

An aerial photograph of a densely packed city, likely in the Middle East, showing a large plume of dark smoke rising from the right side, suggesting a conflict or disaster. The city features numerous multi-story buildings and a prominent mosque with a tall minaret in the center.

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CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	6
Share Your Perspective	7
Azerbaijan Fought for Security, not Ethnicity, in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict	8
Ramil Gurbanov	
Were 30 Years of the Slaughter of Kashmiri Hindus Inevitable?	10
Vijay K. Sazawal	
Pakistan Has to Do Something About Religious Extremism	12
Wali Muhammad	
Climate Change: A Toxic Gift for the Next Generation	14
India Nye Wenner	
The UK's Ruthless Immigration Compromise Means Refoulement in Rwanda	16
Nafees Ahmad	
Ukrainian Refugees in Pro-Russian Transnistria Come to Moldova for Help	19
Tiina Kaukvere, Marian Männi	
How to Develop Immunity to Nonsense: Lessons From a New Science	22
Andy Norman	
Trillion Dollar Dilemma: Is the US Treasury Market in Trouble?	27
Alex Gloy	
On Women's New "Right" to Have "Sex Like Men"	31
Rahul Sur	
Sanctions and Internet Access Will Fail to Promote Regime Change	36
Ted McCarthy	

Sudan Is on the Brink of a New Catastrophe	40
Martin Plaut	
How to Know God Exists	42
Mehdi Alavi	
How Azerbaijan Found Victory, and Armenia Defeat, in Nagorno-Karabakh	45
Atul Singh, Anton Schauble	
Japan's New LDP Scandal Is Unlikely to Change Much	51
Atul Singh	
The Tremendous Legacy of the Late Jacques Delors	53
Nathalie Barthes	

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Azerbaijan Fought for Security, not Ethnicity, in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict

Ramil Gurbanov
December 01, 2023

In September 2023, Azerbaijan took local anti-terror measures in Karabakh, a region controlled by separatist Armenian rebels. An article in Fair Observer accusing Azerbaijan of “ethnic cleansing” is baseless. In reality, Azerbaijan is committed to efforts to restore stability and security in the Karabakh region.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan assumed full control of Karabakh, a region of the country that had previously been under the control of a breakaway entity, in a counter-terrorism measure.

On October 20, an author published a piece in Fair Observer accusing Azerbaijan of “ethnic cleansing” in Karabakh. He achieves this by lifting Azerbaijan’s measures out of all historical context.

The author misses the mark repeatedly referring to damage to the norms and principles of international law without explaining exactly what rights and principles have been violated, and his groundless arguments attempt to conceal Armenia's well-known breaches of international law.

This piece attempts to contextualize the history behind the conflict. Claims that Azerbaijan is committed to “ethnic cleansing” are not supported by the decades of past conflict in the region.

Recognizing the history of Armenia’s illegal occupation of Azerbaijan

Between 1988 and 1994, during the first war, it was Armenia that illegally initiated the invasion of a significant portion of Azerbaijan’s internationally recognized sovereign territory.

This invasion forcibly displaced the better part of a million people in Azerbaijan, about a quarter of whom were Azeris who left Armenia for Azerbaijan as a result of the war. The Azeri population there had inhabited the region for centuries.

Armenian forces committed atrocities and numerous war crimes against Azerbaijanis. This has been confirmed by third-party international organizations. Among the massive killings of Azerbaijanis by Armenian armed forces, the Khojaly Genocide committed by Armenia stands as the largest single massacre throughout the entire conflict. On February 26, 1992, 613 Khojaly town residents, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 old men, were ambushed and brutally killed by Armenian forces.

In 1993, the UN Security Council unequivocally condemned Armenia’s illegal military occupation and ethnic cleansing in four resolutions (numbers 822, 853, 874 and 884). These resolutions expressed full support for Azerbaijan’s internationally recognized borders. They demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from the occupied territories.

Armenia undermines Azerbaijan’s peace efforts

Unfortunately, for three decades Armenia continually ignored the rules-based international order. Armenia participated in negotiations in bad faith, its aim being only to maintain the status quo. Armenia intensified its aggressive military-

political provocations, and Armenians even began to speak of claiming more territories under the concept of “new wars for new territories.”

This ultimately jeopardized the peace process and led to a new war in 2020. This time, Azerbaijan was victorious. As a result of the war, known to Azerbaijanis as the Patriotic War, Azerbaijan liberated its occupied lands and ensured the norms and principles of international law.

Despite three decades of devastation experienced by the people of Azerbaijan, the country launched the peace initiative immediately after the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020. Azerbaijan actively promoted the idea of normalization of relations between the two countries and the peace process.

Azerbaijan has taken measures to carry out large-scale restoration and construction work in the liberated territories as well as facilitated the reintegration of Armenian residents living in the Karabakh region into our society.

Throughout the past three years, Armenia did not fulfill the obligation it took in the trilateral statement to remove more than 10,000 illegal armed forces. Azerbaijan also had reason to suspect Armenia of continuing to violate the agreement by providing funds and weapons to these armed forces. In one case, Azerbaijan’s Prosecutor General’s Office put several alleged criminals on a wanted list for smuggling firearms, ammunition, explosives and other military equipment from Armenia into Karabakh.

Ignoring the warnings of Azerbaijan at various levels and platforms, the illegal Armenian armed forces in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan increased their provocations. This came to a head when a landmine explosion killed 4 police officers and two civilians in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan continues to urge stabilization in the Karabakh area

In response to military instigations and subversive acts by illegally present armed Armenian forces, the armed forces of Azerbaijan launched local counter-terror measures on September 19–20. These measures were aimed exclusively at neutralizing the imminent threat posed to the safety and security of Azerbaijani civilian and military personnel. This act fully aligned with Azerbaijan’s sovereign right to self-defense as enshrined in the UN Charter.

Despite the groundless “ethnic cleansing” and “mass displacement” narratives of the Armenian side, no facts have been revealed to prove the existence of losses among the civilian population. Reports of the UN mission that visited Karabakh noted “no damage to civilian public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and housing, or to cultural and religious structures” in the areas it witnessed and “did not come across any reports – neither from the local population interviewed nor from the interlocutors – of incidences of violence against civilians following the latest local anti-terrorism measures.” So, the ethnic Armenians of Karabakh left on their own accord.

Unlike monoethnic Armenia, Azerbaijan is a multiethnic and multi-religious country. It ensures that all its citizens enjoy their rights as safeguarded by applicable international law. Azerbaijan has declared on multiple occasions that the ethnic Armenians residing in the Karabakh region are welcome to be part of this multicultural model. Therefore, the accusation that Azerbaijan had carried out “ethnic cleansing” is baseless.

Azerbaijan is committed to the normalization of relations between the two countries, as well as the reintegration of Armenian residents of the Karabakh region. Against the backdrop of these promising conditions, Azerbaijan calls upon

Armenia to demonstrate a constructive position in the peace process, and to understand the realities in the region properly.

Armenia must finally recognize that there is no alternative to peace and cooperation in the region.

[[Cheyenne Torres](#) edited this piece.]

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Were 30 Years of the Slaughter of Kashmiri Hindus Inevitable?

Vijay K. Sazawal
December 02, 2023

Pandit minorities in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir have long been targets of ethnic cleansing efforts by Islamic terrorists. The grotesque truth of Pandit genocide has only recently come to light for many Indians. Corrupt politicians, the mass media and other organizations had suppressed the news, enabling and even rewarding continued bloodshed. The latest genocide has ended after 30 years, but could it have been prevented altogether?

The year is 1998. Sunday, January 25, 1998, to be precise. Super Bowl XXXII is in full swing. The Denver Broncos defeat the defending champions, the Green Bay Packers, by a score of 31–24. Bill Clinton is the president of the USA, and the following day he will discuss the Monica Lewinsky story publicly. India celebrates its Republic Day on January 26 as well. Both countries experience a festive weekend.

But not everyone in India enjoys it. Approximately 800 kilometers from the Indian capital of New Delhi, in a hamlet in the Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir (or simply Kashmir), a gruesome event of horrific proportions takes place. Wandhama village is home to roughly 200 farmers, with about two dozen being Kashmiri Pandits — a minority community living in a few homes surrounded by Muslim neighbors. On this day, foreign mujahideen and domestic terrorists enter the village. These radicals pluck Kashmiri Pandits, assemble them in a line, and shoot them dead one by one. The deceased include four children, nine women and ten men. The sole survivor, a boy, escapes death because other victims fall over him and the killers assume the boy is dead. In the hamlet of Wandhama, the centuries-old Kashmiri Pandit community is wiped out in minutes.

Ghastly as the Wandhama tragedy is, an even more heinous crime took place a year earlier. On June 15, 1997, in the Ramban district, about 130 kilometers south of the state capital of Srinagar, terrorists stopped a bus carrying passengers from Ramban to the nearby village of Gool. Four terrorists entered the bus and asked Hindus to step out of the bus. Six Hindu passengers did so. The mujahideen then shot three of them. All three victims were Kashmiri Pandits who were teachers in the Gool Higher Secondary School. The three Hindus spared were not Pandits.

The Wandhama tragedy of 1998 was followed by another massacre. On March 23, 2003, mujahideen members massacred all Kashmiri Pandits in Nadimarg village, located in Kashmir's Pulwama district. Of the 24 killed, 11 each were men and women while two were young boys.

