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Fair Observer^o
Independence, Diversity, Debate

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Is the Gold Standard Now Alive or Dead?

Alex Gloy
January 06, 2023

The current monetary system is unsustainable. The Bretton Woods gold standard system collapsed. Can another form of gold standard make a comeback?

For the first time in 40 years, inflation has spiked in developed markets, reaching double digits in many countries. Calls for a return to a gold standard are getting louder. The list of supporters includes names such as former US president Donald Trump, the American Institute for Economic Research, and US politician Ron Paul. In 2022, US Congressman Alexander Mooney went as far as introducing a bill to “define the dollar as a fixed weight of gold”.

Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank, in a 2016 interview stated “If we went back to the gold standard as it existed prior to 1913 it would be fun. Remember that the period 1873 to 1913 was one of the most progressive periods economically that we have had in the United States.”

Current chairman Jerome Powell, however, does not think a return to the gold standard would be a good idea. Economist John Maynard Keynes famously referred to gold as a “barbarous relic,” which was no longer needed as a backing for currency.

What is a gold standard and why is gold valuable?

A gold standard is a monetary system where a country’s currency has its value linked to gold. This can be done directly, by setting a fixed price of gold to the dollar, or indirectly, by other currencies setting a fixed price in relation to the dollar, thereby linking indirectly to gold. One could imagine a full gold standard, where 100% of paper money issued must be backed by gold. Another option is a partial backing, covering only a fraction of money supply that is backed by gold. Under the Bretton Woods currency system, only non-US official holders of dollars (i.e. central banks) were able to exchange dollars into gold at the fixed price of \$35 per ounce. Private ownership of gold in the US was outlawed under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933. President Ford legalized gold ownership in 1974.

The amount of above-ground gold is limited (estimated around 200,000 tonnes). The amount of gold contained in ores has been declining as most rich deposits have been exploited. The average grade of gold mines has fallen to 1 to 5 grams per ton. Large amounts of energy are needed (to crush and transport rock, for example), limiting how much gold can be economically mined. Over the past decade, annual mining output ranged from 2,800–3,600 tonnes, adding less than two percent annually to the stock of gold available.

ProsAnd cons of a gold standard

The idea behind a gold standard is to ensure a stable currency that is the bedrock of a well-functioning economy. A currency collapse impoverishes large sections of the population. This could lead to political extremism, and, ultimately, threaten democracy. Historians point out how hyperinflation in Germany led to the rise of Nazis.

There are several advantages to a gold standard, which are as follows:

1. Linking the growth of money supply to the growth of gold stocks would keep inflation in check, thereby ensuring monetary stability.
2. Government spending would be limited to the amount of tax receipts. Any deficit financing via debt issuance would require additional gold.
3. Central banks would be immune from political pressure as the amount of money in circulation is determined by gold.

However, there are considerable drawbacks, which are as follows:

1. Under a gold standard, growth of money in circulation would be severely restricted and could suffocate economic growth.
2. Fixed supply of money would be deflationary, and most likely lead to a period of depression with bankruptcies and high unemployment.
3. The expansion of money supply would depend on successful gold mining operations and continued investment in exploration of new deposits.
4. Gold standards in the past might only have worked because the stock of existing gold was much lower. So an increase in the stock of gold was possible. The 46% growth rate of gold stock between 1900 and 1909 would be impossible to repeat today.
5. Policy makers would be unable to respond to economic shocks.
6. Not all countries have equal access to gold for lack of gold mines or existing reserves.

7. International trade deficits, if settled in gold, would, over time, lead to a depletion of gold reserves, leading to a balance of payments crisis coupled with the inability to pay for critical imports.
8. In the (unlikely) event that the amount of gold available would allow for additional debt to be issued, who would be entitled to do so? The government? Banks? Households? Who would decide on who has access to fresh debt?

The problem with a gold standard

In August 1971, US President Richard Nixon “temporarily” suspended the convertibility of the US dollar into gold, effectively ending the gold standard. Since then, the total amount of US dollar debt outstanding has increased from \$1.6 billion to \$92 trillion — an annual expansion rate of 8%. During the same time, gross domestic product (GDP) has grown from \$1.1 billion to \$25.7 trillion, an annual increase of 5.8%. Debt, synonymous with “money,” is growing faster than GDP.

Most economic activity is dependent on the availability of credit. An increase of average 30-year mortgage rates in the US from 2.7% at the end of 2020 to over 7% in October 2022 has led to a decrease in existing home sales from 6.5 million to 4.1 million, a 36% reduction. Potential homeowners without access to debt would have to accumulate the entire purchase price through savings for an “all-cash” deal, which would exclude most people from being able to afford a home in their lifetime.

Proponents often counter that a gold standard could be flexible, with adjustments of the amount of gold backing (downwards) or the price of gold (upwards, hence devaluing the currency) as necessary. But how would that be different from

the current system? A flexible gold standard would let imbalances accumulate over time, require large adjustments, introduce speculation, financial friction, and potentially unintended consequences. The cure could turn out to be worse than the disease.

The current monetary system is unsustainable

The current fiat monetary system seems unsustainable in the long run, for mathematical reasons.

First, it is impossible to create money without simultaneously creating an equal amount of debt. The current system is “damned” to increase debt continuously to enable the economy to grow. Given positive interest rates, debt with interest owed is an exponential function (interest on interest in subsequent periods), which is a problem in a world of finite resources.

Second, the marginal utility of debt has decreased as debt levels increased. Since 2007, US GDP increased by \$11 trillion, while the amount of debt outstanding grew by \$40 trillion. In other words, an additional dollar of debt generates only 27 cents of additional GDP. Interest on debt is owed annually (and increases the debt pile), while GDP resets on January 1st to zero. It gets harder and harder to generate additional GDP with additional debt.

Third, the amount of interest due on rising debt levels is reaching dangerous levels. According to the Institute of International Finance (IIF), the global ratio of debt to GDP stands at 343%. If we (generously) assume an interest rate of three percent, more than 10% of GDP is siphoned off the economy for interest payments – every year. This does not even include repayment of principal.

Is return to the gold standard inevitable?

Would a crisis or collapse in the current system open the way for a return to the gold standard? Central banks, while denying gold had any monetary function, still hold more than 36,000 tonnes of gold valued at more than \$2 trillion at current market prices (\$1,838 per ounce; 1 metric tonne = 32,150.75 troy ounces). Central banks reduced their gold holdings from 1968 to 2008. Interestingly, gold sales ceased after the “Great Financial Crisis” of 2008/9, and central banks began purchasing between 250 and 750 tonnes annually.

Over the past two decades, purchases have been led by countries mostly outside the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), led by Russia (1,875 tonnes), China (1,447 tonnes), India (428 tonnes), Turkey (373 tonnes) and Kazakhstan (324 tonnes).

In absolute terms, the largest holders of gold are the US (8,133 tonnes), Germany (3,355 tonnes), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), (2,814 tonnes), Italy (2,452 tonnes) and France (2,437 tonnes), mostly “old world” countries. Members of the euro-area, including the European Central Bank (ECB), hold a combined 10,771 tonnes. But none of those countries are adding to their holdings, since doing so could signal to markets a dwindling confidence in their own currencies. Emerging market economies have, in absolute terms and relative to GDP, to catch up to developed ones.

The advantage of gold holdings is evident: in a currency crisis, a central bank could arbitrarily set a (dramatically increased) gold price, thereby realizing a large revaluation gain on existing gold holdings. Euro-area central banks could, for example, by raising the price of gold ten-fold, generate a book gain of roughly 6 trillion euros. In a recent interview, Klaas Knot, Governor of the

Central Bank of the Netherlands, suggested gold revaluation as a tool to remedy any solvency crisis.

As a bonus, gold revaluation would lead to windfall profits at private owners, potentially providing consumers with a boost in otherwise dire economic circumstances. According to reports, German citizens privately hold more gold than the Bundesbank, Germany's central bank.

For the US, the outcome is less clear. Data on private ownership of gold in the US is not available. The Federal Reserve, unbeknown to most, does not own any gold. The Gold Reserve Act of 1934 required it to transfer all of its gold to the Treasury. In exchange, the Fed received a "non-redeemable gold certificate," valued at the "statutory" gold price of \$42.22 per ounce, a fraction of today's market price (\$1,838 per ounce). The Fed is "owed" 261 million ounces, but only at the book value of \$11 billion, due to the mandatory gold price of \$42.22. More than 75% of US gold is actually controlled by the military, as it is stored at West Point and Fort Knox.

