

Fair Observer

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A Young American Woman Loses Faith After Dobbs Ruling

Rachel Logue

November 06, 2022

Following the US Supreme Court's reversal of the landmark Roe v Wade case, women throughout the nation will not have the same reproductive rights as they have for the past half-century. The ramifications of this decision could be wide-ranging going forward.

After a full day at school, I pull out my phone and open Instagram as I would on any other weekday evening. But instead of the smiling faces of my friends, a post in The New York Times, "Breaking: Leaked Supreme Court Draft Would Overturn Roe v. Wade" stares straight back at me. My heart drops, as I reread the headline. An overwhelming sense of hopelessness overtakes me. What's going to happen now?

Although there wasn't an act the US Congress made to guarantee abortion rights, state legislatures for 50 years couldn't enforce laws when it came to denying reproductive health access. The court decided in 1973 that a woman's right to an abortion was protected by the right to privacy, the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. However, upon its reversal, that federal constitutional right no longer exists.

This fall, I will be a freshman at Emory University, located in Atlanta, Georgia. Like many other southern states in the United States, Georgia has passed legislation prohibiting a woman's right to

an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy. Before Roe v. Wade was overturned, this bill could not be enforced. But through the Dobbs ruling this past June, the Supreme Court is giving states the right to decide. Women are no longer protected. Young female students like me will still face the repercussions of this devastating ruling, regardless of the university's political leanings. However, while I can travel and gain access to reproductive care, women in lower socioeconomic backgrounds living in cities like Atlanta will be disproportionately impacted by the court's decision.

The Dobbs ruling shattered my once idealistic, naive view of the United States' protection of women. Growing up in Connecticut, a progressive state in the northeast, I took for granted that women of all demographics had the freedom to choose what to do with their bodies. In high school, I was surrounded by teachers and classmates who shared the common belief that it was a right for a woman to have equitable reproductive healthcare. As a junior, I took an American Studies course where we discussed topics related to the oppression of women. I was disgusted by how commercials in the 1970s subjugated women, reducing them to the confines of the household. When it came to dealing with the threats of Roe v. Wade being overturned, I denied the possibility of such an outcome. While the right to an abortion was and is a polarizing, controversial issue, I never thought that the country would revert to a place where women are prohibited to decide their future.

Looking to the future

Although it can be hard to find hope at a time when women are being marginalized, we are living

in a different world than half a century ago. There used to be underground societies where women were able to get abortions and avoid the law. Now in 2022, with the help of technological advancements in medicine, there are safer ways for women to get reproductive care. For instance, since the overturning of Roe, there has been a huge surge in the use of two drugs called misoprostol and mifepristone, often referred to as the “abortion pills.” This medication has been approved by the FDA for 20 years, making it a proven alternative for women. According to the New York Times, medication abortion is less expensive and less invasive while providing more privacy than surgical abortions. Women can even receive these pills by mail after an in-person or initial virtual consultation with a doctor. Another advantage of this medication is that it’s difficult for the state to track and monitor. There is comfort in knowing that innovations such as these exist. Even though I foresee legal challenges in southern conservative states, I hope there continue to be solutions for women to get the support they need and deserve.

If I had known the outcome of the Dobbs ruling when I was applying to college last year, I would have reconsidered attending a school in the south. Many of my friends expressed a preference for staying in the northeast for their higher education, both when talking in class or during extracurriculars. One of my former classmates, who is in the process of applying to college, told me that she is only looking at universities where abortion rights are protected. I believe many young women who grew up in the north will apply to institutions in states that protect women's reproductive rights over those that do not. As I look to the future, I have faith that northern policymakers and scientists around the nation will

come together to protect vulnerable populations of women in need of proper reproductive healthcare. At this point in our country’s history, millions of women's lives are on the line. It is up to us, the people, to be the change we want to see.

***Rachel Logue** grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut. She is a first-year student at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Rachel is looking to pursue a degree in human health and psychology. She served as the chairwoman of the mental health policy committee for a local state representative candidate in the summer of 2020 and worked to make services more accessible to struggling students. Rachel is currently conducting a cross-sectional study to evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical students’ emotional well-being and ability to learn in India.

Revolution Erupted in Iran Because of Mohammad Reza Shah

Mehdi Alavi, Atul Singh
November 08, 2022

Outside Iran, many believe Mohammad Reza Shah was a modernizer. The reality could not be more different. Like his father, Mohammad Reza Shah was an egomaniacal lackey of the British and Americans who oppressed his people, stole from the exchequer and betrayed his country.

In our previous piece, we examined how Reza Shah destroyed Iran. In this piece, we put his son Mohammad Reza Shah under the microscope. We do so because, to understand the Iran of 2022, we have to make sense of its tortured past.

Currently, Iran is ruled by mullahs. Iran's theocratic regime is disliked, if not despised, by the US and its allies. Many, including prominent Iranians, blame the mullahs for all of Iran's ills. However, few are aware of an inconvenient truth. It was the British who paved the path to power for the mullahs with the Americans constructing the mile.

Over the years, the mullahs have faced many protests. In the current wave, protesters have attacked government officials such as the police, ambulance attendants and bank officials. They have also targeted mosques, clerics and religious people. Many protesters chant "marq bar dictaator," a phrase that literally translates as "death to the dictator." Some of them have a soft spot for Mohammad Reza Shah whom we will subsequently refer to as the Shah.

Sadly, the Shah so beloved by some Iranians was an oppressive dictator. His secret police SAVAK kept an eye on the people. Hence, a famous proverb was born: divar mush dare, musham gush dare — the wall has a mouse, the mouse has ears. Under the Shah, Iran was a surveillance state much like the Soviet Union and East Germany. If you said the wrong thing to the wrong people, SAVAK would throw you into prisons like Evin and Qasr. You also faced the risk of torture and murder.

After all, the US had taught SAVAK the tricks of the trade.

Young women who wish for a return to the halcyon days of absolute monarchical rule do not know that the Shah was deeply sexist. He believed that women were less intelligent than men. In his interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, the Shah remarked, "You may be equal in the eyes of the law, but not, I beg your pardon for saying so, in ability." Hence, it is unsurprising that the Shah objectified women and saw them purely through the lens of sexual pleasure.

A Classic Comprador

When the Portuguese pioneered European colonization of the colored peoples, a term came into being. A comprador or compradore came to signify a "person who acts as an agent for foreign organizations engaged in investment, trade, or economic or political exploitation." The Shah was a comprador who ruled Iran first as a British vassal and then as an American one.

The circumstances of the Shah's accession to the throne are most instructive. The British deposed Reza Shah for cozying up with the Germans in 1941. After sending the father packing, they placed the weak, callow 22-year-old son on the throne. They chose the young Shah precisely because they were convinced that he would do their bidding.

The Shah proved to be a good pick. The British and the Soviets occupied Iran. The British used Iran's north-south railroad to supply the Soviets against Germany. In 1942, both promised that they would withdraw their forces within six months of the end of the war. This promise was intended to appease Iranian nationalists. In 1943, American

troops arrived in Iran too. When the war ended, the Soviets troops failed to leave the country as per their promise. Only American pressure made them leave by May 1946. Iranians were appreciative of American commitment to the integrity of Iran and its right to self-determination.

Foreign occupation fuelled national pride and democratic discourse in Iran. Once foreign troops left, this continued. While foreign troops left, foreign influence did not stop. The British continued to extract and export oil from Iran for a pittance. They treated Iran as a de facto colony and the Shah acted as their comprador.

Naturally, dissent emerged. Mohammad Mosaddegh emerged as the key leader. Reza Shah had put him under house arrest. Once the bloodthirsty ruler was deposed in 1941, Mosaddegh returned to public life and was elected to parliament. Protests in 1949 against fake elections led to the founding of Jebhe Melli, which literally translates as National Front. As its leader, Mosaddegh promised to end the British control of Iran's oil industry. He demanded that the British share profits equally with Iran. At the time, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) was paying more money to Britain as taxes than to Iran as a share of the proceeds.

The British opposed Mosaddegh tooth and nail. They refused to share profits equally with the Iranians, claiming it would be a breach of contract. The very British idea of duress invalidating a contract did not apply to Iran. The Iranians had signed a deal that gave them 17.5% of AIOC's profits when the British held a gun to their head. The AIOC cooked its books and Iran never really got the promised 17.5% either.

In late December 1950, the American-owned Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) agreed to share profits with Saudi Arabia on a 50-50 basis. The British rejected the idea of any similar agreement for AIOC with Iran. This left the Iranian parliament with no choice but to pass a bill nationalizing the oil industry in March 1951. The Shah did not sign the bill. Mosaddegh was elected prime minister in April and the Shah was now forced to sign the nationalization bill.

The British responded by manipulating the Americans to conduct a military coup in 1953. The Cold War was on and the Americans were turning paranoid about communism. Nationalization allowed the British to paint Mosaddegh as a potential Soviet ally. Like a wily old uncle manipulating a sinewy nephew, the British got the Americans to do their dirty work for them. Mosaddegh was packed off to prison and the Shah emerged as an absolute ruler just like his father.

Until the 1953 coup, the Shah had one master: the British. From now on, he had two masters: the British and the US. As the American star rose, they came to dominate Iran. The British debacle in the 1956 Suez Crisis strengthened the American hand. As part of the Cold War, the US began beefing up the Shah's regime. Washington provided the regime with military advisers, intelligence agents, and arms and ammunition worth millions of dollars. The Iranian taxpayer paid for such help most generously. American oil companies got a share of the Iranian oil pie.

The Shah's Oppressive Police State

After 1953, life in Iran deteriorated. For Washington, the Shah was a key Cold War ally. Iran was a frontline state against the Soviet Union.

So, in 1957, CIA and FBI helped the Shah's regime to set up the dreaded Sazman-e Etelaat Va Amniat Keshvar (SAVAK), a secret police to cow his people into submission. The US and, later, Israel coached Iranian military, police and intelligence officials in the arts of surveillance, coercion and torture.

By 1960, the Shah had a vise-like grip on the country. He had eliminated, imprisoned, and silenced the opposition. Nobody dared to protest. SAVAK routinely scrutinized students, civil service employees and industrial workers. It censored and controlled all forms of media and professional associations. SAVAK also monitored Iranian communities abroad. It had over 5,000 full-time employees and many part-time agents around the world. SAVAK used all forms of torture necessary to extract to extract information and punish dissenters. Nobody felt safe in Iran.

Such was the brutality of SAVAK that American public opinion began to turn. The US put pressure on the Shah to reform. In 1963, the Shah announced a plebiscite for an ambitious program of social, political and economic reform that has come to be known as the White Revolution. The most important element of this revolution was land reform. He broke down large land holdings to give away land to poor cultivators. In theory, this sounds like a good egalitarian measure. In reality, it led to disaster.

Poor cultivators did not have money to run their small farms. The government gave them land but did not give them farming implements, seeds, fertilizers, irrigation and funds. Unsurprisingly, they abandoned their farms to become landless laborers in cities, particularly Tehran. The urban

population exploded and, in due course, so did discontent.

It was in 1963 that the then relatively obscure Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini spoke out against the White Revolution. Khomeini was teaching at the prestigious Fayziyyeh Madrasah in Qom. He was already a prominent ayatollah. The Shah arrested Khomeini and killed many students at Fayziyyeh. Luckily for Khomeini, the Shah did not kill him or confine him to an Iranian prison. In 1964, Khomeini publicly criticized the Shah for awarding the US capitulation and called him a lackey of US and Israel. The Shah first arrested Khomeini but, after 19 days in Qasr and a another few days in a military base, packed off the ayatollah into exile who ended up living in Turkey, Iraq, and, eventually, France.