An little-known story about a great tragedy

Western, especially American, media tends to forget one key fact about Kashmir. Fanatical Islamic mujahideen terrorists perpetrated genocide of Kashmiri Pandits. This fact was even forgotten by Indian media until the film *The Kashmir Files* came out in 2022.

Only a year ago did Indian moviegoers grasp the horrors of the genocide. Behind this brutal ethnic cleansing, lies a tale of betrayal and deceit. The dominant groups in the country — Indian political leaders, Indian media, Indian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — did their best to hide this genocide. Their cover-up efforts were effective. To this day, even many Indians question whether Kashmiri Pandits faced genocide. Wikipedia erroneously still defines this genocide as an exodus.

Even today, Kashmiri Pandit massacres of the 1990s remain unsolved. Importantly, the Indian state in the 1990s was well aware of what was going on. On June 10, 1999, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) concluded that the Kashmiri Pandit experience had been “akin to genocide.”

Only in the last couple of years — 30 years after the Kashmiri Pandit genocide — has the Indian government finally started investigations into the killings of only a few victims. Even talk of genocide ignores the extent of the tragedy that Kashmiri Pandits experienced. They experienced their own version of Kristallnacht (the “Night of Broken Glass”) that Jews experienced on

November 9, 1938, in Berlin. The Kashmiri Pandit Kristallnacht occurred in Anantnag district of Kashmir on February 20, 1986. Their homes, shops, temples and other property were desecrated or burned in the district.

The government shamefully failed to act in Anantnag. After the Kashmiri Pandit Kristallnacht, there was no arrest, no investigation and no trial. Murderers, arsonists and ethnic cleansers got away scot-free. The morale of fanatical Islamists shot up. They now rightly assumed that Kashmiri Pandits were on the menu.

In 1986, the Congress Party was in power in New Delhi. In 1989, a ragtag opposition coalition took charge. A certain Kashmiri politician took charge as home minister, the top job in the cabinet that oversees internal national security. Ironically, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed — the new home minister from Kashmir — was the rabble-rousing politician who instigated the Kashmiri Pandit Kristallnacht in Anantnag.

Sayeed belongs to the elite Kashmiri Muslim ruling class. Supposedly, he is a direct descendant of Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam. This ruling Muslim elite first systematically persecuted Kashmiri Pandits, then subjected them to a brutal campaign of violence, intimidation and terror, and then ethnically cleansed Kashmir of its original community: the Kashmiri Pandits. New Delhi appeased the Kashmiri Muslim elite, gave them a clean chit and turned a Nelson's eye to the genocide of the hapless Kashmiri Pandits. Justice has not only been delayed but denied to these tragic victims by successive Indian governments.

Murderers got away scot-free, appeasement did not work

Sayeed and other members of the Kashmiri Muslim elite got away with murder. National politicians in New Delhi pursued an appeasement

policy with this murderous elite. The Congress Party and the coalition that succeeded them wanted to retain support of the Kashmiri elite to keep control of Kashmir. They also thought this elite would be useful for getting the Muslim vote in the rest of the country. So, they colluded with national media to keep the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits out of the press.

During this period, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was in the ascendant. They were training jihadis to foment trouble in Kashmir. Since 1947, Pakistan has wanted control of Kashmir. As a Muslim-majority region, Pakistan sees Kashmir as a natural part of the nation. Kashmir is part of Pakistan's foundational myth. Hence, the genocide of Kashmir Pandits is part of the grand plan of Islamizing this region and reclaiming it for the pure nation of Islam.

Before the genocide began, Kashmir had 350,000 Kashmiri Pandits. By 2016, this number had declined to 2,764. Note that the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits has been a long, drawn-out affair. It began as early as the 14th century when Islam first came to Kashmir. The difference between earlier waves of violence and the one in the 1990s is the fact that this genocide occurred in the sovereign territory of secular, democratic and multiethnic India.

Two questions arise.

Was the 1990s genocide of Kashmiri Pandits inevitable? Yes, given the stupidity of national politicians and the weakness of Indian democracy.

Was this genocide avoidable? Yes, if leaders had acted bravely and wisely against fanatical Islamists, a messianic Pakistan and a diabolical, duplicitous local Muslim elite.

[[Lee Thompson-Kolar](#) edited this piece.]

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Pakistan Has to Do Something About Religious Extremism

Wali Muhammad
December 03, 2023

Following an alleged desecration of the Quran, mobs ransacked and burnt Christian churches and neighborhoods were ransacked and burnt in Jaranwala, Pakistan. Such street vigilante acts call the strength of the nation's judicial system into question. State officials and private citizens must take steps to combat religious intolerance.

On August 16, 2023, a heated controversy arose in Jaranwala, a city located in the Faisalabad District of Punjab, Pakistan. Torn pages from the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, were discovered near a Christian residence. This act was labeled as blasphemous, causing heightened tensions among extremists in the region. The torn pages were quickly taken to a prominent local religious leader who passionately called on Muslim community members to take to

the streets in protest. He urged them to demand swift justice and the immediate apprehension of those responsible for the incident.

Religious extremism is a growing problem in Pakistan

The situation worsened as members of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, joined in. They used mosques and public spaces to make emotional announcements, encouraging people to gather at the site of the alleged incident.

A mob gathered around the Salvation Army church soon after, forcing vendors nearby to close shop immediately. The church was attacked along with other smaller churches in the vicinity.

According to a pastor, Imran Bhatti, a total of five churches were targeted and subjected to vandalism and arson. Among the places of worship that fell victim to this heinous act were the United Presbyterian Church, Allied Foundation Church and Shehroonwala Church, all of which are located in the Isa Nagri vicinity. The assailants went so far as to desecrate a nearby Christian cemetery, leaving a trail of vandalised graves. A section of the compound wall was demolished as well.

The recent incident in Faisalabad's Jaranwala highlights Pakistan's ongoing struggle against extremism. Simply condemning such incidents does not address the root causes. Pakistan's ambiguous blasphemy policies have created this crisis of religious bigotry.

The Pakistan Penal Code has strict laws against insulting the Prophet Muhammad. It reads, in part, "derogatory remarks, etc, in respect of the Holy Prophet [Muhammad] either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life,

and shall also be liable to fine." However, the constitution (Article 10A) also guarantees the right to a fair trial. Despite this, judges in blasphemy cases often feel pressured to convict, even when evidence is lacking, due to the fear of physical violence by vigilante groups.

While no judicial executions have yet occurred under these laws, there have been numerous cases of lynchings and street vigilantism against individuals accused of blasphemy, their legal representatives and those who oppose such laws.

How can we reform the law?

In today's world, marked by social progress is a critical need to reaffirm our commitment to diversity and combat intolerance. These goals offer hope for a more inclusive and harmonious future, but it's important to recognize that, while they point the way, humans must actively work towards these goals themselves.

Reforming blasphemy laws is crucial. Outdated laws that limit individual freedoms have no place in a diverse and expressive world. Revisiting and amending these laws can protect individuals from unjust persecution for their beliefs and expressions. The recent events in Jaranwala highlight the urgent need for concrete actions that go beyond words. Pakistan must work to eliminate extremism and preserve its minority populations.

In the intricacies that characterize interfaith relations, lack of **education** plays a significant role in escalating tensions. Ignorance and misinformation thrive when people lack proper knowledge and understanding. In a world where quality education is a privilege, not everyone has the opportunity to objectively assess religious matters. Many people have limited access to information, making them susceptible to manipulation and extremist influences. This

vulnerability can lead to tragic incidents like the recent attack in Jaranwala. Education is essential in fostering tolerance and preventing such conflicts

Considering our changing educational landscape, comprehensive education reforms must be prioritised. As we mold the minds of future generations, our curriculum must incorporate values like religious tolerance, critical thinking and human rights. Religious tolerance, in particular, is a fundamental building block of a harmonious society.

In incidents like these, one key lesson is consistent: In a society guided by the **rule of law**, no one should act as judge, jury and executioner. The recent rise in incidents where individuals resort to violence against the accused without due process and evidence is not only deeply troubling but also undermines the foundations of justice on which the nation was built on. This perpetuates a dangerous cycle of vigilantism. While emotions can run high in the face of terrible crimes or perceived injustices, it's vital to remember that the legal system is designed for fairness and impartiality.

When people take matters into their own hands, they risk compromising the integrity of the judicial process. The principle of “innocent until proven guilty” is fundamental in any civilized society. It safeguards against wrongful convictions and protects the rights of the accused. By bypassing this principle and resorting to violence, individuals not only deny the accused a fair trial but also implicate themselves in the process.

Although, instances such as burning the Holy Quran in the name of freedom of expression or ridiculing religious leaders by non-believers may result in friction and provide obstacles, the accused must be punished only through the due process of law.

Pakistanis ought to appreciate that an individual's religious views are delicate and emotive standpoint. The creation of Pakistan was driven by the desire of the Muslim population in the Indo-Pak peninsula to establish an autonomous nation that would safeguard their religious freedom and enable them to freely practice their faith. The colors of the national flag symbolise the equal rights and unrestricted autonomy to observe religious beliefs of all faiths in the nation.

To tackle these issues effectively, we can take some more concrete steps. Firstly, both the state and civil society can carry out vital **public awareness campaigns**. They should focus on revealing the severe consequences of false accusations and offer guidance on how to handle such situations if they arise. Equally important is to **speak out individually**, in journalism, in social media and in personal conversations, to foster the value of tolerance and an attitude of understanding.

[[Throvnica Chandrasekar](#) edited this piece.]