The European Central Bank (ECB), on the other hand, values its gold at market prices (currently worth around EUR 600 billion, about \$633 billion), listing it above all other assets. The ECB is free to sell or buy gold in the market.

The Federal Reserve cannot sell any gold since it does not own any. It might also have difficulties buying gold at market prices since this would, due to the above-mentioned mandatory gold price of \$42.22, create an immediate loss on the position.

The Fed's hands are tied regarding gold. As the issuer of the world's reserve currency, demonetizing gold was necessary for the dollar to replace gold as prime reserve asset for central banks around the world.

This reveals a fundamental rift across the Atlantic Ocean: European central bankers are, albeit covertly, gold-friendly, the Federal Reserve is not. The former is ready to use gold as a tool to recapitalize its central bank (and subsequently commercial banks), while the latter is not.

In case of a break-down of the current monetary system, an international conference (akin to Bretton Woods) would unlikely be able to agree on a common position on the role of gold. This would signify the end of the dollar as the world's reserve currency. In the ensuing turmoil, market participants would value currencies issued by central banks with sufficient gold holdings. Central banks will not revert to a gold standard, given before mentioned disadvantages, but use their revalued holdings to restore confidence in the continued use of paper currencies.

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The Tigray War Was Tragic, Can Peace Prevail Now?

Martin Plaut
January 09, 2023

On 28 December 2022, flights by Ethiopian Airlines resumed to the wartorn northern region of Tigray. A plane landed at Mekelle, Tigray's regional capital. There were emotional scenes. Families who had not seen each other since the war began in November 2020 were

hugging each other and crying. Social media showed passengers kissing the ground at the foot of the aircraft steps.

It was a dramatic indication that the war might be coming to an end. Two years of fighting between the Tigrayans and government forces from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, supported by regional militia have taken a terrible toll. The conflict is estimated to have resulted in the deaths of 250,000 troops. An estimated 383,000 to 600,000 civilians have died. Since it erupted the Tigray War has been the scene of the bloodiest, and one of the least reported, conflicts. Unlike Ukraine or Afghanistan, journalists have been forbidden from traveling to the front lines. So, no news has got out.

Peace in our time?

The peace deal was brokered in November 2022 in Pretoria and Nairobi. These agreements allowed for a ceasefire, aid flows and the deployment of African Union-led monitors who would oversee the re-establishment of Ethiopian government authority over Tigray.

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the party that dominates the region, promised to disarm its fighters within 30 days under the agreement. That was signed on November 2. It has still not been completed, at least in part, because the text contained the provision that this would “depend on the security situation on the ground.”

As Patrick Wight wrote, the subsequent Nairobi agreement “states that disarmament of the Tigray Defence Forces’s heavy weapons will be “done concurrently with the withdrawal of foreign and non-ENDF (Ethiopian National Defence Forces) from the region.” What a “concurrent” disarmament of TDF and withdrawal of Eritrean

troops looks like in practice is anyone’s guess. It would be positive if this means the alarmingly rapid disarmament provisions agreed to in Pretoria will be delayed.

It has been the Eritreans that have been holding up progress. At the end of December there were eyewitness reports of Eritrean forces leaving Tigrayan towns. “Eritrean soldiers, who fought in support of Ethiopia's federal government during its two-year civil war in the northern Tigray region, are pulling out of two major towns and heading toward the border, witnesses and an Ethiopian official,” Reuters reported.

Others are less certain. Tigrayan refugees fear that the Eritreans remain in parts of the region. Tigrayans have posted photographs of Eritreans in Tigrayan cities on Twitter, including Adwa.

Meanwhile, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki has been claiming “victory” for his forces over the Tigrayans. “My pride has no bounds”, he said in his New Year message. But the Eritrean leader is taking no chances. He is reported to be training dissident Ethiopians in case his relationship with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed goes sour.

Afwerki previously used foreign troops to threaten neighboring leaders with the use of force. In 2011, the United Nations reported that Eritrea was behind a planned “massive” attack on an African Union summit in Addis Ababa, using Ethiopian rebels. It would be wrong to assume that a similar attack is now on the cards, but training dissidents could be a tactic to maintain pressure on Ahmed.

Maintaining tension and instability across the Horn of Africa has been a tactic the Eritrean leader has used consistently since capturing Asmara, the Eritrean capital, in 1991. Since then, Afwerki has led his country into no fewer than eight different conflicts – from Somalia to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

How will Europe and the US respond?

US President Joe Biden has been assiduous in attempting to end the fighting in Tigray. Biden appointed special envoys to the Horn of Africa as soon as he came to office. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken went out of his way to meet Ahmed during the US-Africa summit in December. He raised the question of peace with Ahmed as well as the ending of the Eritrean troop presence in Tigray. Some wags have suggested that the peace agreements signed in Pretoria and Nairobi were so closely linked to Washington's efforts they should be termed "US solutions to African problems" – clearly, a play on the phrase "African solutions to African problems."

The key question now is whether sufficient progress has been made to lift the American and European sanctions against Ethiopia. They were introduced to try to end the war. In the words of Jeffrey Feltman, the former US special envoy to the Horn: "The United States and the European Union hoped that, combined with emergency humanitarian assistance, punitive measures such as the threat of sanctions and the withholding of development aid would halt the atrocities and move the parties from the battlefield to the negotiating table." While the two parties did come to the negotiating table, it is unclear if the peace in Tigray is sustainable.

After two years of war, Ethiopia's economy is said to be on the verge of collapse. The country needs nearly \$20bn for its reconstruction. The EU Foreign Affairs Council is due to meet in Brussels on January 23 and one of the issues on their agenda is the possible unfreezing of hundreds of millions of euros pledged in aid to Addis Ababa. Since 2021, the EU froze nearly \$210m in aid to Ethiopia, following the draconian blockade Addis Ababa imposed on the Tigray region. The money is badly needed and it is not yet clear what strings the Europeans may attach to the lifting of sanctions.

For Eritrea, the picture is clearer: Washington has no time for Afwerki and is likely to keep the president under pressure. Afwerki is already so isolated that it is unlikely that he cares greatly about western attitudes. He prefers to rely on his Arab neighbors, China and possibly Russia for international support. Eritrea will keep playing its game of promoting Ethiopian rebels to retain relevance in the region. This is bad news for Ethiopia and prospects of peace.

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Benedict XVI's Death Ends Rare Era: Pope Francis Now In-Charge

Vas Shenoy
January 13, 2023

Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI shared the stage for one final time. The Argentine pope bowed his head and placed his hand on his German predecessor's casket before it was carried away. With the traditionalist pope dead, the reformist pope has a free hand.

“**B**lessed, faithful friend of the bridegroom, may your joy be perfect in hearing his voice definitively and forever,” thus Pope Francis concluded his homily for his predecessor Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, whose passing on the last day of 2022 brought to a close the historic European-Italian control of the Holy Roman Church. Polish Pope John Paul II was the first non-Italian, European pope since the 16th century, followed by German Cardinal Ratzinger who assumed charge as Pope Benedict XVI.

Pope Francis, who was Cardinal Bergoglio before he assumed charge as pope, is the first Latin American pope in the history of Christianity and the first non-European pope in over 1,300 years since 741 AD. It is also the first time in the history of the Holy See that a reigning Pope has officiated the funeral of his predecessor. Notably, it has been over 600 years since there have been two popes at the same time.

The two men shared the stage for one final time at Benedict XVI’s funeral, with Pope Francis being escorted on a wheelchair 15 feet from Benedict XVI’s coffin. Their last image included a final, indelible gesture: Pope Francis bowing his head and placing his hand on the casket of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI before it was carried away, which concluded the uneasy coexistence of the two for over a decade.

A battle for the future of the Catholic Church

Amid repeated crises, leaks, and scandals at the Vatican, Benedict XVI decided to relinquish the position of the Roman pontiff in February 2013. However, he curiously chose to retain the title of “Pope-Emeritus.” This move was criticized by traditionalists. A leading light of canon law and former rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Jesuit Gianfranco Ghirlanda refuted the legitimacy of the figure of “pope emeritus” in a

long and thoroughly substantiated article. Published on March 2, 2013 in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, this piece was printed after review and authorization by the Vatican secretariat of state as are all articles in this publication.

