Today, Hazaras make up around 20% of Afghanistan's 38-million population. Some, such as international relations scholar Niamatullah Ibrahimi, put this figure at 25%. Yet regardless of how many remain, one thing is clear: The Hazaras are amongst the most discriminated against and persecuted people in the world. As such, they form one of the largest groups of asylum seekers and refugees.

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 precipitated the largest exodus of Hazaras since 1890. After 10 years of war, the Soviets withdrew. A vacuum ensued that led to various factions vying for power. The Taliban seized control and ruled the country from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban soon launched another era of persecution of Hazaras. Two years after taking control of the Afghan capital, Kabul, the Taliban slaughtered 2,000 Hazaras in Mazar-e-Sharif. An estimated 15,000 Hazaras lost their lives under the Taliban regime. The US-led invasion removed the Taliban from power and resulted in less violence against the Hazaras. Yet the community continued to be deemed an inferior group in Afghanistan. Historically, Hazaras were relegated to menial labor.

Despite the legacy of persecution, marginalization and exclusion from the highest levels of government, Hazaras have achieved important gains in the fields of education and culture since 2001. The Hazaras advocate and practice democratic participation, universal education and tolerance for religious and ethnic pluralism. These values are indispensable for the creation and maintenance of a healthy civil society. Yet Hazaras are anathema to the Taliban and IS-KP.

Targeting the Hazara
With the US departure imminent and the return of the Taliban inevitable, the identity, values and achievements of the Hazara people make them a primary target. The formula was repeated throughout the 20th century: An ideologically intolerant group obtains political power and accentuates salient differences of a minority. The dominant group discriminates against minorities, marginalizes them to the lowest caste in society and then systematically eliminates them.

The pattern of violence often appears to the outside world as random. But to the Hazaras, the violence is systematic. Due to their religious and ethnic identity, passion for education and procreation, the minority community has been targeted for ethnic cleansing.

Since December 6, 2011, when thousands of Hazaras were attacked in Kabul during the holy day of Ashura, the violence has resembled a genocidal character. The bombings, which killed 70 in Kabul and four in Mazar-e-Sharif, were claimed to be conducted by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Lei) a Pakistan-based group strongly affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In May of this year, triple bombings left nearly 100 dead, 85 of whom were students at Syed-Al-Shuhada high school, which is predominantly attended by teenage girls. Last year, a maternity ward of a hospital operated by Médecins Sans Frontières was attacked. Twenty-four people died, including 16 mothers and two children. In the same year, 40 students were killed at the Kawsar Danish tutoring center.

Currently, the Taliban control more than half of Afghanistan's territory. This includes 17 out of 19 districts in Herat's province, which is densely populated by Hazaras. With repeated attacks against Hazaras, it is clear that ethnic cleansing is taking place in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have applied this formula before and are deliberately using it again with renewed expectation for its all-out assault on Afghanistan after the US departs. Vulnerable groups in the country are already arming themselves and realigning their relationship with the Taliban. Yet not all of these groups support or embrace the Taliban. Rather, they are only doing so out of political necessity and survival. In other words, act supportively of the Taliban or die.

The litmus test of loyalty will be measured by the degree to which other ethnic groups hold the Hazaras in contempt and advance the Taliban's agenda against them. The phenomenon is called a "cascade," wherein acts of violence against a marginalized group establishes one's legitimacy in the eyes of the dominant group.

What Can Be Done?
The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has called for the UN to appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate the murder of Hazara school children and attacks on Shia worshippers. The International Criminal Court has authorized the chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, to investigate war crimes committed by all responsible parties, including the Taliban.

Yet more needs to be done. The international community should acknowledge the emerging signs that genocide is underway against the Hazaras and will only escalate. Global powers, such as the United States, must call for the protection of the most vulnerable people. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should place Hazara refugees on the high-priority list for asylum.

In response to the Taliban's territorial gains, several mujahedeen commanders, including Hazara leader Mohammed Mohaqiq, have organized local civilian forces whose presence has strengthened and inspired government troops. In the recent past, the government armed Hazara civilians, who successfully defended mosques and sacred celebrations from Taliban attacks. Kabul must consider this strategy again.

Yet local civilian forces, the Afghan army and international troops alone will never bring peace, security and stability to Afghanistan. If Hazaras are to remain in the country with any expectation of a recognizable civil existence, a political solution is required. But a settlement without involving Pakistan, China, Iran and the US is doomed to fail.

Pakistan continues to provide safe harbor and assistance to the Afghanistan-based Taliban. China, a key ally of Islamabad, is the only global power with credible influence over the Pakistanis. Iran now supports the Taliban. It does so in order to counter the emergence of an anti-Iranian Islamic state in Afghanistan. The long-term interest of the United States is to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a training ground for anti-Western terrorists. The presence of all these parties, particularly the Iranians and Americans, is required at the negotiating table.

International leadership capable of identifying and appealing to these four powers, whose current relationship is shaped more by enmity than commonality, has yet to emerge. The situation on the ground requires immediate remedies specifically addressed to the threats posed to the Hazaras. It is time to take notice.

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