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Climate Change: A Toxic Gift for the Next Generation

India Nye Wenner
December 07, 2023

Since 1981, Earth has been heating up at double the previously recorded speed — and the people responsible for the burning are leaving its consequences to the innocent next generations. Young people are crying out for change.

Since 1981, Earth has been heating up at double the previously recorded speed. People spent the last century luxuriating in the gains of the Second Industrial Revolution. They drove gasoline-powered automobiles and bought cheap goods mass-produced in coal-burning factories. All this activity released greenhouse gases, which filled the atmosphere. These gases raised heat to unprecedented levels. The ten warmest years ever recorded have all been since 2010.

Older generations have already experienced the impact of climate change. In 2021, devastating flooding occurred in Australia, Europe, Asia and the US Northeast. California burned and crippling icy temperatures paralyzed Texas. As the climate grows hotter, these events and their risks will only escalate.

Previous generations contentedly burned more and more fossil fuels, and now future generations will experience hotter and longer heat waves, intensifying droughts and increasingly devastating flooding. While they enjoyed luxury, they've left their posterity with the burden.

Youth activism in the face of inaction

The younger generation cares a lot more about climate change than the older one. This is clear when you consider how younger people organize their family life. An increasing number of young adults have qualms about bringing children into a world experiencing intensifying disasters due to global warming. In 2018, the United States Census

Bureau reported that 83.5% of adults aged 55 and older have children. On the other hand, a 2020 Morning Consult poll, with a majority of younger Gen-Z and millennial voters, found that a quarter of childless adults cite climate change as a reason they did not have children.

Unlike thoughtless older generations, younger people do not have a choice in caring about climate change. It is their reality and their future.

Young people, realizing the climate burden left to them, have fought for change and organized mass youth climate strikes. In September 2019, more than 4 million young people in thousands of cities worldwide gathered to protest.

However, adults and politicians have criticized the youth climate movement, often claiming youths are overreacting and would be better off going to school. The adults who are causing climate change will be dead when its consequences peak. The children they are deriding as dramatic are the very same children whose lives their actions will jeopardize. Activists from the younger generation are being shut out and mocked by an older generation living in denial.

For instance, Greta Thunberg, a prominent climate activist, passionately spoke at the United Nations Climate Summit in 2019 at age 16. She denounced global leaders for their inaction and greed in the face of extreme suffering due to climate change. Numerous policymakers, including US President Donald Trump, mocked Thunberg. Trump tweeted to say she had an “anger management problem” and sarcastically described her as “a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future.”

Trump demeaned Thunberg because her criticism personally attacked his presidential ability and high self-image. Thunberg and other young climate activists threaten the worldview and

greedy interests of politicians who refuse to acknowledge the severity of the climate crisis. As Greta Thunberg puts it, “you [politicians] are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal.”

Climate anxiety and what young people can do

In the face of stubborn and selfish policymakers, young people can feel overwhelmed by hopelessness. In a study published in 2022, the majority of youth and young adults expressed extreme worry about climate change. They agree that their worry has negatively affected their daily life. In order to combat this hopeless worry, young people must do something to give themselves agency and a localized sense of control.

Advocacy is an accessible way for young people to get involved in and take action on the climate struggle. It can mean simple things, such as signing petitions, participating in marches or educating friends and family.

Little actions, such as turning off unnecessary lights and water flow, are also easy ways to take action and tackle the crisis.

The most effective way to get rid of feelings of helplessness is to take the bull by the horns and do something. The older generation of policymakers has taken agency away from young people, and they must take it back.

With all the odds pushing against them, young people must continue to press the older generation for change. They must shout, not whisper — demand, not ask — for immediate action.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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The UK's Ruthless Immigration Compromise Means Refoulement in Rwanda

Nafees Ahmad
December 12, 2023

In accordance with refugee protection, the UK Supreme Court has deemed the country's recent Rwanda refoulement policy illegal under international law. Regardless, the government aims to press on. Other nations like the US and Germany are also getting firmer on deportation, proving that ethnonationalism is on the rise.

The immigration laws in the UK are becoming more stringent, and people are losing faith in the significance of what the law permits and forbids. The UK government's refoulement (forced return) policy, a political arrangement to send asylum seekers from the UK to Rwanda to have their claims investigated and approved there, was ruled illegal by the UK Supreme Court last month in *R v Secretary of State for the Home Department*. It did so on the narrowest, most substantial legal justification conceivable: the prohibition of refoulement in international law. International law forbids sending someone back to a situation where they run the

risk of torture, cruel, inhuman or humiliating treatment, or other serious harm.

This widely accepted standard is the cornerstone of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (UNCSR) and the international legal system governing human migration. The government so blatantly broke this agreement that the Court felt compelled to state so. The UK government has indicated that it will merely legislate Rwanda's status as a safe third country. Additionally, it will withdraw from several international agreements that require it to uphold the non-refoulement principle. This will let it ignore the law and its bothersome requirements.

The UK's externalization of asylum

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak may have made these remarks as a political ploy ahead of the country's next election. After all, immigration control has been one of the most contentious political issues of our day, if not the most. As an electoral tactic, it has successfully fanned xenophobic concerns while offering no substantive answers to the migration problems in the UK's asylum externalization.

Some could argue that this kind of deliberate illegality is nothing new. Liberal-democratic constitutional governments have long been known for their flaws. These include extreme hypocrisy, breaking norms, weaponizing migration ideals and dehumanizing migrants' standards — the same ones they are obligated to uphold. This may occur visibly or more covertly. It has mainly been the case when they deal with people who, in their view, belong beyond the purview of their legal frameworks.

When we take a broader view of the UK situation, we see that the asylum and immigration mess results from more extensive issues. These may also be seen in the EU's agreements with

Turkey, Libya and Tunisia. Further, the issues appear in the EU's attempts to distance itself from the violations of human rights, drownings and other tragedies that occur within its borders.

After the Supreme Court rejected the Rwanda plan, Suella Braverman, the sacked home secretary, increased the pressure on Sunak to disregard human rights legislation. Recognizing that there is little hope of halting the boats within the current legal framework, Braverman has asked for revisions to her own Illegal Migration Act to resuscitate the Rwanda deportation system. Braverman's politics are not limited to the UK; they are prevalent throughout Europe, Oceania and the Americas.

Erica Feller, a former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, highlighted the broader threat such politics pose to refugee protection. Refugee protection is a global concern and a common trust. It means that it is a shared responsibility, not an individual one. Unless it is shouldered widely, it may be borne by none as a normative standard.

Until recently, the duplicity of these liberal-democratic states was accompanied by a persistent (though flimsy) conviction that the law's constraining force was still necessary. The law has always been put to the test, twisted and molded, and its principles have been stretched, distorted and abused. But there was still an underlying belief in the liberal legal orders that the law's prohibitions and authorizations would matter. They would play a crucial role in how we treat others and ourselves.

To guarantee states' commitment to some hard-won European refugee protection principles, this role was used for executing governmental authority and as an instrument for setting its lawful boundaries. In my view, some of the

democratically elected political leaders, as well as the UK's public opinion and their electors, have lost this dual understanding of the law's purpose. Rather than being seen as an essential component of effective governance, the law's regulating and restraining role seems increasingly to be a barrier and blow to it. This is especially true in immigration control, where legislative limitations on the government's authority are being violated or legislated over.

Sunak is, in fact, in excellent company. The Italian government's detention has likewise demonstrated a great deal of passion for disobeying the boundaries of the law, and it reacts angrily to courts' attempts to enforce them. To some extent, the EU has also started to play the same game. The regulatory power of the law is diminished each time enduring legal precepts are codified into new procedures and reception directives.

Good governance vs. immigration control

This rejection of the law as a tool of authority, limiting force and regulatory ideal seems to stem partly from the definition of good government being established within the framework of immigration control. A liberal constitutional framework prohibits good government from being defined by convenience or efficiency, nor can it include any governmental goal that most people find acceptable. In the age of globalization, liberal constitutional democracy has been under attack from the inside. The perspectives of illiberalism, populism and authoritarianism have attacked it further. We demand that normative standards of freedom, equality and human dignity constrain the goals and actions of the government. That is the yardstick by which we judge, or ought to consider, the goodness of each government action and its underlying goal.

It is worth emphasizing that we did not choose these principles randomly. Despite potential hypocrisy in liberal legal systems and their problematic application, we deliberately incorporated these principles into our constitutions. We have seen firsthand the devastation that results from simultaneously deregulating political power and concentrating it in the hands of a minority.

For immigration control, however, good governance is defined in a way that denies the cultural, ethnic and religious richness and diversity that characterize our political communities. Governments like the UK's even view that as a threat. The pursuit of universal equality and human dignity is no longer what good governance means in this regard. Instead, the purpose of government is to serve "us" at all costs. It makes no difference whether this cost comes in the form of invaluable human lives lost or a more intangible cost to the values by which we live — this is ultimately the price we must pay to protect what is right, and "right" is now what benefits us rather than the ethereal concepts of equal human dignity.

This form of ethnonationalist thought has probably never wholly vanished from the political and judicial spheres following World War II. Instead, it has consistently existed in the background, patiently awaiting an opportunity to resurface in the European shared political consciousness since the first European migration crisis was heralded.