Benedict XVI’s passing now closes this phase of “two popes.” However, the funeral has led to fresh attacks on the papacy of Pope Francis and demarcated clear fault lines within the Roman Catholic Church. Traditionalists, who unitedly saw Pope Benedict XVI as their flag bearer, are arrayed against reformists who support Pope Francis. This divide also opens questions about the future of the Vatican and the Catholic faith, which is fragmented in Europe, much like politics in the continent.

The first salvo was fired even before Benedict XVI’s funeral by Archbishop Georg Gänswein, head of the Prefecture of the Pontifical Household and possibly Pope Benedict XVI’s closest aide. The traditionalists have a list of complaints against Pope Francis, from ignoring Benedict XVI’s advice on “gender propaganda” to putting a stop to the traditional Latin mass inside the Vatican.

In 2019, Pope Emeritus wrote a 6,000-word letter devoted to clerical sex abuse in which he attributed the crisis to a breakdown of church and societal moral teaching. The letter lamented the secularization of the West. It pointed to the 1960s sexual revolution as a toxic development following which seminaries filled up with “homosexual cliques.” This contradicted Pope Francis’s official position, which blamed the power and corruption of the clergy for sexual abuse.

The conflict is not just theological but also cultural. Often it seems that Pope Francis, who continues to behave at times like a simple priest, strongly opposes the traditionalist elitist behavior of the Pontifex Maximus. For instance, he disagrees strongly with the powerful president of

the US Conference of Bishops, Monsignor Timothy Broglio, who stands accused of behaving as a “Yankee” in 2016. Apparently, Broglio promoted US political interests in the church and condoned the behavior of the US army in Iraq. Pope Francis has a very different point of view.

Traditionalists v. Reformists

Broglio, like Gänswein, is a traditionalist. He served as the secretary of the legendary Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the second most powerful man in the Vatican during John Paul II’s papacy. The US bishops that Broglio represents are uneasy about Pope Francis’s treatment of the second Catholic to enter the White House: US President Joe Biden. The president supports abortion and considers himself a practicing Catholic. Yet Biden was asked to stay away from Benedict XVI’s funeral by the Vatican. However, Biden enjoys a warm relationship with Pope Francis despite his political positions on abortion and gender, which oppose the traditionalist dogma of the church.

The US bishops would like Pope Francis to exert his influence on the US President but the pope refuses to do so. Though few in number, US cardinals contribute significantly to the coffers of the Vatican. This venerable institution is now facing a major financial crisis in addition to a political one.

Traditionalists are already discussing the next conclave, which will be conducted after Francis’s death or resignation. By the end of 2022, Pope Francis had appointed 113 cardinals. Of these, 83 qualify to elect the next pope. Note that there are a total of 132 cardinals who get to elect the pope..

Now with a free hand at reform with the death of Benedict XVI, it is expected that Pope Francis will pack the College of Cardinals with reformists. They will further his agenda of promoting nuns and women to senior positions, allowing married

men into the priesthood in areas that lack priests and opening senior Vatican positions, so far open only to clergy, to lay Catholics. Traditionalists believe this would be a disaster for the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis has also been actively involved in climate change discussions and improving relations with Islam. He has preferred to visit countries where Catholics are a minuscule minority instead of those where the Catholic Church is popular and growing. Traditionalists find this counterproductive at a time when churches are empty and the Vatican’s finances are dwindling. They would rather have Pope Francis visit countries in Asia and Latin America where Catholics remain devout and their numbers are increasing.

Power, influence, and transparency

As head of state, the Pope also has the world’s most efficient and sophisticated intelligence service at his disposal. While the Vatican has never had a formal intelligence service, it is common knowledge that Pope John Paul II played a key role in the fall of the Berlin Wall. Apparently, the Polish pope used the Vatican’s network and collaborated with the CIA to undermine godless communism. With its global foothold, from the deepest forests of Africa to the favelas of Latin America, from remote tribal areas in India to the dark jungles of Indonesia, the Vatican has access to hundreds of millions of the faithful as well as priests on the ground living in communities. It has developed strong relationships with intelligence services worldwide due to its access and sources. The Vatican’s information sources are trusted, loyal, and local.

Pope Francis’s church has striven for economic and political transparency. It has thus weakened the church’s power with intelligence agencies. Under the Argentine pope, the Vatican has focused

more on its pastoral role rather than its Cold War role of the protector of the faithful.

Pope Francis prefers to use a network of close, trustworthy associates than rely on orders like the Opus Dei. Cardinals and the heads of the orders have always lobbied to have the papal ear and one of the most important currencies is information. This defines the influence they exert in the Holy See. During the papacy of John Paul II and even Benedict XVI, Opus Dei was extremely powerful. Now, the Society of Jesus (“Jesuits”) — the order from which Pope Francis comes from — is far more powerful.

Traditionalists also vocally oppose a secretive Vatican-China agreement signed in 2018. The Holy See has not had relations with China since 1951 and recognizes the Republic of China (Taiwan) instead of the People’s Republic of China. However, under Pope Francis, the Vatican signed a two-year agreement with the People’s Republic of China in 2018. It was renewed in October 2020 despite US opposition. Last year, this agreement was further renewed for another two years despite the fact that the Vatican had accused China of violating it in November 2022.

Although this agreement does not recognize communist China, it is seen as a betrayal by Roman Catholics of the underground Catholic churches in Hong Kong and Mainland China. Many see it as capitulation to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As in the case of Tibetan Buddhism, the CCP tries to control Roman Catholicism by appointing bishops and controlling religious activity. In October 2018, CCP officials destroyed Marian shrines in China, just as they have recently demolished Buddhist shrines dedicated to Padmasambhava in China-occupied Tibet.

China is just one political nightmare that the pope, as the head of state, must deal with. Minority

Catholics and Christians who feel abandoned by the church in the Middle East, including Palestine, is another nightmare. The spread of Islam in Africa and Southeast Asia at the cost of Christianity is causing the Vatican concern. In Pope Francis’s Latin America, the spread of evangelical churches at the cost of the Roman Catholic church is a powerful phenomenon. In India, the government is finally challenging the centuries-old policy of proselytization. Like Jesus, Pope Francis is truly wearing a crown of thorns.

Critics wonder if the 86-year-old Pope Francis, who suffers from a litany of ailments, is up to the challenge of rejuvenating and reforming a nearly 2000-year-old institution rather set in its ways. After Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’s passing, the ailing Argentine pope ruled out his resignation.

On January 1, a new papacy of Francis I began without the intrigues of a conclave. His statements reveal that the world is unlikely to see two popes again. With the conservative Benedict XVI gone, Pope Francis will now try to turn the Vatican inside out.

[[Conner Tighe](#) edited this article.]

(In an era of a global pandemic, social media wars and explosively evolving geopolitics, the human spirit and its expression have suffered the most. With apologies to Edward Morgan Forster, “Rome, with a View” is a view of humanity from an interesting perspective. The author, a third culture kid, gathers from his various perches in the eternal city of Rome — Caput Mundi, the capital of the ancient world — the whispers of wisdom through the ages imperfectly and perhaps even unwisely.)

***Vas Shenoy** is a journalist, writer, entrepreneur and student of human thought. He is the founder of Dialogue on Democracy, which aims at bringing

together thought leaders and politicians from democracies globally to encourage a new geopolitical dialogue. For the past 24 years, Vas has worked with corporations, governments and multilateral institutions in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Vas believes he has a unique worldview from his local caffè in Rome where he lives.

US Emergency Departments Are Overstretched and Doctors Burned Out

Jennifer Wider
January 15, 2023

With gridlocked emergency departments, patients waiting for beds, doctors overwhelmed and exhausted, US healthcare is on the verge of a breakdown.

In recent months, emergency departments across the United States have been brought to their knees. A problem that became highlighted during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic is now seeping into the fabric of American hospital care with not enough inpatient beds, exhausted and burnt out doctors and nurses and staffing shortages almost universal.

Dr. Eric Dickson, president and CEO of UMass Memorial Health in Central Massachusetts told the *The Boston Globe*: “When health officials ordered an end to elective surgeries during Covid-19, it was understood to be temporary. The difference now is we don’t see the end. We’re not seeing the

light at the end of the tunnel. This isn’t a surge we’re dealing with. This is the new reality.”