Extravagant Opulence by Foreign Lackey

When the Shah was not oppressing his people, torturing dissidents or locking up his opponents, he was lavishly blowing up Iranian tax money on obscenely extravagant events. In 1967, the Shah crowned himself in an occasion that still lives on in Iranian memory. This American lackey assumed the resonant but meaningless title, "His Imperial Majesty The Shāhanshāh of Iran," and wore a crown that was studded with a mere 3,380 diamonds. He gave his wife Farah the title, "the Empress of Iran," an unprecedented act in Iranian 2,500-year history.

3510999 Coronation of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran, 1967 (photo); (add.info.: The coronation ceremony of the last Persian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Teheran, 23rd October 1967); Mondadori Portfolio/Archivio Angelo Cozzi/Angelo Cozzi.

In most monarchies, coronation is held soon after the king or queen ascends to the throne, as the coronation of Charles II in the UK demonstrates. In the case of Iran, the coronation ceremony was a reflection of the Shah's perverted narcissism. He wanted the world to see him as a secular reformer, a great modernizer, a savior of an ancient civilization, the resuscitator of ancient Persia and a historic emperor beloved by his people. Four years later, he threw what has come to be known as "the world's greatest party" to celebrate 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy.

In 1971, the Shah held this party in the ancient ruins of Persepolis, which now lies in the middle of a desert. An airport, a highway and an entire tent city were built for the occasion. This "billion-dollar party" has come to be known as "the Devil's Feast." As his people toiled in poverty, the Shah and his foreign guests were quaffing the fanciest of champagnes and gorging on caviar.

Many kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers were impressed by this ostentatious desert party. However, canny observers were not entirely convinced. The most memorable of these was US diplomat George Ball who attended this party and saw the spectacle of the crowning of the "Sun of the Aryans." His words sum up this 1971 incongruous big bash:

"What an absurd, bathetic spectacle! The son of a colonel in a Persian Cossack regiment play-acting as the emperor of a country with an average per capita income of \$250 per year, proclaiming his achievements in modernizing his nation while accoutred in the raiment and symbols of ancient despotism."

While the Shah was good at throwing lavish parties, he was not as savvy at retaining Iranian territory. Bahrain had been overwhelmingly Shia and was under Iranian suzerainty before the British took over. The British were supposed to return this island to Iran. Instead, the British pressured the Shah to let Bahrain become an independent state in 1970. They had installed a comprador Wahhabi Sunni dynasty just as they had installed the Pahlavis in Iran. This Wahhabi dynasty still rules over Bahraini Shias with an iron hand.

While the Shah projected himself as a mighty emperor, in reality, he was the gendarme of the Persian Gulf for Uncle Sam. The US relied on Iran as its leading security partner in the Gulf. Iranian oil revenues were spent to protect American interests in the region. The Shah also supported the US in the Vietnam War.

A Sordid and Dissolute Despot

Today, many Iranians see the Shah as a liberator of women. During his time, glamorous women in elegant dresses sashayed down his red carpets. This is in stark contrast to the current regime of mullahs that imposes draconian dress codes on women. The nostalgia for the more permissive pre-1979 era obscures the fact that the Shah did not really see women as equals. He made his wife regent but did not think she would be able to rule as well as him.

The Shah led a famously dissolute life, visiting nightclubs across Europe and chasing beautiful actresses. One of them was Grace Kelly who became the Princess Grace of Monaco in 1956. The Shah spent millions on Kelly. He gifted her "three pieces of Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry: a gold birdcage housing a diamond and sapphire

bird, all fashioned into a perfect pin; a gold vanity case with a clasp set with thirty-two diamonds; and a gold bracelet with an intricate pearl and diamond face.” He gifted others ancient jewelry from the treasury. Tragically, the poor, toiling Iranian taxpayers funded this libertine lifestyle. They also paid for the Shah’s gambling addiction. This magnificent emperor often lost about 50 million tomans (\$42 million) in a single night as peasants went hungry in his homeland.

More importantly, the Shah was the Harvey Weinstein of his day. In fact, he was much worse than Weinstein. Not only pimps but also government officials were supposed to procure beautiful women for the Shah. Some of these women were underaged. The Shah was a serial sexual offender who preyed on vulnerable women and got away with it.

Given the Shah's lack of loyalty to his nation, his excessive ostentation, brutal oppression and moral turpitude, a revolution was inevitable. Monarchs cannot eat cakes forever when their people struggle for bread. Even though SAVAK had imprisoned, tortured or killed opposition leaders like Mosaddegh, the Iranian people were seething in rage against their "Playboy Shah." Iranians revolted in 1979, exactly 190 years after the 1789 French Revolution. Once the dust settled, the mullahs led by Khomeini took charge.

Today, the Shah’s eldest son Reza lives in the US and continues the family tradition. Reza dreams of the restoration of the Pahlavi dynasty and a return to good times for his family. He has been financed not only by the CIA but also the Saudis. Like his grandfather and father, Reza is also a lackey. The apple has not fallen far from the tree.

Today, people are out on the streets protesting against the mullahs who run a theological state. Most of them are very young with some barely 15. Some of them are vulnerable to myths about a glorious past and look favorably upon the Shah. Even in 2022, there are Iranians who glorify and glamorize the Shah. They must remember that he was a corrupt tyrant who stole from his people, gave territories away, helped foreigners destroy Iranian democracy, killed innocents and sexually abused innumerable women. The Shah belongs to the dustbin of history. Iran’s future has to be about liberty, equality, human rights, freedom and democracy.

[The authors corrected and updated this article on November 9, 2022.]

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Totalitarianism Now Presents an Unprecedented Global Threat

Gary Grappo

November 12, 2022

Totalitarianism is on the rise again and democracies are distracted. The gathering of all nations together to staunch the advance of aggressive totalitarianism is necessary and urgent.

I am not a pessimistic person usually. My personal inclination and more than two and half decades as a diplomat have taught me the importance and value of remaining optimistic. Optimism for a diplomat is as essential as courage for a soldier. An effective diplomat is confident that persistent and effective diplomacy can solve a great many problems between and among nations.

But my usual optimism is being sorely tested these days. One glance at international headlines is enough to send anyone into extended binge-watching of online films or some other manner of escapism. At some point, though, one cannot ignore the dark clouds on the horizon, or in some cases directly overhead.

It's easy to compare the foreboding circumstances of today's world with those preceding World Wars I and World War II. Indeed, there are some real similarities: headstrong dictators bent on conquest, tense regional rivalries, distracted democracies beset by internal problems or economic challenges, and restless publics stirred by extremists of all manner. But 2022 presents its own unique

conditions that make it very different from the years preceding previous global conflicts. The most obvious looms menacingly over the entire planet: nuclear weapons. Another is the already present danger of climate change and the inescapable need for nations to work together in addressing it, especially the major powers. So, no, today's crises are not like the previous world wars. The stakes are much higher.

Rising of Totalitarians, Distracted Democracies

The closing of the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in which Xi Jinping effectively made himself dictator for life of the world's most populous country and second largest economy, was at once predictable and ominous. Xi made clear that he isn't backing off. China's aggressive and belligerent behavior will continue. Having named sycophants to sit with him on the party's politburo and its standing committee ensures that he will hear no opposition, no alternative ideas and no dissent to his diktat. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has now moved decidedly from authoritarian to totalitarian government. That is not only dangerous for the people of China but also for the rest of the world as PRC's military forces gear up for a potential conflict over Taiwan.

Juxtaposed against that looming threat is China's "no-limits" partnership with President Vladimir Putin's Russia. Putin, another autocrat seized with blindly conceived grand ambitions, has already laid his cards on the table, or, to be more accurate, on Ukraine. Granted Xi's commitment to him was made before Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, but China has yet to back away from its Russian relationship. This is despite the fact that the war in Ukraine has largely been a disaster for Putin. In

fact, Putin's setbacks might have turned Russia into a veritable vassal state of China. Arguably, this is good for Xi (maybe) and bad for Putin. Despite this situation not being good for Russia, what are Putin's options?

Next on the totalitarian hit parade is the Islamic Republic of Iran, which maintains very good relations with the aforementioned autocrats. Its ruling theocracy governs with comparable iron-fisted policies and a heavy dose of neolithic ideology. As hundreds of thousands throughout Iran take to the streets again at considerable risk of arrest, torture and even death, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei responds with pearls of medieval wisdom: "If we want to prevent our society from being plunged into corruption and turmoil, we should keep women in hijab."

Protesters show no signs of backing down. So, naturally, the Iranian government needs a distraction. The mullahs blame America. It is the Islamist Republic's timeless trope, ignored by the vast majority of Iranians for its sheer baselessness. Despite public discontent, Tehran has thrown its lot with fellow autocrat Putin in his unjust war against Ukraine. Iran has joined Russia in attacking the people of Ukraine by sending drones, missiles, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps operators and trainers for Russian troops.

Protesters show no signs of backing down. So, naturally, the Iranian government needs a distraction. It has joined Russia in attacking the people of Ukraine by sending drones, missiles and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps operators and trainers for Putin's troops. By throwing in its lot with Russia in a brutal and illegal war against Ukraine, Iran reveals the single-minded obtuseness of Khamenei and the desperation of Putin. Such is

the wont of dictators who do what they want. They need not listen to their citizenry and even foreclose the possibility of doing so.

Further down the list of the planet's wretched leaders, one cannot ignore the head of the model pariah state, North Korea. One would be hard pressed to identify a single policy or manner of behavior that is not repugnant and anathema to the UN Charter and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the helm of the Hermit Kingdom is Kim-Jong Un, aka "dear leader," (the titles "supreme leader," "paramount leader," and "great leader" having been already taken by others). The North Korean economy is almost entirely dependent on neighboring China, which sees the tyrant-ruled nation as a useful nuisance and distraction for the US, South Korea and Japan. Otherwise, were North Korea to fall into the ocean tomorrow, it would hardly be missed by the people's colossus next door. Kim fulfills his role well, periodically launching intermediate-range missiles menacingly near and over South Korea and Japan. The dear leader has most recently threatened to test nuclear weapons, which it continues to produce in flagrant contravention of numerous UN Security Council resolutions.

Three of these nations have nuclear weapons capable of annihilating millions. The fourth, Iran, seems poised to get them unless the P5+1 negotiators can manage to pull a rabbit from their negotiating hats and conclude reimposition of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to curb Iran's nuclear weapons development program. But that agreement seems very unlikely after three months of moribund talks, the growing popular protests in Iran and the Islamic Republic's decision to join forces with Russia against

Ukraine. Even so, many predict, Iran's eventual acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability within the near-to-medium term is almost certain. Such a prospect would almost assure across-the-Gulf neighbor Saudi Arabia's rush for its own bomb.

Although Saudi Arabia is nominally led by an absolute monarch, currently King Salman bin Abdulaziz, its effective leader today is his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. MBS, as he is widely known, is an absolutist autocrat but oversees a nation dependent on protection from the US. That dependency relationship could easily change if the kingdom was to obtain or develop nuclear weapons. Unlike North Korea, it has enough oil the world desperately needs to sustain its economy. In fact, Saudi Arabia has so much oil that Iran-like economic sanctions are unlikely. They could lead to a meltdown of the global economy.