The fallacy of Anglo-American human rights principles

Since then, ethnonationalism has undoubtedly grown in visibility, audacity and boldness in the demands it makes of the government. Along with it, we have witnessed the rise of a new kind of deliberate illegality, a rejection of the law, which is viewed as both a regulatory ideal and a tool of political power. This logic leads to inhumanity and

human suffering, as seen in the recently revealed immigration program by former US President Donald Trump. His commitment to resurrecting and extending programs like family separation, Muslim bans, mass deportations, militarized borders and enormous mass detention camps is consistent with his criticism of the law as a restraint on governmental power.

Sadly, Germany has also shown itself to be vulnerable to the perils of similar reasoning. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz remarked that the nation should finally stand firm in deportation — that Germany being tough does not make it heartless. Scholz would do well to embrace the law as a restricting factor and a tool for policy-making, even if it happens to forbid the exact toughness he aims to impose. This would prevent inhumanity from becoming the pattern for Germany's immigration policies.

Will the Rwandan deal be stopped?

The UK Supreme Court has declared its own government's "cash for humans" agreement with Rwanda to be highly unethical and illegal. The continuous attempts to externalize asylum and indefinitely detain asylum seekers are violations of non-refoulement and the UNCSR. Thousands of torture survivors are stuck in the massive asylum backlog, unable to reconstruct their lives or recuperate. The UK government should concentrate on eliminating this backlog before enacting cruel policies that violate their moral and legal obligations.

The agreement was fierce and misguided, especially because Rwanda has a history of grave human rights abuses. These include torture, arbitrary incarceration and the suppression of free speech. The arrangement with Rwanda and the Illegal Migration Act ought to be scrapped by the new home secretary, James Cleverly. Only then will decency prevail.

[[Lee Thompson-Kolar](#) edited this piece.]

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Ukrainian Refugees in Pro-Russian Transnistria Come to Moldova for Help

Tiina Kaukvere, Marian Männi
December 12, 2023

Transnistria, a breakaway region of Moldova, shares a land border with Ukraine. Up to 10,000 Ukrainian refugees have fled there. Because they are outside the reach of Moldova's official government, it is difficult for them to access basic services and aid.

Transnistria is a region of Moldova sandwiched between the Dniester River and the Ukrainian border. In 1990, pro-Russian separatists declared Transnistria's independence from Moldova. They operate their own government and border controls. But Transnistria is internationally recognized as part of Moldova.

Since the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, 8,000–10,000 Ukrainians have fled to Transnistria. From time to time, when aid is available in government-controlled Moldovan territory, hundreds of them cross the boundary to

access it. So, we traveled to Moldova on one of those days to learn why.

Ukrainian refugees cross the Dniester to collect basic needs

On a warm September day, we drive through a checkpoint out of Transnistria. We arrive at the Moldovan village of Varnita. Transnistria is just across the Dniester from here.

Transnistria's "capital," Tiraspol, is about a 30-minute drive from here, and Moldova's official capital, Chisinau, is roughly an hour away. The Ukrainian border is also nearby. Tiny Varnita serves as a gateway to three distinct worlds. Here, you can hear Ukrainian, Romanian and Russian being spoken.

Volunteers from the Moldovan non-governmental organization (NGO) Katalyst Kitchen and the Norwegian Refugee Council assemble food and hygiene packages for Ukrainian refugees living in the breakaway region. Many of the charity workers are Ukrainians themselves. Today, at least 300 people are expected to collect help. These are the lucky ones. Not everyone made it on the list.

A diverse crowd forms a long queue — babies, children, elderly and young people. An old Moldovan gas station swiftly transforms into a logistics center.

Those in need present their Ukrainian passports to receive packages tailored for babies, kids, men and women. Broad smiles appear on children's faces when they reach for their white paper bags. There are little juice boxes, fruit, and puffed snacks for them. The kids also get mini tennis rackets and balls.

The bags for adults are filled with detergents, sponges and soaps. Most of them have basic food.

The people thank the donors and quickly drag the heavy bags to their cars or walk to the bus station — only a few stay to chat. Everything is done quietly, with many unspoken words lingering in the air.

Viola Mozhaieva, a Ukrainian refugee from Transnistria, is a coordinator here. She tells us that finding aid as a refugee in Transnistria has become increasingly rare.

According to Freedom House, a democracy watchdog group, NGOs and civic activists in Transnistria operate in a repressive environment. The Transnistrian authorities monitor and harass groups that work on human rights issues. They also control the public media. Fundamental rights, like freedom of expression, are lacking.

The link to Russia is strong. About 1,500 Russian soldiers still live in Transnistria. The territory solely relies on Russian gas that is then partly converted into electricity. In this context, economic opportunity remains very limited.

"It's very tough for people in Transnistria," Viola explains. "Unfortunately, there's virtually no assistance, mainly due to lack of funding. We're fortunate if we receive food aid once a month or every other month. But people need to eat daily!"

Some refugees are already feeling desperate. "They're becoming aggressive, realizing there's no more hope. The war continues, and the conditions worsen," said Viola.

Considering all this — why stay in a Russia-friendly place with so little support or even freedom?

"We simply didn't know where else to go," 82-year-old Tamara, a native of Crimea, tells us. She traveled to Transnistria with her daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, two cats and a dog. When they arrived, they didn't know

anyone. “We just gathered our family and came here, unsure of our destination,” Tamara explained. “But kind-hearted people took us in.”

An Odesa family with three children wanted to settle in Chisinau, but the father feared he wouldn't find work there without speaking the local Romanian language. They chose Russian-speaking Transnistria instead. Their baby girl was born there after the war had started. Salaries are lower in Transnistria, but so are the rent and everything else, they explain. Now, they are just waiting for the fighting to be over so they can return to Ukraine. “The birth of our child made us hopeful,” adds the mother.

Ukraine has been a significant trading partner for Transnistria, and Ukrainians comprise about one-fifth of its population. Naturally, many refugees came here to stay with family and friends. But others simply could go no further, Viola explains, as many have disabilities.

Nearly a million border crossings

According to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, low living costs, family ties and previous residence are some of the main reasons for choosing Transnistria as a refuge. The problem is that they usually do not register themselves. As of this summer, only 76 refugees — out of possibly 10,000 — had officially filed for protection.

Since the official Moldovan government does not operate in Transnistria, officially registering as a refugee was daunting. According to the UNHCR, obtaining the necessary residency documents was difficult. The refugees also needed a Moldovan mobile number for registration, posing another obstacle. Even the absence of a Moldovan entry stamp on their passports made the registration harder.

The requirements were eased in September this year, said Monica Vazquez, the UNHCR external relations officer in Moldova. Now, refugees only need to submit a self-declaration form, accessible online.

The UNHCR operates through local partnerships across Moldova, including the Transnistrian region. They see that people get tired of helping. Many refugees have been in Moldova for at least a year. “It's natural for them to start working and become self-reliant,” said Vazquez. “But the humanitarian need persists, and it's crucial to keep supporting at all levels.”

Moldova hosts some of the region's most vulnerable refugee populations. “18% are older persons, 7–10% are persons with disabilities and over 60% are children and women,” Vazquez specified.

Moldova has been instrumental in assisting Ukrainian refugees. As of November, over 113,000 Ukrainian refugees have settled in Moldova, with nearly a million crossing the Moldovan border since the war started in February 2022. Additionally, almost 700,000 Ukrainians have returned to their war-torn homeland through Moldova since then.

“What Moldova has achieved is extraordinary on every level,” concluded Vazquez. “It's remarkable how they've stepped up, opened their doors and rushed to assist! Moldova's response has been incredibly forward-thinking.”

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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As an avid traveler, Tiina wants to shine a light on less-covered regions such as Moldova.

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How to Develop Immunity to Nonsense: Lessons From a New Science

Andy Norman
December 16, 2023

Like the body, the mind has evolved its own immune system against problematic ideas. How can you make yours stronger? Be aware of your own fallibility. With others, be charitable, yet inquisitive. Commit to the truth, instead of giving in to lazy relativism. Let arguments change your opinions, not the other way around.

In less than a generation, we've managed to build an utterly bewildering information environment: social media. With nothing more than a tap on a screen, 5.3 billion of us can now plunge headlong into a swirling ocean of "viral" content.

Previous generations also contended with misinformation. False narratives, malicious gossip

and political spin are as old as time. Before the advent of the scientific method, everyone marinated in a rich stew of fairy tales, myths and superstitions. Like us, our ancestors trusted quack cures and fell for conspiracy theories.

But now, quite suddenly, we find ourselves in a brave new world, one riddled with rabbit holes and confounded by clickbait. We have fake news and flame wars, cancel culture and contested speech norms, echo chambers and "alternative facts." We've seen culture warriors weaponize Facebook and Twitter, science denial grow into a lucrative business, and conspiracy theories mutate into monstrous forms (QAnon). Is it any wonder so many of us are lost?

We all see others taken in by the BS. We think, "Children get faked out by fairy tales, but I've outgrown them. Voters are bamboozled by propaganda, but that's them, not us. Followers of other religions are misled, but I practice the true faith." Eventually, though, the more thoughtful among us think to ask pivotal questions. "Am I really so exceptional? Or am I, too, being played? Would I know if I was? Do I really know what I think I know? What misconceptions do I harbor?"

They say there's a sucker born every minute, but in truth, we're all born suckers. We're fairly gullible by default, probably because our ancestors had to learn rapidly when young. That's why children believe in the tooth fairy. The problem is that, even as adults, we remain strangely susceptible to evolved forms of nonsense: Without guidance, we remain lost.