Boarding is wrecking emergency departments

One significant cause of the trouble is something called boarding which occurs when a patient is held in the emergency department after they have been admitted to the hospital because there are no inpatient beds available. In a letter written to President Joseph Biden by more than 30 medical academies and national associations, including the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), the American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM) and the Emergency Nurses Association, healthcare leaders implore the administration to recognize and address these most pressing issues. “Boarding has become its own public health emergency and our nation’s safety net is on the verge of breaking beyond repair.”

The letter goes on to outline the underlying issues caused by boarding, “while the causes of ED boarding are multifactorial, unprecedented and rising staffing shortages throughout the healthcare system have recently brought this issue to a crisis point, further spiraling the stress and burnout driving the current exodus of excellent physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals.”

The winter months have brought this crisis to a head. In many parts of the United States, a “triple threat” of flu, Covid-19 surges and RSV or respiratory syncytial virus in the pediatric population is placing an insurmountable burden on the emergency departments across the country. The letter goes on to ask the President: “the undersigned organizations hereby urge the Administration to convene a summit of stakeholders from across the healthcare system to identify immediate and long-term solutions to this urgent problem. The letter explains that the “breaking point” is completely outside the control

of the workers and looks to the administration for help.

Doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers burnout

Another issue compounding the present crisis is healthcare worker burnout. The American Medical Association (AMA) recently released a study revealing that almost 63% of physicians felt burned out in 2021. And these statistics aren't reserved solely for doctors; nurses, physician assistants, technicians and other healthcare workers are reporting similar burnout numbers. Feelings of burnout and being overwhelmed are plaguing the American health workforce and reflect a systemic breakdown in healthcare. According to ChrisineSinsky, MD, AMA vice president of professional satisfaction: "While burnout manifests in individuals, it originates in systems." Burnout is not the result of a deficiency in resiliency among physicians, rather it is due to the systems in which physicians work."

Looking for a Safe Place in Facebook's Digital Universe

The rate of burnout is a major contributing factor to staffing shortages and needs to be addressed. The letter addressed to President Biden recognizes this issue and calls for solutions: "Overcrowding and boarding in the emergency department is a significant and ever-growing contributor to physician and nurse burnout, as they must watch patients unnecessarily decompensate or die despite their best efforts to keep up with the growing flood of sicker and sicker patients coming in."

Healthcare workers who experience burnout have a much higher rate of early retirement and/or leaving the practice of medicine altogether. It also directly contributes to the loss of skilled healthcare professionals, adding more strain to those left behind. The letter states: "It is critical that we end

the burnout cycle in the emergency departments to ensure our nation's health care workforce can meet the needs of its patient population."

It is quite clear what problems are facing the healthcare system in the United States. And with this crisis looming over the heads of millions of Americans, it will be imperative for the government and its agencies to recognize the scope of the problem and to act accordingly.

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War Is Now Turning Dangerous: What Can Europe Do?

John Bruton
January 20, 2023

The Russia-Ukraine War could go horribly wrong and Europe is unprepared for it. The EU could take practical steps to improve food security as well as confront the fears that underlie the warlike atmosphere that we find ourselves in today.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned last week that, in the case of the Russia-Ukraine War, "if things go wrong, they could go horribly wrong." It could even lead to a full-fledged war between NATO and Russia.

This is an alarming statement from a man who is not given to alarming statements. While this is a war of aggression by Russia, the aggression was driven, at least in part, by fear. Russia feared being encircled by NATO and EU countries that were hostile to it. Yet these same countries had clamored to join NATO because of their fear of Russia. For its part, the US pushed the expansion of NATO into central Europe because it feared a China-Russia alliance dominating the Eurasian landmass.

My direct experience is that security issues dominate diplomatic thinking in Washington, DC, in a way that they do not dominate thinking in Brussels. The loss of life that has already taken place as a result of the Russian invasion is enormous. The physical infrastructure destroyed by Russian weapons will take 10 years, and tens of billions of euros, to rebuild.

There are eight million Ukrainian refugees in EU countries, and this number is bound to increase. The EU is directly helping a country at war, something it never did before in its 70-year history.

Europe is unprepared for a wider war

The war could widen. The possibility of Russian forces using Belarus as a jumping-off point for a new front in Western Ukraine is being discussed. This would bring the fighting much closer to NATO members: Poland and Lithuania. If either of them are dragged into conflict, it could set off a chain reaction dragging all of Europe into war.

The preparedness of EU countries for such a wider war is not great. These countries have significant and well equipped forces, but getting them to the front, where they would be needed, is something for which Europeans rely on America. Airlift capacity is a major European weakness. Since World War II, the road and rail systems in Europe

have not been designed for the swift transportation of heavy military equipment.

Furthermore, there is a lot of duplication and waste in European armies. They have 170 different (national) weapons systems, In contrast, the US, with a much bigger military, has only 30 different systems.

Meanwhile, the weapons that have been supplied to Ukraine from European stocks have not entirely been replaced. Money has been allocated but orders have not been placed. In case of all-out war, Europe could be caught unawares.

Europe is also suffering deeply from inflation. The dramatic increase in food prices, and in the price of inputs necessary to produce food — fertilizer and energy — is a direct consequence of the Russian invasion. Over 10% of the world population is already facing hunger. The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that the number of people facing “acute hunger” has multiplied 2.6 times since 2019. The spike in global hunger is affecting poorer countries more severely but Europe is suffering too.

Wheat prices will stay at 250 euros per tonne for the next two years, as against an average of 175 euros per tonne over the previous 20 years. The price increase for cereals since 2004 has been almost twice that for meat and dairy. The world is facing an escalating, war-driven, food price crisis.

What can Europe do to reduce hunger and boost peace?

When it comes to fighting food insecurity, I have four suggestions for the EU:

1. Reconsider the policy of subsidizing fallow arable land. About six million hectares of land are lying fallow right now. These could be used to grow crops.

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2. Do not encourage use of land that could grow food to produce biofuels. About nine million hectares are now being used to produce biofuels. Instead, farmers could grow crops.
 3. Encourage farming systems that maximize the efficient conversion of sunlight into consumable calories.
 4. Discourage food waste. An estimated 17% of food is wasted, mostly by households because of over purchasing and poor meal planning.

On the conflict front, Europe must make a concerted effort to identify the fears that are fanning the warlike atmosphere today. The fears of all parties have to be taken into account. We must remember that, while it may be impossible to do business with the current regime in Moscow, Russia will still exist when the war is over. The West needs to think through the postwar relationship it could have with a Russia that was willing to respect the territorial integrity of all its neighbors. That could boost the prospects of peace.

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Late Cardinal Pell Wrong, Pope Francis Plans New Future

Gary Grappo
January 21, 2023

Decades-long sexual abuse of children, lack of financial transparency and Catholics abandoning the church challenge the world's oldest institution. The late Cardinal George Pell's reported accusation that Pope Francis was a "catastrophe" is misplaced. Francis is merely responding to the challenges of our times and preparing the church for the future.

There was a time not so long ago when the passing of a notable, even if controversial, personality elicited at the very least muted praise for achievements and restraint on shortcomings.

That was most definitely not the case with the recent passing of controversial Australian Cardinal George Pell, who was removed from the Vatican's number three position managing church finances on charges of child sexual abuse earlier in his career. Though convicted in an Australian court for child sex abuse, he was later acquitted on appeal. Nevertheless, Pell remained a monumental symbol of the church's decades-long struggle with clerical child abuse and the leadership's failures to effectively address it. This controversy still hangs heavy over the church.

Francis Under Attack... Again

Pell's death wasn't just one more opportunity to point out the church's continuing struggles with its child abuse scandal. It was also an opportunity to lambast Pope Francis' leadership of the planet's oldest continuing institution. (Though Judaism predates Christianity by some 1,500-2,000 years, it does not have the institutional structure or leadership framework of the Catholic Church.) That Francis has critics is certainly not news,

however. From the time of his installation in 2013, the Pope has been a target for his liberal or progressive views.

The press is awash with pieces about Pell's anonymous memo that criticized the Pope's leadership as a "catastrophe." It seems this memo was written by said deceased and cashiered cardinal. Setting aside the matter of sour grapes, Pell's assertion that, after Francis, the church "must restore normality, doctrinal clarity in faith and morals, a proper respect for the law and ensure that the first criterion for the nomination of bishops is acceptance of the apostolic tradition." Pell also lays at Francis' feet the Catholic Church's loss of prestige. Lastly, it seems, Francis' statements on issues such as Russia's brutal and wholly unjustified invasion of Ukraine and China's vicious crushing of human rights in Hong Kong and China merely illustrate the prelate's lack of focus and redirection from the church's true course.