Given the deteriorating relations between the kingdom and the US and, in particular, between MBS and US President Joe Biden, the world should not discount the prospect of Saudi Arabia acquiring nuclear weapons and of MBS finally severing his nation's dependency on the US, thus empowering one more autocrat with the ultimate weapon. It will require herculean diplomacy on the part of the US and others to ensure that doesn't happen. Autocrats have their ambitions and are rarely disposed to changing them.

Arrayed against this dangerous lineup of totalitarian states is the US, still considered the world's premier superpower. Its network of alliances and defense treaties in Europe and Asia give the US formidable military and economic clout. The US and its allies are united not only by treaties and alliances but also and especially by

shared values, particularly democracy, liberty, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The aforementioned autocrats see these values as an American imposition on the international order because the US had overwhelming power since the end of World War II.

This anti-American posturing is self-serving. Let us be honest. The problem with these values is not that they are American, the problem with them is that they counter the autocrats' justification for one-man rule. Antipathy toward the US and toward the values it espouses is what unites the world's autocrats. There really is nothing more these nations share, which is revealing in itself.

The Global Rest

Left unmentioned is the "global rest," the large majority of nations in Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia and elsewhere that have avoided choosing sides. Their reasons are several and not always unjustified. Many are former colonies with lingering resentment toward and suspicions of their former colonizers. In addition, many may see getting drawn into the conflict as counterproductive to their own interests, particularly their economic interests. The larger nations of this group — India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia and Nigeria — are stressed democracies like Turkey, Hungary and even the US. Despite their flaws, these democracies would find the ruling styles of China or Russia anathema. For the time being, however, they are not threatened directly nor are their interests jeopardized by the current tensions.

That could easily change, though, and perhaps faster than anyone would want or could predict. An unrestrained Xi might decide to order an

invasion of Taiwan, consequently closing the Taiwan Strait, shutting down half of the world's tanker traffic and sending the global economy spiraling. If Western nations currently supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia were to let up on their support, it would assure a Russian victory. This would empower Putin to plan further expansion in accordance with his revanchist imperial dream of a greater Russia. All of Western and Eastern Europe would be drawn into a resulting continental conflict, also creating conditions for global economic disaster and fertile ground for totalitarian opportunists elsewhere. Overhanging both scenarios is the prospect of nuclear conflict, already broached by a flailing and ever-desperate Putin.

Inability to resurrect the JCPOA nuclear accord would remove any incentive for Iran to shut down its nuclear weapons program. Whether it actually builds a nuclear bomb or not, the mere prospect could set off war in the Middle East as Israel and possibly Saudi Arabia act militarily to foreclose Iran's nuclear advancement. As we have seen in the past, war in the Gulf is highly destabilizing to both the region and to a global economy dependent on the region's oil. China alone looks to the region for 40% of its oil needs.

None of this is over-the-top alarmism. All of the autocrats mentioned have at one time or other threatened use of force. What recourse do democracies have against this unprecedented alignment of nuclear-empowered autocrats? Is it even possible to talk a dictator out of carrying out actions seen as indispensable to some grand plan? And if not, then what?

Perhaps the first step is shaking the citizens of democracies, most especially in the United States,

out of their domestic political navel-gazing and into an awareness of the enormity of the challenge before them. In their increasingly partisan culture wars, Americans appear to be swatting at mosquitoes as dragons, bears and snakes stalk the neighborhood. They would be wise to follow the advice of Franklin D. Roosevelt in his May, 1941 fireside chat. The 32nd president argued then that defense meant not only a well-armed military force but also "... the use of a greater American common sense in discarding rumor and distorted statement... (and) recognizing, for what they are, racketeers and fifth columnists, who are the incendiary bombs in this country of the moment." Substitute disinformation and alternative facts for "rumor" and election deniers for "racketeers and fifth columnists" and Roosevelt's words ring true for America today.

Roosevelt was facing a major threat to the world's oldest democracy. In the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, America had withdrawn into its isolationist island, flirting with all manner of "America First," racist and Nazi ideas, and organizations. Meanwhile Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had begun their march through Europe and Asia, and expansion across the Pacific. Only Japan's strategic blunder in attacking Pearl Harbor succeeded in breaking America out of its isolationist never-never land and launched it into a war to reestablish global security, and ultimately the international global order we know today. It is this very order that Xi, Putin, Khamenei and Kim-Jung Un seek to undo. Neither the US nor other nations should count on either Beijing or Moscow making a mistake like Pearl Harbor again.

The attention and support of voters well informed of the threats before them are indispensable to

successfully confronting Totalitarianism Incorporated of today. The alignment of these dictatorial states could be described by the same words Roosevelt used in his December 1940 fireside chat, an “unholy alliance of power and pelf to dominate and to enslave the human race.” The totalitarian order is predicated on obedience to a single authority, aka the great leader. It is an order and peace of the dictator. The democratic alternative is an alliance of nations composed of citizens loyal to a set of ideals and principles. It is an order and peace of free people.

Deterrence, Diplomacy and Unity

What then is to be done? Deterrence is critical. And it is also expensive. Yet it is essential because totalitarians respect power. Therefore, democracies will have to arm themselves to demonstrate resolve and a clear determination to resist totalitarian ambitions. Ukrainians prove today that dictators, regardless of level of brutality, can be stopped. It’s an example to all democracies.

Diplomacy is important too. Yet it can only be effective when backed up by unflinching deterrence and iron resolve. Diplomacy may work with dictators when they see the costs of challenging well-armed and resolute democratic states. In the absence of credible deterrence, diplomacy descends into appeasement, enabling the easiest of victories for a dictator.

At the moment, the US and the West have to embark on a vital diplomatic initiative with the rest of the world. Many nations are still unwilling to commit themselves to confronting the totalitarian challenge. They must be convinced that their continued fence-sitting ultimately will undermine their respective national goals, and the very global

order that permits their flourishing. The rallying cry must be that in a peaceful, prosperous and secure world, sovereignty, borders and a rules-based international order are the sine qua non of peace. They are sacrosanct. Without an explicit, unqualified embrace of these simple concepts, no nation is safe. Peace and prosperity for all peoples become elusive. Fear and foreboding envelope societies. Liberty evaporates. Human progress is stymied.

That undertaking — the gathering of all nations together to staunch the advance of aggressive totalitarianism — is necessary and urgent. Done successfully, it may be the best way to avoid war and fix a barrier around all those seeking to impose their will on other nations. No nation, regardless of size, should or can afford to be neutral on this matter.

The lessons of the last century’s two world wars and the Cold War taught us that both military power, and principled and determined diplomacy are necessary when confronting totalitarianism. It is time to apply those lessons with renewed vigor today.

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Fascistic Tendencies in the Muslim Brotherhood

Amir Darwish

November 18, 2022

Right from its beginnings in 1928, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was inspired by fascism. Even today, its animating ideas, guiding principles, policy positions, and organizational structure are fascist in some way or form.

Encyclopedia Britannica tells us that the Muslim Brotherhood is a “religiopolitical organization founded in 1928 at Ismailia, Egypt, by Hassan al-Banna.” It is important to note that the Muslim Brotherhood was born precisely when fascism and Nazism were taking off in Europe. Scholars from both Egypt and the West have found similarities between the Muslim Brotherhood and the authoritarian European ideologies of this era.

In particular, the Muslim Brotherhood's social and economic policies were similar to fascist ones. Furthermore, al-Banna sympathized with both Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Since the 1960s, some scholars have even argued that the Muslim Brotherhood is inspired more by nationalism and socialism, less by Islam. Manfred Halpern's iconic book, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa*, argues that the Muslim Brotherhood embraced totalitarianism and rejected modernism.

The MB totalitarian vision

The Muslim Brotherhood's totalitarian vision was inspired by Islam. It saw modernity and individuality threatening. The organization championed tradition and belonging to a community instead. This community was of pious Egyptian Muslims who would live in an egalitarian society. Traditional Islam, not multiparty democracy, was to act as a guide for the future. This future would only be born after a struggle. As in the case of fascists, violence was a legitimate tool in the Muslim Brotherhood's struggle. Like all totalitarian ideologies, the Muslim Brotherhood pledged allegiance to al-Banna, its sole leader, and treated his vision as absolute.

The Muslim Brotherhood's conception of gender roles was remarkably similar to the Nazis. They encouraged marriage and large families. Women were meant to be mothers and men to be fathers. In this traditional view, men were breadwinners for the family while women were the nurturers of future generations. For this socially conservative organization, promotion of family values was a key goal. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood argued for closing down cabarets and dance halls, and censoring plays, films and novels. The organization also suggested improvements in song lyrics to make them more virtuous.

Antisemitism within the Muslim Brotherhood

Just like the Nazi Party, the Muslim Brotherhood too shared an intense hatred for Jews. For example, Sayyid Qutb, the ideological father of the Muslim Brotherhood, espoused his antisemitism in many of his major works such as the book, *Milestones*. The book is still considered to be a foundational text for Islamist groups. According to Qutb, the

world is divided between the realm of God (Islam) and the realm of Satan (Jews). In Milestones, he writes: “[The Jews’] aim is clearly shown by the Protocols [of the Elders of Zion]. The Jews are behind materialism, animal sexuality, the destruction of the family and the dissolution of society.”

In 1938, seven years before Israel was established, the Muslim Brotherhood led violent demonstrations against Egypt’s Jewish community. That same year, they organized the Parliamentary Conference for the Arab and Muslim Countries in Cairo, where they distributed Arabic translations of Mein Kampf and The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

In his book, Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World, Jeffrey Herf explores the Nazi Party’s brief but intense efforts to gain support amongst Muslims in the Middle East. He details the prominent role played by Haj Amin al-Husseini, then the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. In 1937, Al-Husseini fled Palestine, evading arrest by the British for instigating the riots that became known as the Arab Revolt. The Grand Mufti had recruited armed militias to attack Jews but his efforts were ultimately unsuccessful.

By 1941, al-Husseini established himself in Nazi Germany and Italy. During the war, he collaborated with the Germans in their efforts to recruit Bosnian Muslims for the Waffen-SS. In 1945, the Grand Mufti was taken into custody by French troops but he escaped and settled in Cairo where he was welcomed with praise. The Muslim Brotherhood’s issued a statement to Al Misri that is still telling: “One hair of the Mufti’s is worth more than the Jews of the whole... should one hair

of the Mufti’s be touched, every Jew in the world would be killed without mercy.”

That the Muslim Brotherhood was, and still to this day, inspired by fascism is a history that needs to be examined in greater detail. The Muslim Brotherhood has been able to establish itself as a moral, social and political force because of the guiding influence of the authoritarian ideologies that emerged in Europe during the interwar period. By studying the Muslim Brotherhood’s conception and development, we may come to better understand how such ideologies transcended the borders of Europe.

***Amir Darwish** is a British Syrian poet and writer of Kurdish origin who lives in London. He moved to the city in 2003 as an asylum seeker and now has degrees from three UK universities. As a poet, Amir has published his work in the UK, the US, Pakistan, India, Finland, Turkey, Canada, Singapore and Mexico. He frequently appears on British media.

Portuguese UN Chief Preaches to India: Is it White Savior Complex?

Soundarajan Narendran, K.T. Jagannathan
November 19, 2022

During his recent India visit, the UN chief asked India “to protect and promote the rights of all individuals, including members of minority communities.” India is doing that and more. It is a force for global good and deserves not preaching but respect.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently visited India. In more ways than one, it was a significant visit. For a start, it underscores India’s rising geopolitical importance. After 75 years of independence, in the words of Guterres, India is finally a global “powerhouse.”