An unusual few, though, exhibit what I call "deep immunity." These folks think differently. Somehow, they ward off troublesome information with ease and exhibit uncommonly sound judgment. They cultivate mental habits that can grow into something we could all use more of these days: the precious trait called wisdom.

But how do we cultivate these habits? Half a lifetime ago, I began studying the matter in earnest. Decades of research led me to an astonishing, transformative, but almost unknown fact: The human mind has an immune system of its own. Just as the body has a system for spotting and neutralizing infectious microbes, the mind has a system for spotting and shedding infectious ideas. So I wrote a book about it. The book helped launch an upstart science — what we in the business call cognitive immunology.

The field illuminates the workings of the mind's defenses. It explains why these defenses sometimes break down and how we can fortify them against corruption. Critical thinking (CT), it turns out, is at best a haphazard approach to achieving misinformation immunity. CT is not enough. The good news? Outbreaks of viral nonsense are not inevitable. “Infodemics” can be prevented. The trick is to apply the science and proactively cultivate mental immunity.

In what follows, I distill an ocean of research into four actionable steps. Taking them should give your mind's defenses an immediate boost. I hope, though, that the guide will also spur more ardent, long-term striving. If we keep these guidelines in mind and work patiently toward mastery, we can all grow substantially wiser.

Step 1: Shift your reference frame

Many of us default to a certain outlook on information. I call it the info consumer frame (or ICF). On this view, the infosphere is like a marketplace. (Hence the metaphor “marketplace of ideas.”) We humans are like shoppers: We browse the aisles looking for ideas that strike our fancy. Ideas are assumed to be like products that sit obediently on shelves. Meanwhile, our minds are like shopping carts — passive containers for the mental stuff we acquire. Learning is fundamentally a matter of filling your cart with information

commodities; the ideas we “buy” into become our beliefs, and everyone is entitled to believe what they like.

This frame is pernicious. It breeds a sense of cognitive entitlement, exacerbates preexisting biases and obstructs higher-order thinking. In the information age, it is proving especially dangerous. Its influence is seen in the polarization that threatens the world's democracies and the ideological entrenchment of today's culture warriors. Whenever propaganda goes viral and incites unruly mobs, the invisible hand of the ICF is at work. In our time, we're called to rethink this prevailing understanding of our relationship with ideas.

Happily, an alternative is taking hold in the sciences. Here's the gist: Ideas are more like microbes than groceries. Bundles of information obey an evolutionary logic: The “fittest” tend to find hosts, survive and reproduce. Our minds host some that are good for us and others that are bad for us. Good ideas (roughly, true and useful ones) amount to mind-symbionts and bad ideas (the false or harmful ones) amount to mind-parasites.

Sometimes the latter — “infobugs” — proliferate at our expense. For example, beliefs about witchcraft have incited moral panics (Salem), extremist ideologies have inspired terrorist attacks (9/11) and fake news has galvanized sedition (the January 6 US Capitol attack). Some infobugs even induce us to spread them. Think of the clever but misleading meme that gets you to share it, or the religious notions that inspire proselytizing. Just as a virus can hijack a cell for its purposes, an ideology can hijack a mind for its “purposes.”

Call this the microbial ecosystem frame. Minds are not passive receptacles. They're active, infection-prone contraptions cobbled together by natural selection. In fact, our minds co-evolved in

a rich stew of ideas, many of them prone to replicate in spite of our best interests. Crucially, every one of us is susceptible to mind-infections. In fact, every one of us is infected. We play host to countless infobugs. Misconceptions, false assumptions, overgeneralizations, limiting beliefs, crippling doubts — all of these are, in a very real sense, mind-parasites. Minds teem with them, and precautions must be taken to keep them from running wild.

This frame has a key implication: Each and every one of us has a lot to learn — and unlearn. Much of what we think we know doesn't truly amount to knowledge. Admit this, embrace the consequent humility, and you take an important step toward deep immunity.

Step 2: Have standards

We need shared cognitive standards. Otherwise, our beliefs become arbitrary. Opinions diverge, ideologies harden, and worldviews become irreconcilable. Historically, it works like this: Excuses that license irresponsible talk spread, sowing the seeds of mental decadence. Then, unaccountable talk proliferates, belief systems diverge and societies succumb to mistrust, division and conflict.

The outbreaks of irresponsible thinking in our time can be traced to ideas like these: “Our beliefs are fundamentally private and no one else’s concern”; “Everyone is entitled to their opinion”; “Values are fundamentally subjective”; “Articles of faith should not be questioned”; “Criticism is tantamount to the policing of thought.” A related idea — that “no one has standing to uphold standards” — is conveyed by the sneaky rhetorical question, “Who’s to say?”

Philosophers call this nexus of ideas “relativism,” and intellectual historians know that their appearance presages periods of turmoil and

civic decline. Why? Because they weaken the centripetal pull of objective evidence. Without reality-based cognitive standards, “the center cannot hold,” and “mere anarchy is loosed.”

Cognitive immunologists classify relativistic ideas as mental immune disruptors. People employ them to evade accountability norms. This subverts those norms, leading to cognitive dysfunction. Shedding the disruptors is thus one way to build mental immunity. If you haven't already done so, I suggest renouncing the ones in quotation marks above.

Try this also: Apply the Golden Rule to the life of the mind. Ask yourself what cognitive standards you would have others observe, then hold yourself to those same standards. Want others to be honest? Be honest yourself. Want others to be fair-minded and persuadable? Make yourself fair-minded and persuadable. Are you troubled that others believe things they have no business believing? Then don't believe things you have no business believing. Apply the “Law of the Gospels” to the world of information and — voila! — you get a rich and beneficial ethics of belief.

Norms of accountable talk are the cornerstone of human civilization. When they are generally observed, constructive means exist for resolving conflicts, and everyone benefits. When bad actors defy these norms, it chips away at the trust that makes cooperative living possible. Imagine a world where decayed norms of accountable talk afford no protection against malicious accusations. Imagine a rival employing unfounded allegations to get you locked up. You'd have no recourse. If that's not the world you want, help strengthen the norms of accountable talk.

Also, dump the idea that it's enough to have a good reason for whatever you want to do or believe. You can manufacture a serviceable reason for anything, so that standard is too lax. (I call this

the Platonic standard, because it occupies center stage in two Platonic dialogues.) This standard encourages wishful thinking and rationalization. It also exacerbates confirmation bias

The antidote is the Socratic standard: beliefs and decisions should be able to withstand tough questioning, including the objections of those who disagree. Standards like this give us a mechanism for resolving our differences with words. They also bring the defects of troublesome ideas to light and help us shed them. The true test of responsible belief is not, “Can I find a reason for this?” but, “Can it withstand questioning?”

You know how we update our antivirus software to protect our computers from the latest digital pathogens? We need to do the same with our brains. Here’s how. Learn how bad actors “hack” minds: how they play on fears, encourage wishful thinking and float seductive conspiracy theories. How they weaponize doubt, cultivate cynicism and compromise mental immune systems. Build your mental library of mind-viruses, fallacies and mental immune disruptors, and you’ll spot manipulative information more easily.

Step 3: Practice basic cognitive hygiene

Many of us dislike uncertainty, so we “tune out” our doubts. But cognitive immunology explains why this is a grave mistake. Doubts are quite literally the antibodies of the mind. The mind generates them to fight off problematic information. Learn to listen to them. Often, they’ll draw attention to an idea’s defects, thereby reducing the risk of mind-infection. Better yet, befriend your doubts: learn to enjoy their company and enjoy the benefits of next-level BS-detection.

Your mind also generates reasons. Sometimes, it does this to rationalize what it wants, but more often, it does this to draw your attention to a consideration that really does count for or against

something. A basic principle of cognitive hygiene, then, is to give good reasons their due. Whether they count for your position or against it, credit them. Let them change your mind. (In practice, this often means letting them nudge your degree of confidence in something up or down a bit.)

Willingness to yield to “better reasons” is the very heart of rational accountability, so submit to each and every relevant consideration that comes along. Often, there are important considerations on both sides of an issue; when this happens, reject the myopic foolishness of “either...or” and embrace the wisdom of “both...and.” Grown-ups can credit competing considerations.

You can strengthen the “muscle” at the core of your mind’s immune system by habitually yielding to evidence. Simply allow evidence to shape your outlook and your mind’s immune system will grow stronger. Push back against evidence (that is, defy reason on behalf of a favored position), and it will grow weaker. The research on this is, I believe, conclusive: Even small concessions to willful belief damage the mind’s immune system. By all means, be resolutely hopeful, but renounce willful believing.

When exploring contentious topics, it’s also important to sideline your identity. Here’s why: When people hitch their identity to a set of views, a phenomenon called “identity-protective cognition” kicks in. They begin experiencing legitimate challenges as threats — and overreact. More precisely, your mind’s immune system will overreact. When mere words trigger a heated response in you, you’re experiencing an unhealthy auto-immune reaction. Immunologists call some immune system overreactions “autoimmunity.” Yes, auto-immune disorders of the mind also exist.

Good cognitive hygiene also requires that you practice subtractive learning. Most of us think of learning as adding to the mind’s knowledge

stockpile. But it's equally important to subtract out the stuff that doesn't belong. Notice inconsistencies in your beliefs and take time to address them. (Usually, this means letting go of one of the inconsistent beliefs.) Fail to do this and inconsistencies will accumulate; your belief system will grow increasingly unreliable, and your capacity for sound judgment will degrade.