These are unquestionably tough times for the church and for Francis himself. Left unsaid in Pell's screed, however, is the huge dark cloud that still hangs over the church in the minds of many Catholics (including this writer): the still-unresolved matter of the church's complicity in the decades-long sexual abuse of children. Efforts in state-level civil courts in the US have begun to address the many unspeakable crimes visited on mostly young boys by predatory priests and the church's now documented attempts to cover up those crimes. As was the case with Pell in Australia before his acquittal, the UK and elsewhere in Europe, it is civil courts rather than the church that are taking action. As much as the church would like, it has failed to fully address the "tools of Satan" that have infested it.

Catholicism In Decline

The child sex abuse scandal and the storm over Francis' papacy are only side shows to what is really happening in the church. With the possible exception of Africa, Catholics are abandoning the church. The decline in numbers of American Catholics is in keeping with the overall decline in church membership throughout the US. In 2020, according to Gallup, 47% of US adults belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, down more than 20 points from the turn of the century. It marks the first time that church membership in America has fallen below 50%. It had remained steady at around 70% as recently as the 1990s.

What is especially noteworthy is that while membership remains over 65% among so-called traditionalists and baby boomers, it's fallen precipitously among Gen Xers, millennials and Gen Zers. Data is unavailable for the upcoming Gen Alphas, but the trends have to be disturbing for all churches in the country. It seemed that Catholics may have been bucking this trend. Nationwide Catholic membership increased between 2000 and 2017, but the number of churches declined by nearly 11% and, by 2019, the number of Catholics decreased by two million people.

As baby boomer members decline, younger members are not making up for the loss. The percentage of Catholics who say they are a "member" of a church, as opposed to just acknowledging their Catholic faith, has dropped by nearly 20 points since the year 2000. So, even if they may accept their faith, Catholics are not joining churches. The decline in Catholic figures mirrors that of Protestants. The fastest rising group in terms of religious faith is actually the "unaffiliated," people of no religious persuasion.

Also left unsaid is what the fall in these numbers means financially for the Catholic Church. Firm

figures on the church's finances are hard to come by given the Holy See's lack of transparency, even with its own members. However, among those Catholics worldwide who give to their church, it is generally believed that Americans rate the highest. Moreover, the Vatican invests its funds heavily in the US. American Catholics wield little to no influence within their church, except through their donations, which are likely to fall with declining membership. And even among those who stick with the church, their disgust with the child sex abuse scandal and the millions in payments the church is now being forced to make to victims across the country have led them to reduce or even discontinue their donations. Loss of US income would be devastating to the church and its ability to carry out its worldwide mission, one more reason perhaps that churches and Catholic schools are closing across the country.

The decline in Church membership and even religiosity, especially among Catholics, in the US is not a unique phenomenon. Similar figures have been registered throughout the West, though the fall was presaged in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Even Catholic stalwarts like Ireland, Spain and Italy, the ultimate bastion of Catholicism, have seen declines. Declines in Latin America, from whence Francis hails, is moving in the same direction. Notably, Evangelical Christianity is on the rise and seems poised to take the Catholic Church's place.

The "why" of that decline has as many answers as there are people. Certainly, among many Catholics of my age, the baby boomers, and countless generations before, guilt had been a driving force in their faith. And the church of that day masterfully wielded the baton of guilt, most especially against women. While newer priests have recognized that the "guilt them till they give" strategy was no longer tenable, the label lingers, especially as traditionalists still prevail even within Francis' church.

Progressivism + Demography, the Way of the Future?

However, here's one person's data point. In a world where inclusivity, tolerance and caring are gaining increasing traction, especially among Millennials, Gen Xers and Zers, and even many Boomers, Pell's call for "normality" — whose normality? — and "doctrinal clarity in faith and morals, proper respect for the law" is distinctly unappealing and even unchristian. The evolution of progressivism — a word that would undoubtedly rile Pell and his traditionalists — and especially demography make that approach a nonstarter and prescription for continued declines.

What may truly gall Pell and others of his stripe is that Francis may actually recognize this. Standing up for human rights, protecting and responsibly managing our environment, condemning patently unjust and murderous wars, and even extending a welcoming hand to gays and divorced couples actually sound more, well, Christ-like. (Though Francis could certainly be more assertive on these and on other issues.)

If Pell's desire for the return of normality and doctrinal clarity means continuing to exclude women from the priesthood and demean their role in the church, prohibit divorce and contraception, and bar LGBTQ couples from marriage and membership, then expect to see more declining numbers and closing churches. The church envisioned by the recently deceased Pope Benedict XVI will most certainly come to pass, much smaller though perhaps stronger. And it must be said, much older.

Pell's church is the Catholic Church of the past. Francis would seem to have his eye on something different. The future, maybe?

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Sports Fans Say Qatar Has Now Politicized the World Cup

Ellis Cashmore, Jamie Cleland, Kevin Dixon
January 22, 2023

Qatar was the blueprint for the future, according to a brand new research that asked 1,200 fans how they thought the geopolitically explosive tournament will affect sport. As high as 9 out of 10 believe the World Cup has been politicized for good.

Qatar 2022 was a different World Cup: the tournament was ensnared in a web of geopolitical scandals that almost strangled the competition before it began. The aftermath will be just as scandalous, at least according to football fans, over 90% of whom believe future World Cups and Olympics will be international political events. They are convinced the kind of controversy and polemic generated by Qatar will become the norm. Yet, there is a paradox: almost three-quarters believe this is a lamentable development.

“Qatar is just the start and a blueprint for future events to be targeted for political and financial gain,” one research participant predicted.

Why are so many convinced the character of the World Cup and, by implication, the Olympics has changed, and why do so many believe this is bad? Basically, fans balance the benefits and intrinsic rewards offered by global tournaments against the hijacking of such events for partisan purposes. At Qatar, the host’s abundant human rights issues and its questionable labor practices were roundly criticized. There were clichéd complaints of “sportswashing,” though, as one fan concluded: “Sportswashing is not really possible anymore. Attempts to pull the wool are cut off immediately by the billions of people on social media.”

Galvanizing Effect

Nowhere in the world is likely to be morally flawless in the mind of sports fans. They see sport as bringing climate change, human rights, bigotry and practically any other of the world’s bedeviling social problems into focus. Sports is, as one participant put it, “fair game,” meaning, if there is a problem that needs fixing, the methods are of secondary importance: only the result matters and sports is becoming an effective instrument. Nearly 73% are convinced sport in the 21st century is politically weaponized and will be an effective force in changing society. Sports have a “galvanizing effect,” according to one fan: “Movements for change can use the associated momentum to kick off beneficial activity.”

Qatar has “lit a fire” under sport. “Any future host nations will come under more scrutiny,” suggested a fan, making a point shared by most. And another: “It is a myth that sports and politics are not intertwined. Sport can create positive change in society, and an open stance should be encouraged to drive this change.”

“Athletes like all of us have a right to free speech,” declared one fan, confirming that the role of the World Cup, like it or not, will be to spotlight inequities, injustices and discrimination.

Politics and the World Cup in Future -- What fans think

88.6% Think World Cups and Olympics of the future will be controversial political events

72.3% Think sport has the potential to produce social and political change

73.4% Think political World Cups are a negative development

62.1% Don't think athletes should get involved in nonsporting affairs, like wearing emblems or making gestures

51.8% Don't think being involved in political activism is detrimental to competitive performance

34.1 % Think future World Cups should follow Qatar's example and ban alcohol.

Sample: 1,200. Conducted: Dec. 19, 2022-Jan 19 2023. Teesside University, UK

Who Is In Charge of the Message?

But, while there is near-consensus on the moral destiny of the World Cup — and, according to most fans, the Olympics too — there is division over the desirability of sports becoming political in character. Nearly 74% don't feel that politicization shouldn't be encouraged. It is, they say, not sports' responsibility to be a catalyst of change. Why then do so many think the politicization of sport is an unfavorable prospect?