The secretary-general lauded the country’s contribution to sustainable development goals. In his words, “India’s recent development journey is characterized by high impact programmes delivered at scale. This includes the world’s largest food-based social protection scheme and the massive expansion of access to clean water and sanitation services.”

Guterres also noted that India is the biggest provider of military and police personnel to UN missions. Importantly, India has provided the first all-women UN police contingent for a peacekeeping mission. More than 200,000 Indian

men and women had served in 49 peacekeeping missions since 1948.

One False Note

Yet Guterres was not all sweetness and light when it came to India. He gave a speech at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. During his oration, he gave India some unwanted advice. Guterres said, “As an elected member of the Human Rights Council, India has a responsibility to shape global human rights, and to protect and promote the rights of all individuals, including members of minority communities.” He went on to add, “India’s global role will benefit if concrete actions are taken in support of the rights and freedoms of journalists, human rights activists, students and academics.”

Guterres comes from Portugal. He could do well to remember that his forefathers brought the Inquisition to India. Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498 to kick off an era of rape, murder and theft by Europeans in Asia. Unlike the British, the Portuguese did not leave in good grace. The largely pacifist Jawaharlal Nehru whom Guterres quoted had to send troops to kick the Portuguese out of Goa in 1961.

Given the historical record, Indians do not take kindly to Europeans, and especially the Portuguese, preaching to them. The trope of India becoming less inclusive and pluralist has been bandied in Western newspapers. In New York, where Guterres resides, The New York Times has poured pure poison about India in its recent articles. The story is simple. It goes something like this. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a Hindu fascist party. It marginalizes minorities, tramples freedoms and weakens the rule of law.

Ipso facto, white knights in shining armor have to ride to India's rescue.

By preaching to India about human rights, Guterres displayed a breathtaking lack of sensitivity. Indians have noted that the likes of Guterres ignore their history of conquest, colonization and continued plunder while merrily preaching to India. India has played its part and is playing more than its part as a force for global good.

Some Key Facts

India conducts elections regularly. The BJP recently lost to the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the sensitive border state of Punjab, which was partitioned in 1947. West Bengal, another border state, is ruled by the Trinamool Congress (TMC). India has been a democracy for much longer than Guterres's Portugal. Few remember that Portugal only became a democracy in 1975. In India, power changes hands from the BJP to the AAP or the Communists to the TMC peacefully. India is the world's largest and most diverse democracy.

India also has a vibrant legal tradition. Indian courts are slow but they are not dominated by the political elite. Unlike the US where judicial appointments are a game of political football, the Supreme Court Collegium has complete autonomy to appoint judges to India's highest court. The prime minister or parliament has no say. This is unimaginable in most countries where the political elites appoint judges. Unlike American presidents, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not appointed a single judge. Judges have appointed their fellow judges. Most of them come from elite English-speaking families that historically owe

their allegiance to the Congress Party still run by the Nehru dynasty.

India upholds human rights of its citizens resolutely. Are there abuses? Of course. No country with over 1.3 billion with so many religions, ethnicities, languages, castes and communities can avoid some incidents. Yet it is in the US where Guterres resides that one in three black men "today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime, as can one of every six Latino boys — compared with one of every 17 white boys." The American Civil Liberties Union also observes that, since 1970, "the number of incarcerated people has increased sevenfold to 2.3 million in jail and prison today, far outpacing population growth and crime." India does a lot better in protecting rights of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and all other minorities than the US.

Importantly, India has made great progress in improving the rights and plight of women. The government banned the practice of triple talaq. Muslim men cannot utter "talaq, talaq, talaq" and get rid of their wives. The human rights of over 80 million Muslim women have improved thanks to this measure. As per The Independent, "India is on the greatest toilet-building spree in human history." In 2018, it reported that, since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took over in 2014, his government built an estimated 80 million toilets. By now, the number has crossed over 110 million. This means that women do not have to go out into the fields to defecate or urinate. Their health, welfare and dignity have dramatically improved.

India also vaccinated hundreds of millions against COVID-19 for free. It distributed vaccines to citizens regardless of class, caste, religion, sexuality or any other discriminating factor. It fed

the poorest sections of the population during the pandemic too. India even sent 50,000 tons of wheat to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan when millions faced hunger and starvation after the US abandoned this tragic country to its grim fate.

India's humanitarian measure for Afghanistan gives the lie to Rana Ayyub of The Washington Post calling the BJP government anti-Muslim. If Ayyub's claims are true, why would a Hindu fascist government feed millions of Muslims living under the Taliban?

Americans forget that the Taliban gave refuge to hijackers of an Indian plane in 1999. This hijacking of a plane from Kathmandu in Nepal to Kandahar in Afghanistan is seared into India's consciousness. The BJP was in power then and humiliatingly released three terrorists who have killed thousands since. One of the three released was responsible for abducting and killing the American journalist Daniel Pearl. Another founded Jaish-e-Muhammed that attacked the Indian parliament in 2001 and launched the devastating Mumbai attacks in 2008. The third continues to send jihadis to Kashmir.

Despite this record, the allegedly Hindu fascist government negotiated with its Taliban counterpart and buried the hatchet. India not only fed millions in Afghanistan but also enabled their vaccinations. As per Voice of America, "India invested billions in development projects" in Afghanistan. The BJP government's humanitarian assistance has saved the lives of millions of Muslims despite the fact that the Taliban government has supported jihad against India.

Less Preaching, More Respect

As a guest in India, Guterres demonstrated subcutaneous racism when preaching to his hosts. He forgot that the institution he represents is frozen in time. The winners of World War II sit in the Security Council, the masters' table. Others sup at the servants' table without any veto power. The masters still talk down to nations they perceive as servants.

Guterres is not from one of the five veto-wielding nations in the Security Council. Yet he comes from a country that inaugurated the European imperial age. Os Lusíadas is still the national epic of Portugal. It is a story of Vasco da Gama's voyage to India. Unlike the BBC, this epic does not mention that "da Gama began a campaign of terror against Muslim shipping off the Malabar Coast." In 1502, this greatest of Portuguese heroes captured Meri, a ship full of Muslims returning from their Hajj to Mecca. He burnt the 400 men, women and children on board. It took four days for all of them to die. Unlike da Gama, Guterres is not a bloodthirsty imperialist. However, like many Americans and Europeans, he suffers from the white savior complex. The likes of Guterres rarely give former colonies like India their due.

But as Nobel laureate Bob Dylan sang, The Times They Are A-Changin'. Portugal no longer has an empire. Instead, it is drowning in debt. The Financial Times tells us that Portugal's debt-to-GDP hit a record 135.2% in May. Other European countries are also facing a debt crisis. To make matters worse, Europe is suffering from double-digit inflation and rising interest rates that make both further borrowing and servicing more expensive. The Russia-Ukraine War has proven to

be an unmitigated disaster for this war-scarred continent.

Other dominant powers are not doing too well either. The US stands weakened on the global stage after it abandoned Afghanistan so cavalierly. Saudi Arabia and OPEC+ have thumbed their nose at Uncle Sam and a petroyuan trade is emerging. China is suffering from Xi Jinping's hubris and a catastrophic zero-COVID policy. The UK has yet another new government after a third world style economic crisis. To balance its books, this government is planning big tax rises and spending cuts.

Given such a grim global scenario, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has been very complimentary about India. In her words, "India deserves to be called a bright spot on this otherwise dark horizon because it has been a fast-growing economy, even during these difficult times, but most importantly, this growth is underpinned by structural reforms." India has come a long way from 1991 when it went through a currency crisis thanks to decades of failed Nehruvian socialist economics. Now, Guterres's fellow European Georgieva is praising India for its sound economic management. A projected growth rate of 6.8%–7.1%, a robust democracy, magnanimous humanitarian aid even to hostile states, massive contributions to the UN and dynamic multiculturalism make India a force for global good. White saviors must realize that India needs less preaching, more respect. A seat at the UN Security Council would be a good start.

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government. From 1998 to 2007, he worked for Apollo Tyres and the TVS Group on product development, business channel development and supply chains. Since 2007, Narendran has worked on policy making, public policy and digital government. He has experience of working with non-governmental organizations, governments and global institutions on big data, social media analytics and sentiment analysis. Educated at IIT Chennai and Anna University, Narendran has an interest in spirituality and narrative development.

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A Magical Tale: Not Trekking in the Himalayas

Glenn Carle

November 20, 2022

Fate conspires against a CIA man's plan to hike (trek in Indian English) in the Himalayas. A whirlwind of unplanned events, overzealous minders and swamis make sure that mountains remain faraway.

The original plan was to hike for three weeks along the India-China-Nepal border. Two former professional associates – Indian Special Forces officers – had agreed to take me. Technical climbing has never interested me, but I have been a lifelong hiker, going on weeks-long hikes over the years in the Alps, the Wrangell-St. Elias mountains in Alaska, the Pyrenees, the Cascades, the Rockies, the Burundi Highlands, the Southern Alps of New Zealand, the White Mountains north of my home... I had also arranged with yet another former Indian Special Forces officer friend to have a few speaking engagements in India prior to my “trekking,” as Indians refer to hiking. He is well plugged into the Indian power structure.

For months I poo-pooed my wife's completely sensible admonitions that I was, well, old, overweight, out of shape, had had a heart attack, and always have felt the altitude from about 8,000 feet and above. “The clock is ticking for us all” was my mantra response, and “it ticks faster at 66”

than it had in years past; so, no caviling. Off I would go.

An Unexpected Royal Welcome

I arrived in Mumbai during the last rainfall of the monsoon, driving through crashing rain and whipping windshield wipers in the dead of night and checked in to the Taj Mahal Palace, across a plaza from the Gateway of India, where Gandhi had returned to India from South Africa in 1915, and where the last British troops embarked to depart India after over 200 years' presence and the Raj. A beautiful peacock made of lotus flowers greeted me in the hotel lobby. I had one day to acclimate myself and to walk around downtown Mumbai, where I passed an Indian Naval base and saw such signs as, “If you carry a weapon or linger, we may shoot you,” and “Do NOT spit here. Or there.”

And here things went...astray.

I received a call in my room the day after my arrival. “Mr. Glenn, welcome to India. No longer worry about your hotels. We have taken care of your stay. Your car is waiting downstairs.” What car? I wondered. Who had taken care of my hotel? Began three weeks in which I had been provided with a car, a driver (just about indispensable in India,) and two...er...guides, hand-holders, facilitators, minders, guards.

For the first time of many I asked myself, and even would expostulate to anyone I happened to be with at a given moment, What the hell is going on? Who are these people? I didn't know and didn't really find out until after perhaps a week or ten days of being shepherded from one VIP meeting to another across the country – in Mumbai,

Ahmedabad, Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Mussoorie... “They are close to the prime minister,” is what I was told, somewhat furtively, whenever I could reach my former Special Forces friend or get something out of anyone. “They are taking care of you. You are important,” he told me.

People posed for photographs with me. “Why?” I would ask. “Who do they think I am? I’m not anybody anymore.” “Oh, Mr. Glenn,” would come the reply, “but yes.” Mr. Glenn is so modest! Ho ho ho! At one point my driver dared to speak with me: “You,” he said, looking at me in the rearview mirror. “Good looking.” I laughed and shook my head. “Me?” “Yes,” he nodded his head. “No,” I scoffed. “I am old and fat.” He looked in the mirror again. “Yes.”