Step 4: Mind your mindset

It's easy to slip into a mindset that compromises mental immune function. If you're too trusting, a lot of bad information will get past your filters; if you're unduly suspicious, good information will get caught in those same filters. You can be too gullible, but you can also be too cynical. You wouldn't know it from all the emphasis we place on critical thinking, but you really can be too critical for your own good.

Critical thinking is mostly a fine thing, but the combative attitude of a culture warrior is corrosive of mental immune health. Culture warriors fixate on points that can be wielded as weapons against "them" — and become blind to considerations that weigh against "us." Treat the space of reasons as a battlefield and you'll develop an acute case of what psychologists call "myside bias." This can fatally compromise your mind's immune system. That's why partisan zeal unhinges minds.

To avoid this fate, be curious, not critical. Maintain a collaborative spirit. Treat conversation partners as collaborators. Never wield reasons as weapons; instead, employ them as pointers meant to guide attention to relevant considerations. Don't reason to win; reason to find out. I call this mode the way of inquiry: Make it your default mindset and, over time, you'll achieve something akin to wisdom.

Of course, we do need to test each other's ideas. Our mind-infections are largely invisible to us, so

we need the help of others to spot them. It doesn't help, though, if conversational idea-testing becomes contentious. Then, pride and fear interfere with falsehood removal. Two habits of mind can help here. First, think of challenges as opportunities, not threats. They're opportunities to unlearn and should generally be welcomed. Master this, and you won't overreact to cognitive conflict.

Second, convert your objections into clarifying questions. Even if the view at issue seems unworthy, approach it as something worth understanding. Show genuine interest. Be curious and patient. If the claim in question is problematic, ask for help understanding it. Do this, and a lot of times the claimant will discover its problematic qualities for themselves. Once you've won a person's trust, you can place countervailing considerations alongside their reasons — "This is true too, right?" — but let them weigh up the pros and cons. And let them draw their own conclusions.

So there you have it: a four-step guide to developing mental immunity. To sum up: (1) shift your reference frame, (2) uphold standards of accountable talk, (3) practice sound cognitive hygiene and (4) mind your mindset. As you weed out misconceptions and replace them with understanding, your immunity will deepen. You'll become less prone to mind-infections. As those around you do the same, they become less likely to infect you.

We can build herd immunity to cognitive contagion. Imagine a world where outbreaks of unreason are routinely nipped in the bud, where truculent ideologies are easily dissolved and pointless partisanship no longer frustrates human aspirations. Can we evolve such a world? Absolutely. With cognitive immunology to light the path, each of us just needs to do our part.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

***Andy Norman** is the award-winning author of *Mental Immunity: Infectious Ideas, Mind-Parasites, and the Search for a Better Way to Think*. His work has appeared in *Scientific American, Psychology Today, Psychiatric Times, Skeptic, Free Inquiry* and *The Humanist*.

Trillion Dollar Dilemma: Is the US Treasury Market in Trouble?

Alex Gloy
December 16, 2023

The US Treasury market impacts everything from mortgage rates to the value of the dollar in your pocket. Recent increases in government borrowing have raised questions regarding its future. Is the most important financial market in trouble?

US Treasury securities, with more than \$33 trillion outstanding, comprise the world's largest government bond market. Yields on those securities serve as benchmarks for interest rates around the world, setting the baseline for the cost of borrowing for everything from dollar-denominated borrowing by non-US governments to corporate debt. So, if the Treasury market is in trouble, its effects can ripple throughout the international debt markets and, therefore, the entire world economy.

How Treasury rates affect other rates

Since US public debt is widely regarded as a “risk-free” asset, it is taken as a baseline for pricing other, riskier debt investments.

Pricing of newly issued corporate bonds is usually expressed as a premium to US Treasuries. For example, if you are a BBB-rated US corporation, you currently would need to pay 1.6 percentage points more than the yield on 10-year US Treasury bonds, currently at 4%. Hence, the corporate bond would yield 5.6%).

The same applies to non-US governments issuing debt. Recently, the Philippines (rating: BBB+) sold new 5½-year debt. The bonds were priced to yield “T+144bps”, meaning “Treasury yield plus 144 basis points,” or 1.44 percentage points. Lower-rated State of Mongolia (B3, equivalent to B-) had to offer a spread of 4.25 percentage points over Treasuries for a total yield of 8.75%.

The yield premium over Treasuries is also known as the “spread.” Here you will find a table explaining the credit scale used by rating agencies.

The entire world's debt is priced off Treasury securities. If the yield for Treasuries goes up by one percentage point, most borrowers of US dollars will see their yields increase by the same amount. With more than \$300 trillion in global debt outstanding, a one percentage point increase in interest rates would cost borrowers \$3 trillion (which is larger than the GDP of all but the top seven nations).

Given their importance, we need to understand how Treasuries are created, traded and treated.

How the sausage is made

Treasury securities are born out of necessity—the need for the US government to raise funds. Since the government spends more than it raises in taxes, any shortfall must be filled by selling debt. For the 2022–23 fiscal year, the deficit amounted to nearly \$1.7 trillion.

In addition to plugging the hole torn by deficits, the US government needs to refinance existing debt coming due — which is a lot. An astonishing 85% of Treasury debt issued in 2023 is due within one year or less. This leads to constant refinancing needs. 4-week Treasury bills, for example, need to be refinanced twelve times per year.

Despite the annual fiscal deficit being “only” \$1.7 trillion, the gross financing needs for November 2023 alone added up to \$2.37 trillion.

To figure out how much debt to issue, the Congressional Budget Office drafts a “Budget and Economic Outlook,” typically each January, and updates it in August. Treasury officials meet quarterly with the Treasury Borrowing Advisory Committee, comprising senior representatives from banks, broker-dealers, hedge funds and insurance companies. The committee then issues a report to the Treasury Secretary with recommendations on debt issuance for the coming quarter, culminating in table with a recommended financing schedule. The Treasury department subsequently issues a tentative auction schedule. This way, market participants can anticipate future supply and plan accordingly.

Treasury securities come in three main categories, classified by time to maturity: Treasury Bills (one year or less, namely 4-, 8-, 13-, 17-, 26-, and 52-week), Treasury Notes (2-, 3-, 5-, and 10-year) and Treasury Bonds (20- and 30-year).

The bills do not have a coupon, or interest payment. Instead, are sold at a discount to their face value. For example, a 52-week bill would be issued at 95%, so that the ultimate yield would be 5.26%. All other Treasury securities carry a coupon.

All issues have a fixed rate, except for the 2-year note, which can be issued with either a fixed or variable rate.

In addition, 5-, 10-, and 30-year notes and bonds also come as Treasury Inflation Protected Securities (TIPS). Unlike other Treasury securities, where the principal is fixed, the principal of a TIPS receives an inflation adjustment over time. For example, the latest 5-year TIPS has a coupon of 2.375%. On top of that, the principal gets adjusted for inflation in regular intervals, compensating the owner for the loss of purchasing power.

How Treasuries are sold

New Treasury securities are sold via auctions. Institutions submit bids, stating which minimum yield they are willing to accept. The Treasury then fills all bids, beginning with the lowest yields, until the entire auction amount is sold (i.e., it uses a Dutch auction). All successful bidders are then awarded the same final yield.

Indirect bidders do not have accounts with the Treasury and must submit their orders through primary dealers, who act as intermediaries.

Primary dealers are a select group of banks and financial institutions that are obligated to bid in Treasury auctions. If no other buyers show up, primary dealers will end up buying the entire auction. In theory, this could amount to \$90 billion or more. However, in March 2020, the Federal Reserve introduced a lending program, the so-called “Primary Dealer Credit Facility,” where Primary Dealers can obtain loans against collateral

(consisting of the Treasury securities they just bought). The amount of borrowing is unlimited, thereby eliminating the possibility of a failed auction.

This is an important piece of information to understand: US Treasury auctions cannot fail. The Federal Reserve will lend unlimited funds to private sector institutions to absorb any unsold securities. However, the Federal Reserve does not cover any price risk; if interest rates were to rise rapidly, bond prices would decline, creating losses for financial institutions holding them. This effect was seen in March 2023, when Silicon Valley Bank was brought down by losses on Treasury securities and other bonds usually deemed “high quality liquid assets.”

The secondary market

Buying a Treasury security in an auction is also referred to as the primary market. Once a Treasury security has been issued, trading in the secondary market begins.

Trading volume in the secondary market is impressive. According to the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association, more than \$840 billion worth of Treasury securities were traded daily during November 2023. On busy days, trading volume is likely to exceed \$1 trillion, equal to 3% of the total amount outstanding.

On top of that, futures contracts on those bonds are being traded. A futures contract is a trade where the price between buyer and seller is set, but the settlement is made at a specified date some time later. Most futures positions are unwound before settlement.

The average daily volume for the most popular contracts (10-year, 2-year and 5-year) exceeded 13 million in November of 2023. Multiplying the number of contracts traded by their face value of

\$100,000, the total value of those futures traded amounted to more than \$642 billion.

Maintaining this level of market liquidity is important because it makes sure that large buy or sell orders can be absorbed without much impact on price.

The repo market

If you are in a financial pinch and need to borrow money, you may go to a pawn shop. A simple promise to pack back the loan will not convince the store clerk. However, you can use a gold watch as collateral. The store clerk keeps your gold watch until you pay back your loan.

Treasury securities are considered the safest and most liquid investment. This makes Treasuries the perfect collateral for borrowing money.