The answers for this are not straightforward. Some fans believe the remonstrations witnessed over Qatar will soon be forgotten and will have achieved nothing. Sports only appear to be effective, but in the longer term are simply not. Some fans reflected on how sport was often lauded in the fight against apartheid in South Africa. There was a widespread boycott and SA was alienated from world sport for much of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet there is little evidence that the boycott actually served more than a symbolic role.

“Who is in charge of the message?” asked one fan, raising another objection. Is it legitimate for one culture to criticize another because its customs and practices differ? One of the present authors has argued that much of the attack on Qatar bordered on Islamophobia and several participants in the research were concerned that moral absolutism (the belief in absolute principles in ethical, political or theological matters) could prevail. As most fans recognize, there are few places in the world that are perfect enough to avoid some sort of reproval. (The next World Cup is to be held in Canada, USA and Mexico, which would seem to offer plenty of raw material for political protest.)

One participant extended this argument: “People like to pass judgment on other cultures without acknowledging the problems in their own country.” He continued: “Don't forget homosexuality was illegal in the country that hosted the World Cup last time England won it.” It's a slyly intelligent response: Britain's Sexual Offences Act, which decriminalized private consensual homosexual acts between men aged over 21 was not passed until 1967, a year after England's only World Cup win. There was no gay liberation movement; this started in 1969. While Betty Frieden's *The Feminine Mystique* had been published in 1963, women's liberation didn't pick up momentum till the late 1960s/early 1970s. There was no protest in 1966.

Sports Should Be Pure

Host nations have, in the past, largely escaped the kind of audit that would expose unwholesome legislation, customs and cultural practices. Football's World Cup has, over the decades, been held in countries mired in conflict, where dubious pursuits and, often abhorrent operations have been practiced. The 1934 tournament was played in Italy, then under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, the founder of the Italian fascist party, who annexed Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in the same year and, in 1940, entered World War II on the same side as Germany. "Il Duce," as he was known, used the World Cup to promote fascism.

In June 1978, General Jorge Rafael Videla, the military dictator of Argentina, presided over the World Cup opening ceremony, and presented the trophy after the final. Three years earlier, he had explained his philosophy of government: "As many people as necessary must die in Argentina so that the country will again be secure." About 30,000 political opponents of the Videla junta "disappeared," many feared killed, burned and their remains scattered on some of the pitches used during the tournament. The World Cup itself was a huge success, the Argentinian national team prevailing — though only after suspicions of match fixing. It's sometimes been speculated that Argentina's invasion of the Falklands in 1982 was in large part an attempt to regenerate the feelings of nationalism and solidarity sparked off by the World Cup.

"Politics don't belong in sports," proclaimed one fan bluntly. The point is shared by nearly three-quarters of fans: They have largely accepted the prescription of Avery Brundage, who was president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from 1952-72: He strongly condemned political interference in sport, which, he maintained, should be "pure." Only in recent years have sports fans departed from this and taken

notice of athletes like Colin Kaepernick and Naomi Osaka, who explicitly used their sports as political platforms.

Social Media's Exposé

Sports fans have politicized over the past few years. Global movements, in particular Black Lives Matter and MeToo have demonstrated the electrifying power of social media in solidifying opinion and motivating people into action. Even if the majority don't encourage the politicization of sport, they have become perhaps unwitting participants in the process. Back in 2002, when Qatar was awarded the hosting rights by Fifa, football's world governing organization, fans were not concerned with the territory's culture and politics, nor its moral desirability as a site for one of the world's two most prestigious global tournaments.

By the time of the Qatar tournament last December, everyone was familiar with the customs and practices of the Sheikdom in the Persian Gulf. Some fans attribute this to a growing awareness, in itself hastened by changes in communications: "Social Media allows [a nation's suitability as host] to be challenged far more than it ever was and exposes stories that the public would previously be unaware of," said one fan, underscoring the role of online exchanges. Another participant agreed: "Forthcoming events will be exposed in the same way."

Tangential to the main inquiry, but an indicator of fans' expectations of World Cups was the alcohol ban: Qatar, a Muslim territory of course, implemented a ban on the sale of alcohol in stadiums. This appeared to be an unpopular decision that fans would resent and oppose. In the event, they didn't. Over a third (34%) of fans would now support a similar ban at future World Cup tournaments. A minority, but a significant minority nonetheless.

If their visions are to be accepted, future international sports tournaments will take on a very different and much more political complexion that we're used to and, while most fans regret this development, the vast majority are expecting the kind of turbulence of the Qatar World Cup to be repeated time and again. As one fan summed up: "We live in a time where politics and sport are inextricably linked."

[Cashmore, Cleland and Dixon are the authors of [Screen Society](#)]

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Varieties" (Palgrave, 2015); and "Consuming Football in Late Modern Life" (Routledge, 2013).

What Jakarta Climate Change Lawsuit Means for the Future

ArumdariNurgianti
January 23, 2023

In 2019, citizens and activists in Jakarta sued the government for poor air quality in court. The case established the right of citizens to a healthy environment. It also called for strengthening the judiciary and policy making entities through citizen participation.

Climate change is causing havoc around the world. Therefore, many countries are starting to tackle it. Indonesia is one of them.

Indonesia has set a target of 31.89% reduction in GHG emissions without international funding, and 43.20% with international support by 2030. This commitment is legally binding. This gives judiciaries a pivotal role in achieving this goal. Climate litigation is "an increasingly common and citizen-accessible area of environmental law." Citizens increasingly use this form of litigation to hold countries and public corporations accountable both "for their climate mitigation efforts and historical contributions to climate change."

In Indonesia, all climate-related cases are filed in the general court and led by certified judges in environmental law. The future holds increasing ecological challenges due to climate change, making it essential for Indonesia's government to

enhance its jurisdiction in order to mindfully regulate environmental laws.

In 2019, citizens and activists of Jakarta sued the government for poor air quality in central Jakarta court. This case was critical in the history of human rights in Indonesia as it voiced the citizens' demands to improve the overall environment. The case reached a verdict after two long years in 2021. The verdict entailed appropriate penalties for the president, three of the ministers, and the governor, in order to implement appropriate actions against air pollution. This case has contributed to the climate litigation progress and movements in Indonesia.

Principles and Practice

This case consists of some principles related to environmental law as mentioned in Article 2, Law 32 of 2009. These include the principles of pollution pay, sustainable development and the precautionary principle. According to the pollution pay principle, Jakarta's governor should be stricter in penalizing drivers who do not comply with permissible pollution levels for vehicles, businesses or activities that do not meet emission-quality standards. Due to this case, the governor issued regulation 66, regarding the exhaust emission tests of motorbikes in 2020. This added more than 15 air quality monitoring stations, and arranged emission inventory.

Air pollution negatively impacts health over many generations. Such pollution is not sustainable and violates the principle of sustainable health. Judges argued that the health ministry had violated the law by refusing to share any information regarding the polluted areas and the effect of the air pollution on public health. The health ministry also did not have the statistics about the decline in public health due to the air pollution. This goes against article 14 in presidential rule 41 of 1999. Therefore, there is a

need for Indonesia to improve transparency among stakeholders.

Keeping in accordance with the precautionary principle, after the Kalimantan forest fires in 2017, the panel of judges requested the president to revise presidential rule 41 of 1999. Though the validity of this act has been questioned for 21 years, it has still not been reviewed by the president, signifying a failure to prioritize the regulations. Despite this, a ray of hope may still lie amongst the citizen lawsuits filed against air pollution in Jakarta. These lawsuits led the government to redesign the Baku MutuAdara Ambien (BMUA), which translates as the Ambient Air Quality Standard, and could possibly be what encourages the prioritization of the pollution risks.

Strengthening Climate Commitments

This suit serves as an example for all Indonesians to approach the court of law with citizen lawsuits if their rights to a healthy environment are violated. The right to a healthy environment is a human right, and so, will be considered in court in any environmental case. The court's decision to consider human rights a supporting element in *PerbuatanMelawanHukum* (PMH), and their choice to present human rights experts in court are well-measured moves.

In addition to this case, the media also plays a crucial role in raising awareness about climate litigation in Indonesia. Presenting more cases and initiating discussions will increase critical thinking and optimism amongst citizens about the environment and their human rights.