My time became a whirlwind of engagements I had planned, such as speaking to the Indian Ministry of Defense’s strategic planning office (“China will be fine,” was their basic view; “China will continue to grow in power but has growing problems,” was my basic presentation,) or to an audience in IIT Gandhinagar in Gujarat (I spoke on India as a driver of global economic growth)...and a series of meetings I had not planned and did not know would happen – “Come. In car. Sit. We go now. Important. Yes,” (my minders’ English was approximate. “And your Hindi is non-existent,” my wife would archly rejoin when I told her the tale, lest a hint of the Raj inhabit my perspective) – meetings with chief strategists for the prime minister’s party, or with senior Islamic figures, or with the foreign ministry – What is going on? I kept asking.

Magic Realism

At one point I had a meeting arranged with the leader of the Islamic Deobandi movement, something that no one in the CIA could ever arrange. It was like meeting with the leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini. He canceled on me only a few hours before the meeting. “He thinks you are going to assassinate him,” my Special Forces friend told me. “He is afraid of the repercussions of meeting with a bogeyman CIA guy, that’s what he is afraid of,” I replied.

The next morning I was having tea with some journalists and government officials in a five-star hotel’s beautiful, arcaded café. “And so,” the journalist told me, “the Indian commander of India’s UN ‘peacekeepers’ never received any constructive guidance from the UN in Geneva. The situation was unsustainable. And so the government told him, ‘Act. Use ‘Indian rules of engagement.’ He used our Gurkhas that night – No guns. Just knives. No noise. Killed thousands of ‘rebels,’ in silence. No more troubles. Never made the media...”

I was digesting this little bit of – news?, bravado? – when someone tapped me on the shoulder. “Excuse me,” a man said, standing behind me, hands clasped, bending slightly. “Are you Mr. Glenn?” Who the hell knows me here? I wondered. This was a bit ridiculous. But they did. “We saw you on television.” That was possible (but still surprising,) as I do a bunch of commentating on foreign affairs for Indian and other non-American networks. “I am the hotel manager. My card.” He inclined his head. “Please allow me to give you a personal tour...” I gazed at him, and blinked once. Around we went. “And here is where Hillary dined.” Murals of the Hindu goddess Rati – the

goddess of carnal desire – overlooked the table. He looked at me, “Perhaps soon you will dine here, too, with your wife?” I spent weeks feeling that somehow, I was benefitting from a case of mistaken identity.

I kept telling my minders that I was there to go hiking and had it all arranged. “Yes, yes. Trekking! Ha ha! We go, yes!” was the invariable response. And then they would drive me off to another meeting, or to a Hindu religious ceremony where, literally, I was one of (as far as I could see) two Westerners among one hundred thousand happy celebrants of, as best I could ascertain, the Yajna - the Hindu Fire Ceremony. Fire staves circled around all sides of my head as I sat on the banks of the Ganges, thousands upon thousands of arms and voices raised up as far as I could see or hear, chanting the oneness of the five elements – earth, water, fire, air, and space – and lotus leaves filled with flowers and fire swirled past me, flickering lights on the dark waters.

Later, my minder burst into the cell in the ashram they had put me in and said, “Come. Important. Must go now. Meet Swami.” A couple of days before I had hazarded that “I don’t think an ashram is really for me.” So, they put me in the prime minister’s ashram, of course. I could not refuse without creating...disharmony.

“What? Meet what swami?”

“Swami G.” He looked at me with a hint of contempt; how crude! “You must come now. A great honor.”

Oh, well, then; Swami G... Of course. It was a formal, highly protocol-driven affair, with small talk and official photographers. The business-

suited majordomo silently pointed me to a small oriental visitor’s sitting mat, adjacent to the Swami’s larger alpha rug, and then receded into the shadows on the side of the audience chamber... Jesus Christ, I thought as I sat down cross-legged, trying not to fidget despite the ache in my bum hip (“Yeah,” said my doctor, “hockey player”), what the hell is going on? At which point the thought crossed my mind that expostulating “Jesus Christ!” and “What the hell?” created the wrong karma vibe. Swami “G” floated in, a small procession of factotums settling in the shadows behind. We rose in quiet deference. He sat and so did we.

The Mountains Prove Far Away

There was a moment of supposed repose, then he slowly turned his head towards me. “You will, of course, wish to attend our ceremony tomorrow evening.” He modulated his voice so that I had to lean towards him to discern his wisdom. “I’m afraid I will be leaving early in the morning to go trekking,” I said, hope triumphing over expectation. Swami G looked at me beatifically. “Yes, I am sure. But I believe you will wish to delay your departure.” The briefest pause. “Our ceremony is really quite special.” He gazed at me from his effortless lotus pose, hands on knees. “I do not doubt you will attend.” Of course I could not escape, lest I create disharmony, with the superiors of my minders, at the least. The photographer emerged and posed us this way and that as we namasted one another.

After this excruciating session, I was making my way back to my ashram cell, when my minder of course blocked me in the hallway: “Come. Now. Follow. We eat.” Well, okay, I thought, that can’t be so bad. Ashrams have communal cafeteria dining and I could at last relax and figure a few

things out. But he took me through wending corridors to a small private dining room where I dined with...the ex-foreign minister of an Asian country. The minister and I sat in awkward silence for perhaps a minute, concentrating on the lentil paste on our aluminum trays, until I introduced myself. We spoke, astoundingly, of mutual friends, our eyebrows respectively raised that in an ashram's private dining room in Rishikesh, India we had discovered that our lives had intertwined unseen and unknown over the decades.

I had long since concluded that there was no escape and after the private dinner with the ex-foreign minister I jotted a note to myself, "Go with flow, what a hoot vs dammitall!" "Rishikesh, the yoga's Mecca" an American Hindu monk in saffron had told me over yogurt the previous morning.

The following morning I once again enjoined my minder, "The trek?" He looked at me and smiled. "Get in car. Yes, yes. Trek, trek! Ha ha ha! Trek! We go now!" And he had me driven off to other non-trek events, adventures, meetings. We rafted down the Ganges, the smoke from burning corpses rising on both riverbanks and sometimes enveloping us. Mourners before the pyres slowly poured libations of their incinerated loved ones' ashes mixed with cow's milk into the river as we passed mid-river. The water was a fathomless vortex of grays and browns.

My raftmates were all giddy and jumped overboard for a swim. "You jump. You swim, yes?" my minder urged. "I am not swimming in that," I replied to the prolonged dismay of my raftmates, Indians all. "But, here" I said, to recover the moment, "I'll teach you how to sing 'Dip, Dip, and Swing,' an old American Indian canoeing

song," (well, close enough, I thought,) that I had learned in 1965 as a boy in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. We erratically paddled down the Ganges shouting-singing in dissonant enthusiasm, "DIP, dip and swing and BACK! Flash-ing like SIL-VER! Faster than the WILD GOOSE flight. DIP, dip, and swing!" I became quite popular on the raft.

The "trek" lay somewhere far above, in the far-distant and unseen peaks where only, it seems, swamis sometimes tread.

I never met up with my two former Indian Special Forces officers. They awaited me in the foothills of the Himalayas, wondering, I learned, what had become of their American trekking partner? I never saw, I literally never saw, the Himalayas.

The Hindu Universe

It became clear, and I learned eventually, that some elements close to the government had decided (erroneously, I kept saying) that I was a VIP, and wanted me to leave with a good impression – "You will write of India, perhaps. Whatever you feel. The New York Times and The Washington Post do not understand India as I am sure you do..." and that to them I was too old and too out of shape (not true!) to risk allowing me to wander around the Himalayas "trekking." If I stumbled or had a problem, my minders would have been in trouble.

But in India, in the Hindu universe, time circles upon itself, there is no simply linear progress, our avatars live variations of our lives sometimes in sight of our own and it is unclear ever "what is going on?", for we should know from my heroine, Michelle Yeo, that everything happens everywhere

all at once, and meaning is multiple and disjointed even as it is profound and important. The Himalayas were all around me even when they were beyond my reach, my body-guard minders with broken English were perhaps my gurus if I had the wisdom to see them properly, to find serendipity in chaos and meaning in absurdity, and all my meetings were important even when I did not know they would happen or even who I was meeting or why, or even if they were preposterous, or even if they never happened.

And I was important and influential and insignificant, of course I was, and like the lotus leaves carrying flowers and flames down the Ganges during the yajna, I swirled and turned and glowed and sputtered and was lost in the flow of confusing days, a kaleidoscope of broken but glittering images before my eyes, disjointed and of shapes I could not make out, all full of meaning and nothingness, if only I could see, at least full of meaning in this particular reality, so long as it, so long as I, exist. A hike, a trek, might not ever reach the hills, and what is a trail, anyway?

Such have been the past five years. Such have been the past forty-five. Trekking, yes! Ha ha!

***Glenn Carle** is a noted author and avid reader. As Deputy National Intelligence Officer, Mr. Carle led the 17 agencies of the intelligence community in preparing the US government's most senior assessments of transnational threats to the nation for the president, members of cabinet and the nation's most senior military leaders.

How Capital Eats Its Young

William Softky

November 20, 2022

Capitalism's endgame of harvesting the future is in play, now that markets value children's attention as more valuable for revenue than for learning. There are possible solutions if we can first acknowledge the problem. A review of Dr. Susan Linn Who's Raising the Kids? provides some clues to the solution.

Attention is valuable, especially that of children. Unfortunately, that value, a profoundly human value, is undermined by the business world's idea of valuation, a concept focused exclusively on commercial or monetary value. Insofar as markets are informational mechanisms, they undermine perception and damage mental health, especially that of children. The exquisitely sensitive human attentional system evolved to aim itself at Nature, not to be targeted by revenue-seeking interruptions, distractions, and deceptions. A brilliant new book *Who's Raising the Kids?* makes clear the structure, science, and scale of the problems posed by the attention economy, problems especially salient for children.

Attention, in the most basic sense, is a creature's informational-management strategy. We use our attention to determine what matters, where it is, and whether I can trust it? Vertebrate attentional systems evolved over hundreds of millions of years to let a body use and trust its senses. The brain's hardware learned to squeeze meaning from

scenes like the savannah, scenes containing multiple tiny, faint cues. To a sensory system, faint statistical outliers are eye-candy, attractive, like sugar, precisely because they are rare. Attention works properly only in a world of sticks, stones, sky, people, fauna and flora, and not much else. Man-made things distract and mis-direct human attention even without meaning to. And now they mean to and are built to do so, automatically and at scale.

At the finest level, tiny pixels use microsecond tuning to draw our eyes toward interesting things which aren't there. Video games anticipate our anticipation in order to dose us with dopamine. Social media synthesizes the illusion of friendship. Search engines synthesize illusions of meaning. Smartphones rule from our pockets. Smartphones are the grandest intruders, allowing multinational corporations skilled at using science to design what we will see, believe, and love.

They have successfully commandeered and monetized the growing brains of children and are inflicting widespread damage, according to a powerful new book by the psychologist who saw this coming thirty years ago. Decades ago Dr. Susan Linn was a child psychologist (and puppeteer!) who appeared on the famous US childrens' show Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. Seeing firsthand the damage done to kids by marketing and monetized play, she founded the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (now Fairplay). It is among the few child-advocacy groups accepting to follow neuroscientific principles, and not accepting corporate money. Now Linn is a professor of psychology at Harvard.