After the 2008 global financial crisis, unsecured lending (without collateral) all but disappeared. Even banks do not trust each other anymore.

Borrowing money by using Treasury securities is called a repurchase agreement, or short “repo”. In a repo transaction, the borrower agrees to buy back the securities used as collateral at a later date. The repurchase price will be at a slight premium, compensating the lender for lost interest. The time frame for these transactions is usually very short, often overnight.

Here, too, the amounts involved are mind-boggling. In November, the average daily repo financing reached a stunning \$5.2 trillion, comprising \$4 trillion of Treasury securities.

As if this wasn’t enough, a reverse-repo market exists where the Federal Reserve lends out Treasury securities in exchange for cash, with a peak volume of \$2.5 trillion.

Who owns Treasuries?

“Somebody” needs to own (and keep buying) US federal debt. A look at the the owners of Treasuries reveals that only two out of five groups are price-sensitive: foreign and domestic private institutions. The other three groups are the US government trust funds, the Federal Reserve and foreign official holders — central banks and sovereign wealth funds.

US government trust funds include like the Social Security and Medicare. These funds are “captive” buyers. They are obligated to invest in Treasuries, regardless of the price.

Central banks, including both the Federal Reserve and foreign central banks, are also insensitive to price. They acquire securities for reasons other than profit maximization. Their purchases are motivated by monetary policy (Federal Reserve) or exchange rate policy (foreign central banks).

Foreign entities hold \$6.7 trillion worth of Treasury securities, of which foreign official accounts hold more than half. Among the largest holders by country are traditional export countries like Japan (\$1 trillion) and China (\$0.8 trillion). As most internationally traded commodities and goods are invoiced in US dollars, the exporter ends up with excess dollars. To prevent its exchange rate from appreciating, their central bank then needs to absorb those dollars.

This has important implications; as long as non-US nations produce more goods and services than they consume, they will have positive trade balances, and hence US dollar inflows (that often get absorbed by a central bank). As long as the US consumes more than it produces, a trade deficit implies more money leaving the US than coming in. In other words, the US is exporting Treasury securities. The export of debt is the mirror image

of its balance of trade. Financial flows must match flows of goods and services.

According the Polish economist Kalecki, a nation’s economy consists of four sectors: households and corporations (the private sector), the government and the foreign sector.

If the foreign sector has a surplus, domestic sectors must have a deficit. This could be either the government, or the private sector, or both. In the case of the US, the large and growing trade deficit therefore requires a large and growing fiscal deficit.

Only if Congress stepped in and put the brakes on government spending would the fiscal deficit shrink. This, in turn, would force a reduction in the trade deficit. Such a reduction is characteristic of a recession, as US consumers are forced to cut consumption, a lot of which consists of imported goods.

Foreigners would then cut their purchases of US securities. But now, the need for foreign financing of US debt is reduced since the fiscal deficit was addressed.

The numbers may seem scarily large, but the Treasury market is far from being at the edge of a cliff.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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On Women's New "Right" to Have "Sex Like Men"

Rahul Sur

December 17, 2023

The sexual revolution had the goal of giving women the right to “have sex like men.” In the years since, Western women and men have grown more distant. Birth rates have dropped while young people avoid emotional intimacy and choose artificial alternatives to sex. To correct this, we must embrace the fact that women and men have different, unequal but complementary sex drives.

Medicine is a double-edged sword. It can heal an infection or illness, but it can also have unwelcome or even fatal side effects. Likewise, an unthoughtful application of an ideal may lead to unintended, disastrous consequences. That is what happened after the feminist movement altered history by winning the right for women to have sex like men.

The foundational idea of feminism has always been to achieve equality between the sexes. Inspired by this, the catalyst propelling the sexual revolution was the assertion that women have a right to express their sexuality in the same way as their male counterparts. There is no doubt that at least some feminists fought for this right. The famous television show *Sex and the City* posed the question of whether women should seek sexual pleasure as men do. *Vogue* magazine asked this again in 2022 but avoided answering it.

The issue remains relevant. It gets straight to the fundamental connection that links men and

women: their sexual union and the societal norms surrounding it.

The sexual revolution, past and present

With “equality” as their guiding light, feminists began their long march toward sexual freedom. The following is a timeline of the movement’s major milestones, following the progression of how the demand for sexual equality with men grew.

In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women’s rights convention in America, was held. Its manifesto, the Declaration of Sentiments, declared that “all men and women are created equal” and objected to “a different code of morals for men and women.” By “morals,” of course, they meant sex.

In 1928, Margaret Mead, the high priestess of the sexual revolution, published her famous book *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*. She wanted to “concentrate upon the adolescent girl in Samoa” who “thrusts virtuosity away from her ... All of her interest is expended on clandestine sex adventures.”

From the 1970s onward, the sexual revolution’s theorists and scientists started asserting that sexual repression or “civilized” sexual morality undermined human happiness. The feminist Germaine Greer “championed promiscuity to break women’s ‘doglike’ devotion to men ... tentatively at first, but with rising confidence, women were claiming unrestricted erotic freedom.”

Today, feminists continue to assert that women and men are equally sexually hungry. Dr. Sarah Hunter Murray, author of *Not Always in the Mood: The New Science of Men, Sex, and Relationships*, holds this view. In her words, “Not

only is the idea that men have higher sex drives an oversimplified notion, but it's really just not true."

A study from the University of Michigan assures us that "Women like casual sex as much as men if the stigma is removed from accepting the offer and the experience involves a 'great lover.'" Feminist Kristen Sollee stated, "So many high profile women are embracing gender equality and unabashed sexual expression."

Influenced by this norm, sex therapists compel their female clients to act like men sexually. One therapist had clients who were "strong, progressive women" but weren't "comfortable expressing themselves" at an "intimate, sexual level." They felt that men should seek them instead. The therapist advised her clients to exercise assertiveness. She suggested they buy marbles in two different colors, one for each partner, and put them near an empty glass bowl. Whenever a client or her partner initiated sex, she was to place a marble into the bowl. The goal was to have roughly an equal mix of colors in the bowl at the end of the year. She was effectively telling her female clients they must mimic men to be sexually equal.

Feminists won a resounding victory: The right of a woman to "have sex like a man," if she so wants, is now cultural orthodoxy. Even the suggestion that she should not do so because she is a woman would be considered a violation of her equality with men.

A rather sticky issue remains, however. The feminists assumed that women could have sex like men because the male and female sex drives are the same. But is that true? In the spirit of the Seneca Convention's assertion to "let facts be submitted to a candid world," here are some that speak directly to the strength of the male sex drive.

The male sex drive's great, and sometimes destructive strength

Prostitution has occurred in all cultures across the world. Female prostitutes are mentioned throughout the ages, from the Code of Hammurabi in the 18th century BC to Hollywood's hit film *Pretty Woman* in the modern era. Powerful kings and monarchs assembled colossal harems such as the Grand Seraglio of the Ottoman Sultans. Hugh Hefner had a harem of Playboy Bunnies. Women were, are and will be objects of affection for the male gaze.

History and current events have repeatedly shown us the deviant side of male sexuality. The use of rape as a weapon is a war crime recognized by international criminal law. Religions reflect how powerful the male sex drive is. The Quran dangles women as one of the rewards for pious Muslim men in heaven, saying it is populated by "maidens of modest gaze, who no human or jinn has ever touched before." Mohammad Atta, one of the airplane hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, thought he would go on and find "women of paradise" waiting for him, dressed "in their most beautiful clothing." Voyeurs are all male and can go to great lengths to observe nude women, even on US Navy ships. There is a reason why they are called "Peeping Toms."

With such a storied history of prompting sexual misconduct, the male libido is notorious to women everywhere. Journalist Hadley Freeman wrote, "Men ... are dogs, trying desperately to escape being trapped so they can hump anyone and everyone they meet."

The female sex drive is weaker

Nobody makes the case that women do not like sex or do not cheat on their spouses. Different women have different preferences and goals. However, it

is not complicated to determine the strength of the female sex drive vis-à-vis the male one if we look for evidence around us.

The #MeToo movement and the No Means No movement, the latter of which went on to become Only Yes Means Yes, demonstrate that women are far less ready for casual sex. The multi-billion-dollar worldwide market for diamond engagement rings shows women's preference for monogamy.

The Fifty Shades of Grey book series, which has sold over 150 million copies worldwide in 52 languages, has a majority female readership. It is about women's secret longing to be sexually dominated by a powerful, controlling man. Time magazine reported on analyses of 20 studies that estimated that between 31% and 57% of women entertain fantasies where they are forced to have sex. Empirical studies have shown first and second-year female students "hook up" to shed their virginity. By the third year, however, they become increasingly interested in committed relationships and have less casual sex.

Even Margaret Mead's 1928 book contradicts the portrayal of women as promiscuous. In the chapter on formal sexual relations, she wrote, "In native theory, barrenness is the punishment of promiscuity; and, vice versa, only persistent monogamy is rewarded by conception ... virginity is a legal requirement for her ... and virginity definitely adds to a girl's attractiveness."

In her pioneering book, Mead informs us about the premium on female virginity even in a society considered relatively free of moral constraints. It suggests a disparity in the strengths of the male and female sex drives.