The president and the ministries of Indonesia need to be held accountable for any violation of the BMUA rules. Jakarta's air pollution is getting progressively worse. Along with Hanoi and Mandalay, Jakarta is the most polluted city in Southeast Asia. Their citizens' life expectancy has

reduced by three to four years on average. The verdict also probes the ministry of environment and forestry to strengthen the supervising roles of governors. The supervising roles of governors extend to the areas of forming policies on emission limits, management plans (RPPMU), power station units and other operating industries in each province. In order to further public participation and their faith in the government, there need to be mechanisms to penalize governors if found ineffective. This will showcase the nation and its judiciary's commitment towards reversing climate change.

Indonesia continues to face challenges with solving the air pollution in Jakarta. For instance, the country has a limited number of judges specializing in environmental law who can address the potential rise in climate-related cases. Indonesia also needs to stop relying on coal power plants to attain its economic resilience due to its direct impact on air pollution. Furthermore, the public is still largely unaware of the urgency of the climate crisis.

Since climate-related cases are rising, Indonesia must train its young judges in environmental law. Cases alone will not do the trick and neither will judicial activism. Indonesian citizens have to take an active role in getting their representatives to draft laws to combat climate change. They also have to put pressure on the government to implement these laws through sensible policies. These policies must have goals and targets that can be measured, monitored and evaluated. Only then will Indonesia be able to play its part in combating climate change.

[[ThrovnicaChandrasekar](#) and [HarshithaGadde](#) edited this piece.]

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One Hundred Years of ChatGPTude

Mauktik Kulkarni
January 24, 2023

The profound banality of artificial intelligence tries to conquer the magical realism of the human experience in the form of ChatGPT.

“Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.” Gabriel Garcia Marquez used this iconic line to embark on a tour-de-force on human nature in his literary masterpiece One Hundred Years of Solitude. Had Gabo, as his adoring fans call him, been alive today, he would have begun with ‘A few days later, as he put a gun to his head, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember his lonely midnight doomscrolling that introduced him to ChatGPT.’

The famous opening line, juxtaposing the macabre realities of life with the sense of wonder that comes with appreciating human ingenuity, draws

readers into a wild journey of exploration. Not just of human existence and their place in it, but also the fertile nature of the human mind that can conjure up imaginary worlds to convey profound insights. And then, there is ChatGPT. No matter which line one prompts the machine with, it spits out a few paragraphs mimicking the human mind.

Magical Realism and AI

Gabo makes us marvel at the human ability to understand our origins, internalize our journey through civilizations, observe the mundane, day-to-day life, and convey a deeper sense of meaning and belonging that fills our hearts with contentment when we turn the last page. Ironically, ChatGPT uses similar means to achieve fairly pedestrian ends. The Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) – built on something called a large language model – takes in everything ever written in a particular language, calculates the probability of any word following a given word, and strings together human-sounding sentences. Gabo playfully mocks the cyclical nature of human endeavors in the hope of liberating our souls. ChatGPT exploits the cyclical math of words to keep us trapped in a linguistic status quo.

The irony does not end there. By hand holding us into his small, rustic, and isolated community of Macondo, Gabo takes us back to our childhoods, making us wonder how magical it would feel if gypsies from a faraway land brought along thingamajigs like magnets, magnifying glasses, and telescopes that we have never been exposed to. In the book, it inspires the patriarch Aureliano and his son Arcadio to embark on a lifelong quest to master alchemy. On the other hand, ChatGPT, while robbing us of the alchemy of cogently expressing our thoughts, resembles another one of those shiny new objects we have gotten used to in the age of social media. The viral tide of amusement will wash away faster than we think, leaving a void for another AI algorithm to fill.

And finally, there is fatalism, writ large in Gabo's real and imaginary worlds. In his make-believe world spanning a hundred years, the author pokes fun at the folly of conservative and liberal idealism in politics. The repeating names of the characters and their personalities spanning generations of the Buendia clan capture the somewhat limited nature of human imagination. Even in real life, a cruel twist of fate, or fatalism, made Gabo befriend Hugo Chavez. One of the most discerning minds of our generation finding virtues in a run-of-the-mill populist who later turned into a dictator. In a way, Gabo's life and body of work challenge us to reconcile fatalism with Mark Twain's famous quote that the radical invents the views, but when he has worn them out, the conservative adopts them.

Where will ChatGPT take us?

ChatGPT evokes fatalism of a completely different kind. At one level, it is just another, and utterly predictable, step in the long march of technological progress. The geek in me asks: If an assembly line can automate and obviate physical labor, what is wrong in ChatGPT automating the mental labor of stringing together words? Who are we, if not elitists, to benefit from the efficiencies assembly lines bring and lament the banality of the language ChatGPT spits out without even a moment's worth of 'thought'?

On another level, as the euphoria subsides and people at large start searching for the next supposedly game-changing invention, ChatGPT will certainly creep into our daily lives. It will make some jobs redundant and be a godsend for those who dread the thought of writing a story. Even those who struggle with a writer's block or small businesses with no marketing budgets will benefit from it. At the same time, it will supercharge the deadly social media driven propaganda machines, which we have accepted as a part of life, with little accountability.

While the world is still in thrall of the capabilities of the latest version of ChatGPT, the perils of using such AI for automating writing are already staring at us. A recent report in the Washington Post summarizes how AI created a journalistic disaster for a media outlet, forcing it to issue countless corrections. Soon enough, pitfalls of such advances will sow socio-political divisions, prompting ethicists and politicians to call for meaningful regulations. As this author has argued before, AI engineers will have to grapple with issues of technology for its own sake vs. the democratic systems that enable free inquiry, challenging authority, and maximizing human capital.

Whatever the future holds, it will certainly chip away at our sense of what it means to be human. The fatalist in me even wants to believe that one hundred years of ChatGPTude will produce a masterpiece like Gabo's. The radical and romantic in me is screaming inside, begging me not to bet on it!

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Why Do You Need to Know About Mohammad Mosaddegh?

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In 1941, the British deposed their lackey Reza Shah for cozying up with the Germans and placed his callow, decadent, opulent and worthless son on the throne. This led to a pro-democracy movement and the rise of Mohammad Mosaddegh, Iran's first-ever democratically elected leader.

In 1941, World War II was in full swing. Thanks to its oil reserves, Iran was a key piece on the geopolitical chessboard. Reza Shah Pahlavi was in-charge as an absolutist ruler. The British had backed his rise but were uncomfortable with his flirtations with Nazi Germany. In 1941, the British decided to get rid of Reza Shah and install his son Mohammad Reza Shah. He was a weak 22-year-old who was putty in British hands. His rise to power had a silver lining though.

From 1941 to 1953, Iran experienced a golden period of freedom. During this era, seven political parties emerged in the Iranian parliament Majles. Mohammad Mosaddegh emerged as the most important leader during this period. He became prime minister in 1951 and initiated significant reforms.

Before 1941, Reza Shah ruled Iran with an iron hand. If people dared to protest, they were shot on the spot or tortured to death or whisked away to a brutal prison. From 1941 to 1953, free speech, democracy and rule of law emerged in Iran. Mosaddegh was a key figure in democratizing Iran.

The Brief Story of Iranian Democracy

Educated in France and Switzerland, Mosaddegh came from a patrician family. However, he was a reformer who believed in democracy. In 1925,

Mosaddegh voted against Reza Khan taking over as the Shah. Once in power as Reza Shah, the monarch exiled him from public office. With Reza Shah out of power in 1941, Mosaddegh emerged from the shadows to play a key role in Iranian history.

In 1944, Mosaddegh was re-elected to the Iranian parliament, the Majles. As a patriot, he wanted a strong Iran. Mosaddegh aimed to build an Iran with rule of law, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, parliamentary democracy and a strong economy. Above all, this Iranian leader opposed foreign interference in the internal affairs of Iran. In particular, he did not want the British to exploit Iranian oil for London's imperial benefit. He was also against concessions to the Soviets in northern Iran.

Mohammad Reza, the new Shah, and Iran's comprador elite were beholden to the British for their hold on power. So, they did not take kindly to the rise of Mosaddegh. This corrupt and absolutist elite was also against democracy because they would have lost power. They tried the age old trick of rigging elections.

As a result, protests erupted in 1949. People came out into the streets to rally against voter fraud. Mosaddegh led a group of delegates to the Shah's to protest the "lack of free elections." That forced Mohammad Reza to promise "fair and honest" elections. Mosaddegh and some other leaders founded a party named JebheMelli, which literally translates to National Front, to contest the elections.