The best possible book on the topic

With that background Professor Linn is the best possible person to write this book. And she has produced the best possible book. While her sentences are often professorial (of course!), there are plenty of cute anecdotes, appearances of charming children, wry observations, and tales of comically misguided products, like the video game advertised to make going to sleep exciting (p. 104). For a relentless point-by-point compendium of why moneyed interests must be kept away from children's play, *Who's Raising the Kids* still provides a remarkably funny, easy read. While it employs US examples for a US audience, her reasoning applies outside the US as well, and will probably be easier to act on in those other places. This book is for the world.

Most thoughtful people already know that commercial influences are bad for kids, so they don't need to read this book. They don't need its ruthlessly clear thinking and comprehensive, evidence-laden summary of fifty years of scientific study, because their parenting instincts are already fine. Besides, pondering such depressing content is a grim reward for reading what one already knows. On the other hand, some responsible officials hoping to make their case may demand even more powerful evidence., Some might even hold out for the formulation of undisputed natural laws to provide them with the clout to successfully rearrange budgets. I'll give them such laws at the end, since that's my professional specialty. As a general rule, many parents already have the evidence. They don't need even the best book imaginable to tell them about the obstacles to raising functional children provided by a market-saturated world.

On the other hand, if you are in a position to influence children or guide their experiences—as a superintendent, teacher, nanny, app designer, marketer—you must read this book. Your ignorance would be a moral hazard when other people’s children are entrusted to your care. And when you finish digesting its contents, to double your investment. Mail your well-thumbed copy to your favorite venture-capitalist or corporate executive, since they need wisdom even more than you do. Ignorance is no excuse when truth is so important, and easily available.

Professor Linn’s barrage of evidence is overwhelming: the wasteful excess of crinkly packaging around toys, kids falling in love with characters from ads, apps designed to spy on kids. Her list of all the easy ways there are to make money from kids’ innocence goes on and on. Like taking candy from a baby.

After this book, there should be no dispute that markets threaten children’s sanity. Only Self-serving industry will of course gripe about how impractical solutions are to protect the status quo. Those gripes are true as far as they go, because the only sustainable solution is a tough sell in a pro-capital society. It implies neutralizing market forces present in domains affecting kids. So, in a word, this book is about changing everything.

This book is so good, the best possible review need only use Professor Linn’s own words. Which I will do. No reviewer could add anything more than praise to this magnificent work, except perhaps a commonsense explanation of how this crisis has been mounting for thirty thousand years, and what society must do to save future generations.

Who’s Raising the Kids, Compressed

Herewith the titles and a few representative lines from each of the thirteen chapters of *Who’s Raising the Kids* by Prof. Susan Linn (To each quote I append in italics a dense comment using the technical language of trust-formation, to simplify a unification at the end).

Chapter 1: What Children Need and Why Corporations Can’t Provide It

“The more a toy or app drives the form and content of children’s play and the more the characters or the toys kids play with are linked to popular media properties and franchises, the less children get to exercise curiosity, initiative, creativity, flexible problem-solving, and imagination.” (p. 19)

Comment: Children’s innate learning algorithms need autonomy and real life detail as inputs. Standardization, broadcast, and synthetic attractiveness undermine those algorithms by restricting freedom and damaging data, and thereby undermine learning and trust.

Chapter 2: Who Wins the Games Tech Plays?

“Technologies are problematic when they optimize profits at the expense of the health and wellbeing of individuals and the larger society. Yet no independent review of the potential harms and benefits is required before they go to market.” (p. 35)

Humans evolved to capture attention from each other in real life, and to defend ourselves from it. Now cheap and tireless machines capture our attention all the time, everywhere. They are inhumanly designed to dodge our defenses.

Accumulated micro-distractions and micro-deceptions erode everyone's trust and mental function. Yet regulators cannot agree either about how to limit the overall damage, nor even about how to measure it in the first place.

Chapter 3: And the Brand Plays On

“When commercial values dominate children's environment, kids are in danger of losing out on exposure to some of the best human values, such as altruism, generosity, nonconformity, and critical thinking.” (p. 69)

Our brains evolved to associate meaningful phrases with actual human values (e.g. Motherhood, God, Country). When a child's mind instead locks onto a slogan optimized for attractiveness by a focus group, the child fixates on something slippery which can never teach it trust.

Chapter 4: Browse! Click! Buy! Repeat!

“When corporate executives talk about reducing friction, some of what they mean has to do with reducing external barriers to buying, but it also means reducing or eliminating our intra-psychic friction—the cognitive and emotional brakes that enable us to set limits on consumption. For that reason, kids are not just fair game for advertisers—they are essential targets. Their immature capacities for judgment and impulse control render them especially susceptible to marketing messages.” (p. 81)

The younger a child is, the more innocent its brain, apt to believe the propositions it is exposed to, the longer damage to learning will last. For a child to waste crucial brain-cells learning bad habits and things which are not true is a tragedy, while for a marketer those represent long-term investments.

Chapter 5: How Rewarding are Rewards?

“In nurturing environments where there are opportunities to explore the world on their own terms, young children are intrinsically motivated to learn, to gain competence, to strive for autonomy, and to satisfy their curiosity.” (p. 107)

Natural environments (unlike synthesized ones) can be instinctually explored in continuous space and time, exactly what a brain evolved to do. Only interaction with unbiased, natural statistics allows a brain's zooming algorithm to converge on trustworthy solutions. Alternative statistical profiles, such as artificially “intermittent rewards,” undermine that algorithm by over-stimulating dopamine release.

Chapter 6: The Nagging Power of Pester Power

“Except for the fact that children and families are being harmed, there's something darkly comic about living in a commercialized culture that thrives on business models dependent on encouraging obnoxious behavior in children. No sane parent would welcome people into their home whose every interaction with children is designed to instill in kids such intense desires that they nag incessantly to get them fulfilled. Yet that's exactly the goal of all advertising to children.” (p. 123)

Messages and interactions optimized to produce revenue from children must of course somehow free that money from the family coffers. But using children to communicate a sales pitch inserts family conflict and undermines trust.

Chapter 7: Divisive Devices

“Whether with reluctance or open arms, we have invited into our homes powerful, seductive entities

designed to generate profits by monopolizing our attention. And they don't give a damn about our family relations or our children's wellbeing." (p. 131)

"Like all other nervous systems, ours evolved to forage, not produce. Humankind uniquely produces things that captivate our senses, and now they do" more than ever. (Sensory Metrics of Neuromechanical Trust, p. 2334)

Chapter 8: Bias for Sale

"A society's material culture simultaneously reflects and influences the values, norms, preferences, and taboos of that society. Stories and toys represent a significant component of the material culture belonging to childhood, and they profoundly influence how children make sense of the world around them, including how they view and experience themselves and others." (p. 154)

Stories and toys sell better when optimized for pre-existing concepts and stereotypes. Oversimplified ones sell best of all. But when it comes to social values, pre-existing means backwards-looking, and simplified means caricatured. Backwards-looking caricatures describe regressive attitudes like racism, sexism, and mercenary individualism. Those are already built into mass-produced communication, but kids absorb them fastest.

Chapter 9: "Branded Learning"

"Because [corporate-sponsored teaching materials] are often slickly produced, require no up-front cash outlay, and can bypass school boards and be sent directly to teachers, they may appear to be a godsend to cash-strapped schools." (p. 169)

Corporations have money and underfunded schools have young eyeballs, so an inevitable market-driven (but corrupt) transaction lets corporations disguise their advertising as educational material, offered to schools for free. But there is no such thing as free information. In this case kids and society pay the price.

Chapter 10: "Big Tech Goes to School"

"The value of quality, teacher-driven instruction is well supported by research. There is no credible research supporting industry claims that online, personalized learning programs improve academic outcomes. Test scores do not rise. Dropout rates do not fall. Graduation rates do not improve." (p. 185)

Human brains evolved to learn from physical objects and physical people in real life. Pixels and frames on screens are so chopped up, they only carry one millionth of the detail young brains need to trust their eyes, as long-established laws of neuroscience prove. So screen-based inputs of any kind not only don't help reading and writing, they cause actual harm to seeing itself.

Chapter 11: Is That Hope?

"In the United States, two types of laws would help to stop tech companies from exploiting children. A national privacy protection law, which we do not have, and adequate laws protecting the rights of children, which we also do not have." (p. 199)

As long as US law more successfully protects growing capital than growing brains, capital will damage children.

Chapter 12: Resistance Parenting: Suggestions for Keeping Big Tech and Big Business at Bay

“Six principles of child development to help adults make decisions about introducing tech to young children:

1. Young children live and learn in the context of social relationships.
1. Young children use their whole bodies and all their senses to learn about the world.
2. Young children learn best and benefit most from direct, first hand experience in the world of actual relationships and objects.
3. Young children are active learners who learn by inventing ideas.
4. Young children build inner resilience and coping skills through play.
5. Young children make sense of the world through play.”

(p. 210)

All humans, young children especially, evolved for interaction in the three-dimensional real world, which is our native sensory interface. Synthesized inputs, or even real inputs selected for impact, provide fake data and thus undermine real learning.

Chapter 13: Making a Difference for Everybody's Kids

“I am for a world where children are universally valued for who they are, not for what they or their parents can buy. Where family and community values no longer compete with commercial values for precedence in children's lives. Where kids have lots of “in the real world” time with their friends and with the adults who love and care for them. Where their friendships can flourish without

interference from, and monetization by, tech and media companies.” (p. 239)

The environments in which brains grow and learn best are the natural, socially supportive ones for which they evolved. Because all experience is training data for a growing mind, commercial interference damages learning in often irrecoverable ways. Monetizing children's brains means the end of our species.

The Battle for the next generation's sanity

This point summarizes Professor Linn's book. The sensory and social needs of growing children are actively opposed by the needs of capital. Widespread and growing monetization technologies are already eating the brains of our young. Legally. And sometimes the young even like it.

Attention is easy to harvest because humans offer it so freely. But that doesn't make the ethics of attention-harvesting different from those of organ-harvesting. Both attack vital biological systems, and thus share a dysfunctional dynamic which, above a very low threshold, ensures that revenue can only derive from inflicting harm. As targets, children provide the easiest profit and suffer the longest-term damage.

In recent years bosses and hiring managers worldwide have privately lamented the latest generations' poor social skills, low attention span and diminished motivation, to say nothing of their defective team spirit, absence of critical thinking and decline in physical endurance. Young people now don't simply work as well as earlier generations. Studies confirm these mass deficiencies, which happen to be the same

problems this book reveals. Thus, the decision made decades ago, under US President Reagan, to expand the dissemination of kids' ads has now exploded into what one should expect: sad, damaged, dysfunctional adults everywhere. The economy is already hurting from how it abused human brains twenty years ago, long before today's far more invasive technologies took hold.

Although Linn doesn't stress this point, the class of guilty parties is obviously not limited to large corporations. Tiny startups and lone influencers can also do damage as they desperately flail about to attract revenue and attention. The problems Linn points to are deep systemic ones: How can society neutralize a wide class of market mechanisms which have been optimized for hundreds of years to produce revenue by any available means, including means that have a damaging effect on children? Is it reasonable to think we can stop capital from doing what it's best at? Legislation—like the Five Rights bill in the UK and COPPA² and KOSA in the US—is a start. But it's not enough.

As of now, the biggest companies in the world have promised their shareholders money produced by strip-mining the brain-cells of future generations. Can that be stopped? Seen from the coldly mathematical perspective of information flow through space and time, the problem is even worse than what Professor Linn describes. And the possible solutions will inevitably be more profound.

It Started with Cave Art and Loincloths

Allow me a parable. A long long time ago, in Paleo Paradise, people were only exposed to each other and Nature, and paid attention accordingly.

But human interests are fickle, so to manage them somebody, let's say a proto-administrator, invented figurines and cave art for people to look at, and loincloths to keep them from looking away. Ever since then, humans have seen less and less of each other and the natural world our sensory instincts evolved for, and more of man-made things which exploit those instincts. In fact as a species we're proud of those creations. We call them art. When they make money, we call them entertainment or advertising.

The takeaway message is that attention has long been for sale, but it's never been so cheap. The ancients had salesmen, but not rack-mounted computers serving a million times the harassing sales pitch for the price of a human salesman and with no qualms about the quality of the message. A few decades ago new active technologies—radio, television, video, cable, internet—let machines represent live talking people. Recently, the ability of The Machines — designed to micro-monitor, micro-monetize, and micro-prod — increased hundreds-fold thanks to the omnipresence of mobile devices. As a result, machines now capture attention far too efficiently for human sanity and safety. The open security holes of our nervous systems have been utterly hacked. Human communication is corrupt in every medium but the air we breathe.

Roughly, a species whose intimate, subtle social communications evolved through a million years of live campfire singing, dancing, and group hugs has in a couple generations become thoroughly immersed in ever-more-mesmerizing panoplie of blinking things, whose primary purpose is to capture attention and induce belief. And those things work. The bandwidth and authenticity of

human interaction has been dropping steadily since cave-times. Now humans know less and less how to feel, to move, to see, or to connect with one another in more than caricatured ways. The mechanism at the core of the problem is recordable communication. Things like texts, tweets, likes and videos are not even empty calories in terms of biological signals. They provide no calories at all. Our nervous systems are failing from informational starvation, and trust — the essential cement of human society — is dying by the year.

If you worry about Platform Capitalism and the Rise of the Machines, then think about this: robots, robo-calls and robo-therapists pretend to be our friends, but secretly they obey their spreadsheet overlords.

Grand Projects

Humanity has solved problems this hard before, or almost as hard. Water-pipes made of lead, exploding boilers, crashing trains and cars, toxic food, fake accounting, risky drugs, filthy restaurants, the list goes on and on of tricks we've learned to keep the things we make from killing us. As a general rule, when society realizes that saving or making money here creates danger over there, it makes laws and sets up snap inspections. Think financial enforcement, or health inspectors who check that restaurant dishwashers use water that's hot enough.

Killing bacteria by turning up a thermostat is straightforward. Killing the influence of money in communication is far harder, since at present capital owns the major channels and doesn't want to part with them. In that light, here are some angles for regulators to use in protecting children from toxic commercial interactions:

Disclaimers don't work; double-blind does. Any self-respecting judge, I hope, would laugh out of the room the legal fiction that a printed disclaimer will insulate the unconscious against manipulation. The unconscious doesn't work that way. Learning requires autonomy, so all manipulation harms it. Fortunately manipulation can be measured objectively, as advertisers do, using randomized testing ("A/B testing"). As long as regulators can look over the shoulder of marketers measuring ad impacts, honesty has a chance.

Disgorgement discourages damage. Ill-gotten data, like ill-gotten money, should poison the well. If for example algorithms are trained on kids' private profiles, or on racist historical data, not only should the data be purged, algorithms and workflow trained on it should be wiped clean. As an incentive principle, the ease by which technology violates trust must be balanced by draconian consequences when it crosses that line.

Transparency brings balance. Trust only works when everyone has the same high-quality information. So private claims about ad "eyeballs" or behavioral impact — the kind of claims companies use to get money from investors and advertisers — must be equally available to the public and to regulators, because those claims are proportional to the public harm being done.

Health Not Test Results. Until kids again become happy, energetic, social, curious, and motivated, they should get more music, art, live games, and physical activity, and less of everything else, especially technology. Written tests of academic performance mean nothing compared to live 3-D tests of nervous system function.

This month, the US Senate is considering two laws which would help the situation enormously: the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA 2.0), and the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA). The Senators who vote should read this book. In fact, *Who's Raising the Kids* should be required reading everywhere, especially in countries (like France) with strong protections for public health. But also in countries (like India and Pakistan) whose advertisers seem proud of teaching kids to nag and pester parents (p. 117). When well-paid grownups brazenly brag about wrecking kids' relationships, children are doomed.

***William Softky** is a biophysicist who was among the first neuroscientists to understand microtiming, and among the first technologists to build that understanding into algorithms. Thousands have cited his scientific work, his PhD in Theoretical Physics is from Caltech, his name is on 10 patents and two of the companies he inspired were acquired for \$160 million total.

Reunited by Art and Against the War in Ukraine

Franthiesco Ballerini
November 22, 2022

Ballet stars who fled Russia after the invasion reunite on a stage in California to celebrate art and oppose Russian President Vladimir Putin's war.

When war separates people, arts reunite them. That was the goal celebrated last Saturday in Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, California, where dancers impacted by the war in Ukraine danced together for the first time since the invasion, on February 24th. The one-night-only special ballet performance, *Reunited in Dance*, was simulcasted for visitors in the plaza in front of the concert hall because tickets were sold out in a matter of days. "This is an artistic, not a political event, but of course it's impossible to separate the two, especially because ballet is Russia's most powerful factor of soft power."

The stories behind this special reunion are as touching as the performance presented at René and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. Xander Parish is a British dancer responsible for the choreography. A year ago he married a fellow dancer, Anastasia Demidova. Together they made the decision to leave everything behind without saying anything to their friends in the Mariinsky. "If I had stayed in the Mariinsky Ballet, it would mean things were fine but they weren't, even if I love my mentors and colleagues there. It's sad when politics has that kind of effect on art", says Xander. "It was very hard for every dancer. We are all against the war, but at the same time, we are all grateful to Russia for all it taught us in arts. But it was scary to leave by bus across Finland and Estonia, when airplanes prices charged by Turkish airlines were an extortion" Parish explained.

Texas-born Adrian Blake Mitchell went on to dance six seasons at the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, together with the world-famous ballerina Polina Semionova. When the Russian

invasion of Ukraine took place, flights were canceled and Mitchell found that it was impossible to cross borders with his small dog, Beau, either by train or bus. He took an Uber-like service to cross the Bridge of Friendship, as the border from Russia to Estonia is familiarly referred to. But the FSB agents (Russian security) realized he was American and asked him about his politics, his thoughts on Russia, where he worked and the countries he had traveled too. He broke out in tears when he finally managed to get to the other side of the bridge.

Ukrainian dancer Vsevolod Maevsky, formerly with the Mariinsky Ballet, says he has lost all emotional balance in the present and no plans for the future. “All I want is that my sister and nephew, who decided to stay in Kiev because she didn’t find any jobs elsewhere, may survive, although I get very angry that she didn’t listen to me when I advised her to leave. I feel a lot of contradictory emotion now. I think politics is all about nothing but the money. They don’t care about people. How can we build a new world if we put money and nationalities above people?” Maevsky complained.

Swiss-born Laura Fernandez Gromova is Ukrainian on her mother’s side. Before joining the Mariinsky, she won three top prizes at the Prix de Lausanne ballet competition. She was in Moscow when the war started, but part of her family is in Mariupol, which suffered some of the deadliest bombardment. She still wonders if they are alive. She was advised not to show her Ukrainian passport. After leaving Russia, she thought her career might be over, until she received an invitation to dance at the Georgian National Company.

War’s heartbreak and the humanity of the arts

David Motta Soares left Brazil at the age of 12 to join the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. Living in Russia since that age, he says the decision to leave Russia was one of the hardest in his life, especially after European dance companies started to ban Russian dancers. “That’s sad and impossible. Every major dance company in the world has some Russian artists. Also, we don’t do politics. We bring people joy and happiness. We need to embrace, not exclude people,” says David, who booked an urgent flight to Turkey after the invasion and wrote on his Instagram account, a few days later, that he had quit the Bolshoi, “the place I called home for many years”. He describes the reunion with other dancers in Costa Mesa. “It was a fairytale to meet my colleagues in California and bring some joy in such a difficult moment. Art and sports have that responsibility, to put forward the human side of this war,” says the dancer, who is now in Germany, but with no long-term plans for the future.

The idea for Reunited in Dance was born a few months after the invasion of Ukraine and it was sponsored by Elizabeth Segerstrom and the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation. It premiered *The Ballet Class*, a new ballet choreographed by Xander Parish to Tchaikovsky’s *The Children’s Album*. The program included Christopher Wheeldon’s *After the Rain*, Eric Gauthier’s *Ballet 101*, and Ilya Jivoy’s *BA//CH*, closing with selections of *Swan Lake*, *Le Corsaire*, *Paquita*, *Paquita*, *Don Quixote* and others. Although Reunited in Dance was designed to be a one-night celebration, dancers were so excited with the project and happy with the long

and warm applause of the audience that some of them have plans to join again soon. Parish, for instance, is thinking about forming a ballet company that embraces talents in exile. He explained why. “I believe that the spirit of that place, what we know, what we learned, who we became and who we are, can be preserved, and can be reunited.”,

***Franthiesco Ballerini** is a Brazilian writer, journalist and filmmaker. His book, *Soft Power* — an investigation of the world’s most important cultural influences like Hollywood, tango, anime and Bossa Nova — was a finalist at the 60th Jabuti Awards. His fifth book, *History of World Cinema*, looks at the way different cultures, languages, aesthetics, techniques and industries of the world are portrayed in film. Ballerini is currently pursuing a PhD in media communications.

Qatar Will Change the World Cup Forever

Ellis Cashmore

November 26, 2022

The World Cup is no longer just about football. Humanity is intractably divided, culturally, politically and religiously, and sporting spectacles have and will become a focal point for some of these clashes.

Every World Cup in future will be a cauldron of dispute, confrontation and conflict, a long day’s journey into hostility. Instability and strong emotions will turn what purists once regarded as quadrennial celebrations of global harmony into reminders that humanity is intractably divided, culturally, politically and religiously.

For over 90 years, the World Cup has rivaled the summer Olympics for scope, grandeur and athletic excellence. It still does. But, from this point, it will also be an occasion for gathering forces of dissent. Many will despair at the wrangling that’s changed the character of the 2022 tournament in Qatar, while others will be excited by the way sport can force into world focus problems, affairs or just situations that might otherwise be ignored or dismissed as unworthy of international attention.

Cultural Changes

Twelve years ago, when football’s world governing organization FIFA agreed to let the sheikhdom on the coast of the Persian Gulf with a tiny population of 2,200,000 to host the tournament, the problems posed seemed logistical: weather, accommodation, timing and so on. No one could have known what was coming. The Harvey Weinstein case came to the fore in 2017, and led to the subsequent surge of the MeToo movement. The comparably potent cultural movement of Black Lives Matter that grew after the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in 2020. Gender fluidity and the challenge to the traditional sexual binary. Transgender politics, not only in sport but in every area of society. These were among the cultural shifts that changed ... well, practically everything in society, including perceptions and expectations of sport.

The days when sports governors tried strenuously to prevent political or social issues fouling the onetime pursuit of amateur gentlemen are now gone. Sport is now fully weaponized and the majority of its fans not only accept but insist that it should be used as an instrument for exposing injustices and promoting causes (I have soon-to-be-published research that provides evidence of the rise of politicized fans).