Once the Majles convened after the elections, Mossaddegh emerged as the most powerful parliamentarian. As leader of JebheMelli, Mossaddegh pushed for major reforms. The Majles approved a development plan with agricultural and industrial reforms. The plan required financing, which was only possible

through oil revenues. Sadly for Iran, most of these revenues were going to Britain.

Oil Catches Fire

Unsurprisingly, oil revenues were a hot button issue in the 1949 elections. Once the Majles assembled, many of its members were duty bound to renegotiate the patently unfair agreement imperial Britain had forced a subservient Iran to conclude. In the words of the fictional character Michael Corleone, made famous by the 1972 movie *The Godfather*, the British had made the Iranians an offer they couldn't refuse. Led by Mosaddegh, Iranians now mustered the gumption to reject that British offer.

Mosaddegh promised to end the British control of Iran's oil industry. He demanded renegotiation with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), the British oil giant now known as BP. Note that the AIOC was supposed to pay a mere 17.5% of oil revenues to Iran. In contrast, its American counterpart was paying Saudi Arabia 50% of oil revenues in 1950. To rub salt in Iranian wounds, AIOC practiced creative accounting and did not even pay the 17.5% it owed Iran. In fact, they paid more in taxes to London on their profits from Iranian oil than to Tehran. Led by Mosaddegh, Iranian patriots resolved to get Iran's fair share from AIOC.

Iranian pressure made the British offer slightly better terms in 1950. Mosaddegh was key in rejecting this unfair offer and demanded a 50-50 split, the same enjoyed by Saudi Arabia. Naturally, the British opposed Mosaddegh tooth and nail. They claimed that revision of their agreement with Iran would amount to a breach of contract. The British very conveniently ignored their own common law idea of duress as grounds for invalidating a contract. Simply put: if Winston puts a gun to Rumi's head to get his signature on a contract, that legal document is null and void. Such

legal principles were moot for AIOC, which tried every trick in the book to safeguard its extortionate illegitimate profits.

British intransigence fueled Iranian patriotism on oil revenues. The public swung behind nationalization of AIOC. By the time the British belatedly agreed to a 50-50 split in February 1951, the ship for renegotiation had sailed. In March, the Majles passed legislation to nationalize the oil industry. True to form, the Shah did not sign this bill. This British lackey stayed loyal to his imperial masters, not the Iranian people.

By not signing the nationalization bill, the Shah frustrated the Majles and the Iranian people. In April, the Majles made Mosaddegh prime minister, with around 90% voting for him. A few months earlier, Mosaddegh had turned down the prime ministerial position. This time, he took charge with a single-point agenda: cut out foreign powers from Iran's oil industry.

With Mosaddegh in-charge, the Shah reluctantly signed the nationalization bill. This dramatically changed Britain-Iran dynamics. The AIOC left Iran, dismantling even the massive Abadan Refinery and associated facilities. For the first time in two centuries, Britain was on the backfoot. Unsurprisingly, this mighty imperial power fought back. It went to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to appeal against Iranian nationalization. Mosaddegh cannily disputed the court's jurisdiction. Months later, the ICJ decided in favor of Iran.

The Empire Strikes Back

The British did not just resort to legal measures though. Their fabled intelligence agencies started conspiring to oust Mosaddegh through hook or crook. The British courted American support to do so. Their task was not easy. After World War II, the US had been siding with Iran on the oil issue. It

had its own strategic interest to break into the Iranian oil market. Mosaddegh was well aware of the importance of the US. In November 1951, the Iranian prime minister visited Washington to meet President Harry Truman. Mosaddegh had a good reception and returned to Iran positive that the US would act as an honest mediator between Iran and Britain.

Mosaddegh's successful US trip and rising international popularity unsettled the Shah. Vainglorious and insecure, the Shah resented Mosaddegh. When the prime minister appointed a minister of war, the Shah vetoed him. In response, Mosaddegh resigned.

This act in July 1952 led countrywide protests. People poured into the streets, chanting "Give me death or give me Mosaddegh." HashtSubh, a leading Iranian newspaper, published the headline: "Salaam to Hero Mosaddegh, We Swear That We Stand by You to Our Death." In keeping with the tradition established by his brutal father, the Shah ordered a crackdown. On July 21 — 30 Tir in the Iranian calendar — the Shah's forces killed hundreds of people. This bloody day in 1952 is still remembered as the 30 Tir Uprising.

The very next day, on July 22, the ICJ decided in favor of Iran. This fueled popular support for Mosaddegh. Despite his brutal actions, the Shah was unable to establish control over Iran. He was forced to recall Mosaddegh. The Majles now firmly backed the prime minister. Iranians were euphoric. They believed that they could now move forward towards a new future.

The British had other plans. They refused to accept the ICJ decision. They saw Iranian insubordination as a danger to the British Empire and imposed a worldwide embargo against Iranian oil. They froze Iranian assets and banned exports of all goods to Iran. Britain acted against Iran in much the same way as the US is doing today. Like the US today,

Britain planned a regime change in Tehran: Mosaddegh had to go.

British covert operations against Mosaddegh were savage and sophisticated. Misinformation, bribery, blackmail, murder and riots were all part of the toolkit. On April 20, 1953, news broke out that General Mahmood Afshar Tus, Mosaddegh's chief of police, had been kidnapped and killed. Investigations revealed that generals sidelined by Mosaddegh were responsible for this brutal killing.

By now, the British had Americans on their side. The zeitgeist in the US had changed. Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, Richard Nixon was vice president and Joseph McCarthy was the most powerful voice on Capitol Hill. McCarthy saw a communist under every bush and feared the Soviet Union would take over the world. The British found US paranoia against communism fertile ground to sow seeds of doubt about Mosaddegh. Bit by bit, they convinced Washington to join them in their conspiracy to overthrow Mosaddegh.

British and American efforts in weaning support away from Mosaddegh in the Majles forced the prime minister's hand. Mosaddegh asked the Shah to dissolve the Majles. Now both a British and an American lackey, this weak ruler declined. Mosaddegh called for a referendum on the dissolution of the Majles. Over 99% of Iranian voters supported him. On August 15, 1953, Mossadegh dissolved the Majles.

This proved to be the highpoint of Mossadegh's power. Events would soon overwhelm him. His political enemies were now conspiring with the British and the Americans to get rid of him. Yet Mosaddegh had changed history. He had challenged autocratic rule at home and deepened democracy. At the same time, he had taken on imperial powers and won back Iranian sovereignty.

Mosaddegh Matters

Mosaddegh was a great statesman. He was honest, hardworking, idealistic and resolute. He made immense personal sacrifices in his political life. Mosaddegh steered Iran in a new direction despite the odds. In 27 months as prime minister, he achieved more than any other Iranian leader in the last two centuries.

In the land of absolutist Shahs, Mosaddegh championed rule of law, creating an independent judiciary to check the powers of the executive. Mosaddegh also supported freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. An ardent democrat, he tried to increase political participation and organize free elections.

Revolution Erupted in Iran Because of Mohammad Reza Shah

Mosaddegh's economic reforms were significant and are often overlooked. A frugal man, he balanced the budget and focused on increasing Iran's economic output. The tiff with the British was as much about economics as politics. Mosaddegh invested in health, unemployment insurance and infrastructure. Unlike the Shah who believed in ostentatious consumption, Mosaddegh was a believer in long term investments that would have a major multiplier effect.

Mosaddegh curtailed the culture of corruption fostered by the Shahs. He removed corrupt ministers and appointed honest ones. He got rid of generals who served British interests. He redistributed lands illegally seized by Reza Shah.

One of Mosaddegh's last attempts in power was to give women the right to vote in municipal councils. He also wanted to provide women maternity leaves and give them the same rights as men in social insurance, benefit, and disability

allowances. He had little success but that was not for lack of trying.

In 1952, Mosaddegh was named Time Magazine's Man of the Year. As American media often does, they painted this unfamiliar foreign figure as a villain. In contrast, Mosaddegh was hailed in colonies and newly independent colonies. In Yugoslavia, Egypt and India, he was hailed as a liberating hero. Remember, this was a time when almost all of Africa was still under European rule and the US still practiced race segregation. In his far-sighted reforms, Mosaddegh was far ahead of his time. Noted American diplomat Henry F. Grady called Mosaddegh "a man of great intelligence, wit and education—a cultured Persian gentleman." To Grady, the Iranian leader reminded him "of the late Mahatma Gandhi."

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