Sports has a mixed record in promoting social change. While it's hailed as partly responsible for bringing down South African apartheid, there is no persuasive evidence that boycotting South African sport was effective in any more than a symbolic way. The memorable black power salutes at the Mexico Olympics of 1968 are now iconic reminders of the fight against racism in the USA, though many neglect how athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who gestured with their gloved fists, were actually punished and demonized at the time rather than vaunted. Muhammad Ali is often regarded as champion of civil rights as much as a boxer, though, in 1964, when he dropped his name Cassius Clay and converted to the Nation of Islam he was attacked for his separatist philosophy.

Criticism of Qatar or Islam?

Some believe revealing Qatar's exploitative treatment of migrant workers and its admonition of homosexuality will hasten a change in both. In the first instance, this is possible. In the second, unimaginable. Islam decrees that homosexuality is sinful. No Islamic country on earth, nor any Muslim, whether in the middle east, Britain, USA or anywhere else will demur. Qatar is among at least eleven other countries that consider homosexuality a capital offense, which may be punishable by death.

At this point, I should perhaps declare an interest: I am a white, cisgender heterosexual male, born in the UK, part-educated in Canada, having lived in Asia and the USA. In common with other sociologists, I understand the deep cultural significance of religion, but believe in the primacy of humanity, making me atheist. I am also reflexive, meaning that I don't accept there is a neutral position from which to assess cultures: the very fact of my existence implicates me in culture and precludes objective analysis. I remain aware that I am steeped in the culture of my upbringing and mature development. So, while I've supported gay rights and opposed racism for my adult life and argue against others who do not, I try to resist privileging my own culture over all others. I include this detail because my interpretation of much of the recent condemnation of Qatar is that it is a disguised attack on Islam.

Close to a quarter of the world's human population are Muslims. I find the Islamic code on homosexuality repugnant. I also acknowledge that its source is in faith and no amount of argument will change this. So, when Qatar is described by western journalists as "medieval," it discloses a sneering, ignorant disrespect. And, when I hear western Europeans, who are not Muslims, describing their commitment to "cultural inclusiveness" or "inclusivity," I suspect they mean excluding any party that disagrees with popular western principles, standards and values.

Intolerance is an old-fashioned word so maybe neo-intolerance is how we should describe the new form of western cultural pompousness. The affectedly -- and usually self-congratulatory -- manner with which west European liberals make pronouncements on practically anything that

deviates from their own rules of thought and conduct is sure to be challenged. Possibly by the time of the next World Cup.

Politics and the 2026 World Cup

The 2026 World Cup will be shared by three hosts all from the same land mass and all predominantly Christian: Canada, USA and Mexico. Not all countries are equally worthy of opprobrium, of course. The USA will bear the heaviest burden, with laws on the possession of firearms framed in the nineteenth century (far from medieval) and laws on abortion that were reformed in 1973, but which may by the time of the World Cup, be retroceded to the 1820s. Mexico decriminalized abortion only last year. As for Canada, that perennially inoffensive territory in the north, consider: last year, Pope Francis publicly apologized for the 150,000 indigenous children who were separated from their families and taken to residential Catholic schools where they were beaten, starved and sexually abused, between 1881-1996. This will be one of a number of concerns regarding indigenous people that will surface when the World Cup arrives.

Once more, there will be sanctimonious critics offering their insight, resonance and misplaced sense of superiority. There will also be earnest interrogation that will lead to useful and possibly productive developments. Qatar is not going to abandon Islam, but its citizens live on planet earth, eat, work, catch buses and do many of the same things as the rest of the world. That includes examining their lives from time to time -- as we all do. They have been made forcibly and, I am guessing, uncomfortably aware of what many others regard as their shortcomings and may choose to revise them accordingly in future.

What is football for?

Football is ridiculous, isn't it? Eleven grown men kicking a ball in one direction while another eleven grown men try to stop them and move the ball the other way. Can you think of anything more trivial and purposeless? The attention granted the World Cup might lead a friendly alien to assume the tournament takes us closer to world peace, or finding a cure for cancer, or maybe saving the planet from self-destruction. It does none of these things. But this sporting wasteland may yet produce some good: if, as I expect, World Cups from this point become cultural tinderboxes, then they might cease to be trivial and conjure larger, more meaningful campaigns that will bring genuine benefits.

Those who wish football and other sports to ablate themselves of politics will rue the day FIFA awarded the 2022 World Cup to what was once a British protectorate where they speak Arabic and which got rich through its oil. But the sustained fury the decision has engendered may yet be the greatest blessing, not to football, but to the world.

Ellis Cashmore's latest book is "The Destruction and Creation of Michael Jackson."

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A New Fusing of Japanese-Aussie Synergies in the Indo-Pacific

Ved Shinde

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A rising China is pushing Australia and Japan closer. Both want a free and open Indo-Pacific. Therefore, they are cooperating to counter China's efforts to dominate this region.

Australia and Japan have been in the news lately. The prime ministers of both countries got together to issue a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC). They reaffirmed their vital “Special Strategic Partnership.” The two leaders also promised to “strengthen economic security, particularly through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative.” So security now includes not only defense but also economics.

The Dragon in the Room

Why is love in the air for Australia and Japan?

The answer is simple: China.

The Middle Kingdom has taken an increasingly assertive posture in the Indo-Pacific. Beijing has made “historical claims” on the Senkaku islands claimed by Tokyo. It has increased its military maneuvers in the South and East China Seas, building artificial islands and bases. Closer to Canberra, China has intensified maritime activities in the South Pacific islands. It has even signed a pact with the strategically located Solomon

islands. Such actions have fuelled insecurity in Tokyo and Canberra.

On the economic front, new realities have emerged. After the economic liberalization in the Deng Xiaoping era, China grew rapidly. Given the gigantic Chinese market, most Asian countries wanted to prosper from the China story. Trade increased exponentially.

China-Japan trade grew dramatically as well. In 2021, China was Japan's biggest trade partner and the trade volume crossed \$370 billion. China-Australia trade grew too and reached \$245 billion in 2020. Under Chinese President Xi Jinping, the country began to weaponize trade and bully its trading partners into submission. When Australia called for an independent probe into the origins of the COVID-19 virus, Beijing responded with a range of strict trade reprisals against Australian imports. Naturally, this made policymakers in Tokyo and Canberra cautious. They are attempting to change their trading patterns and rely less on China.

Strange Bedfellows

A century ago, Australia feared “economic infiltration” and racial takeover by the Japanese. In 1901, Australia implemented its White Australia Policy to exclude non-white immigrants and keep Australia a European nation. In World War II, both Japan and Australia were locked in a bitter conflict in Papua New Guinea. Mutual suspicion ran high and bilateral relations reached the nadir. In those years, Australia increasingly looked towards the US and Western Europe for identity, inspiration and security. It did not want much to do with its near abroad full of ragtag Asians. Much of Asia,

especially Japan, saw Australia as a genocidal white outpost in their neighborhood.

In the 1950s and 1960s, mutual suspicion decreased. Both Japan and Australia were worried about a rising Indonesia. They shared concerns about Indonesian strongman Sukarno who was one of the founding fathers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). As American allies, Japan and Australia were naturally concerned about Sukarno's nationalist assertions and NAM.

As a result, Intelligence cooperation between Japan and Australia slowly grew. This was accompanied by a commerce treaty signed in 1957 between Tokyo and Canberra. Gradually, closer economic ties decreased historic suspicions. Japan became Australia's largest trading partner from the late 1960s onwards to 2007 when China replaced it. Additionally, Japan and Australia were also part of the American security architecture in the region. The US-led hub and spoke system contained the communists in the region during the Cold War.

Unpacking the Updated JSDC

As pointed out earlier, the new JSDC signed by Tokyo and Canberra comes at a time of rising Chinese ambition. Xi's China seeks to extend its sphere of influence in Asia. Beijing's rising influence comes at the cost of regional powers who do not subscribe to the Chinese worldview. They are anxious and want to oppose China. As a result, Asia is profoundly fractured.

In this new geopolitical scenario, the JSDC makes sense. It builds local capacity to counter China. Japan and Australia do not entirely have to rely on the US to maintain peace and stability in the region. Both countries are deepening their military

partnership. They are increasing interoperability, intelligence sharing, military exercises and defense activities on each other's territories,

The two powers further seek to build on the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) signed in January 2022. Besides Australia, the US is the only country with which Japan has signed the RAA. Japan also has an Acquisition and Cross-servicing Agreement (ACSA) with Australia. This agreement allows reciprocal provision of supplies and services between their defense forces. They are also collaborating in space, cyber and regional capacity building.

The JDSC marks a shift in traditional Japanese reluctance to act proactively on military matters. In the last few decades, Japan punched under its weight in military issues. This was primarily due to its war-renouncing constitution. The updated JSDC reflects the internal debate in Japan over the role of its military and the country's role in the world. Various Japanese strategists have called for revising Japan's National Security Strategy. They are pushing for Japan to take an active regional role. Moreover, policymakers in Canberra are also stepping on the gas. Australia is on a shopping spree for military technologies from nuclear-powered submarines to unmanned aircraft and hypersonic missiles.

The JSDC's focus on intelligence cooperation is significant because both Japan and Australia have formidable geospatial capabilities in electronic eavesdropping and high-tech satellites. Experts believe that such intelligence cooperation will also provide a template for Japan to deepen intelligence cooperation with like-minded partners.

Secure Economics and Regional Dynamics

Japan and Australia now recognize that economics is closely tied to security. In this new deglobalizing world, words like friendshoring and secure supply chains have come into play. OPEC+ has cut oil production despite repeated US requests and sided with Russia. The US and the UK first supplied vaccines to their own populations before giving them to Europe or Asia. China used personal protective equipment for its people during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, Tokyo and Canberra want to set up a secure economic relationship in what the Pentagon calls a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world.

The Russia-Ukraine War has hit Japan hard. The country imports most of its energy. Supplies from Russia's Sakhalin-2 project have stopped and Japan faces an energy shortage. Rising energy prices have increased its expenses and increased input costs for its products. Therefore, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has made energy resilience a priority. In this context, Australia is a reliable and valuable energy supplier to Japan. Already, Canberra is Tokyo's biggest supplier of LNG and coal. Both countries seek to deepen this relationship.

Both countries have further announced an Australia-Japan critical minerals partnership. These minerals include rare earths that are crucial in clean energy technologies like solar panels, electric vehicles and batteries. These could well be the oil of the future. Japan as a leader in many of these technologies and Australia as an exporter of minerals might have a win-win long term relationship on the cards.

The US also figures prominently in the updated JDSC. Japan and Australia have asked Washington to fill in the gaps for sustainable infrastructure needs. This is part of the role the Quad — the US, Japan, India, and Australia — seeks to play in countering China's Belt and Road Initiative.

To counter China, Japan and Australia also support ASEAN's centrality in the Indo-Pacific. They have also reiterated their desire to implement the 2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific Continent through the Pacific Islands Forum. This initiative seeks to develop cooperation with Pacific Island countries in critical infrastructure, disaster recovery, and maritime security. This is a multilateral play to counter the Big Brother model that China follows and provide assistance for smaller countries from medium-sized powers they trust. Japan and Australia share concerns about Myanmar and North Korea as well.

In the new world order that is emerging, regional powers are assuming more importance. The US is tired after two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It cannot write a blank check for Indo-Pacific security and single-handedly take on China. Therefore, the US is leaning on allies to step up. This makes the updated JSDC important. In the words of Professor Haruko Satoh of Osaka University, "Strengthening the Japan-Australia partnership is crucial for the US-led hub and spokes security system in Asia."

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