The consequences are becoming apparent

It has been over 50 years since the start of the sexual revolution, and its effects have shown

themselves. In 2022, Jessica Burrell, a feminist who prided herself on her sexual conquests, wrote:

The tide is turning away from casual sex, especially for women...a new wave of conscious abstinence seems to be emerging. But why is this? ... It was easy to feel a sense of duty to use this hard-earned freedom; when single, I had a sense that it was my feminist obligation to get out there and have sex like a man, overriding any hormonal urges and remaining intently unattached. To be empowered meant being unfailingly up for it, and those who weren't risked looking uncool or not progressive. For me, this meant...a pressure to have sex on male terms.

This is a paragraph rich in unwitting revelations. Ironically, the right to have sex like men became its exact opposite: a "feminist obligation" and "sense of duty." Having "sex like a man" implies that women do not like to have sex like men. And the "hormonal urges" are a tacit admission of what evolutionary biologists have long told us, which feminists derided: The possibility that sex can result in a life-altering pregnancy gives women a heavier burden, making women sexually choosier than men.

We now have more than 50 years of data to prove that the sexual revolution had the worst effect on the one thing it was supposed to improve: sex. The orthodoxy that a woman had to remain a virgin before marriage was replaced by the orthodoxy that she had better not remain one. The mission statement that "we want to have sex like men" went on to become the sexual revolution's first commandment: that women are always ready and sexually available.

Unsurprisingly, to many powerful men, this seemed like an offer they could hardly refuse. Many of them forced themselves upon women

who did not want their attention and claimed that their actions were consensual. (Though that possibility cannot always be ruled out — women, too, can fib.) It is after the sexual revolution that women's complaints of good men being extinct have hit an all-time high. Young people are having less sex than before.

The passionate union between man and woman is seriously threatened. The National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior reported that men and women under 30 were “significantly more likely” to admit that they did not kiss during sex because kissing would have been “too intimate” with their partner. Yes, even the kiss appears endangered. Birth rates have plummeted across the West and are now far below replacement rates.

Technological alternatives dominate sex

We are at the cusp of an age where men and women are attempting to eliminate each other sexually. What else can one make of the fact that women's demand for donated sperm has soared? Many sperm banks are deliberately established near elite colleges to satisfy women's demand for “college-educated sperm.” The global sperm bank market is expected to grow from \$5 billion in 2021 to \$7.5 billion by 2030. This is a result of the growing acceptance of single-parent or same-sex families.

By a creepy and mysterious coincidence, sperm counts of Western men — only Western men — have halved in the last 40 years. That is just ten years after the sexual revolution started. In the last decade, the number of women choosing to freeze their eggs has increased tenfold.

Men also took action to get flesh-and-blood women out of their lives with pornography. They also have the option to seek pleasure from virtual girlfriends. The AI chatbot company Replika offers erotic roleplay to its customers. Some

buyers consider themselves “married” to their chatbot companions. The company Silicon Wives sells luxury sex dolls for \$2,000 and ships them free worldwide. Its blog congratulates new customers, assuring them:

You've made a great investment. A sex doll can provide companionship, sexual satisfaction, and even add some unique spice to your relationships. A sex doll doesn't care about your job, car, looks, or the contents of your wallet. They're always up for a good time and will never judge you for your fantasies or your hang-ups.

In short, a Silicon Wives doll is a woman without the ‘disadvantages’ that come with a real one.

The sexual revolution has hurt women

If there was any intention among the revolutionists that increased sexual rights would benefit women's lives, it fell through. Instead, the opposite happened: Women's happiness is declining, particularly in America. Antidepressant use is rising, mostly in women. Nearly 18% of adult women use antidepressants. Increasing numbers of women are drinking themselves to death. Single mothers head 80% of the 10.89 million single-parent families in the country — a third of them live in poverty.

America is not the only nation in jeopardy. In Western countries such as the UK, Greece and Venezuela, significantly more young women have been convicted for violent crimes than in the past. The UK has reported a loneliness epidemic among teenage girls and young women.

How did this happen to the West? The root cause is the literal application of equality in the sexual realm. Equality is an ideal that glitters because of its seeming ethical symmetry. It is

manifestly contrary to hierarchy. That is simultaneously its strength and weakness, as equality can be mistaken for sameness or identity.

Once it was accepted that women are equal to men — which they undoubtedly are in worth and dignity — the logic of this principle extended unstoppably into women’s sexual lives. Since men had demonstrably more sexual freedom, logic demanded that women ask for equal rights. To argue or concede that women were different might have implied that they wanted less sex than men. That would have been a nail in the coffin in their fight for equality. Logic locked feminists into demanding that women get the right to have sex like men. Those who made the demand unknowingly set women up to be clones of men while kneeling before the shrine of equality.

The complementary nature of the sexes must be understood

The feminist victory that women should have the right to have sex like men is probably one of social history’s worst turning points. The data inarguably shows this. Essentially, feminists overprescribed their medicine. Sex is essential to women, and it was tightly moderated before the revolution. Since then, feminists have effectively prescribed morphine for a headache.

Sex for women does not have to be of all-consuming importance like feminists decided. The women who made this diagnosis were puzzlingly most out of touch with the specificities of female sexuality. It was betrayal by women intellectuals — many of them elite and white — that has damaged millions of ordinary women. This right must be challenged, or else its devastating social consequences will spread further across the world.

Now that some women are realizing the revolution’s failure, the logical next step is to

correct course. People who genuinely care about women, men and society at large should launch a new discourse: Women can reflect upon the advantages of renouncing equal sex. They can embrace a sexually conservative lifestyle that treats female sexuality with understanding and nuance.

Doing so should not be considered as succumbing to the “patriarchy,” but simply drawing on past experience. If such a movement grows strong, it is also likely to induce positive changes in men’s sexuality and behavior. Today’s men, who are wrongly excoriated for their shortcomings, may work harder to win love. Women have far more power over men than feminists care to admit. They are what men dream about and desire all their lives. It is time for women to regain what nature has given to them, which was whittled away in the name of equality.

Sex between women and men ought to be exempt from the misapplication of the ideal of equality. Instead, we should accept it for what it really is: gloriously unequal, different and complementary between two equally authentic sides of humanity.

[[Lee Thompson-Kolar](#) edited this piece.]

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Sanctions and Internet Access Will Fail to Promote Regime Change

Ted McCarthy
December 23, 2023

US policymakers have long assumed that sanctions on trade and promoting access to the Internet would lead oppressed people to change their governments. More often than not, they provoke harsh crackdowns and create little substantial benefit.

How does one kill a zombie — especially if the zombie is a stubborn and pernicious idea?

Paul Krugman wrote last year how “Zombie Reaganomics” continues to infect the brains of Republican politicians in the United States. I’d like here to promote two additional policy notions to similar “zombie” status. First, the idea that widespread sanctions can drive regime change under autocratic governments. And second, that expanding Internet access can achieve the same.

Of course, these two levers of political control appear quite different on the surface. The Internet is a positive force in the world allowing for increased communication and information — something I do believe, despite my pessimistic views to follow. Meanwhile, sanctions, as even one conservative-libertarian think tank recently argued, are increasingly seen as both “ineffective and immoral” means of punishing governments deemed unsavory.

But some policymakers and pundits today, especially in the United States, seem to think both

increasing Internet availability and sanctions can still do good for the citizens of their target countries. See for instance, US Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott. They recently co-sponsored Senate bills and amendments urging the US to fund expanded Internet access on the island of Cuba. Scott and Rubio carefully positioned this advocacy as coming from a place of care for the wellbeing of the Cuban people. In December 2020, Rubio issued a statement demanding the US work harder “to protect the fundamental rights of Cubans.”

Yet only six months later, the same senator urged the Biden administration to increase sanctions against the Cuban government — in effect, against the very same people whose “fundamental rights” he says he wants to protect.

How is it possible for one person to both wish to expand Cuban sanctions and Cuban Internet access? Presumably, Rubio hopes these things will magically lead to more freedom for Cubans, despite mounting evidence neither can do so. I believe there’s a Cranberries song for that.

These zombie ideas have proven false nearly everywhere in the world, but there’s a great deal of evidence this is especially true for Cuba. So let’s separately examine the impacts of the Internet and sanctions on autocratic governments, and then see how the two have played out together in Cuba over the past several years to disastrous effect.

Comparison shopping

An idea has persisted throughout the politics, media and tech space for decades that the Internet inevitably leads to democracy in places with autocratic regimes. As Thomas Friedman wrote in his 1999 book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*:

On the Internet people are ... uploading and downloading ideologies. In a few years,

every citizen of the world will be able to comparison shop between his country and his own government and the one next door.

Since Friedman wrote these words, the Internet has expanded and changed in too many ways to count. The hope that social media and the Internet might lead to enduring political change has changed with it, as can be seen most prevalently in the hopeful run-up to, and then subsequent disappointment, of the variously named Twitter, Facebook, Arab Spring and WikiLeaks “revolutions.” Entire books have been published examining how the Internet has helped fuel protest movements and then, more often than not, helped repressive regimes crush them — and then allowed these same regimes to strengthen grips on power, tightening government palms over civilian mouths.

In fact, as James Griffiths argues in his book *The Great Firewall of China: How to Build and Control an Alternative Version of the Internet*, US rhetoric about Internet freedoms has even helped strengthen autocratic governments by validating claims of US imperialism. Griffiths points to a situation in 2010 in which the government of China pointed at US efforts in Iran’s “Twitter Revolution” to justify its own Internet controls. He cites Yu Wanli, an expert on US–China relations, who explained to US diplomats that pro-Internet rhetoric, like that of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “empowered the censors, ‘who could now plausibly argue that the United States was explicitly using the Internet as a tool for regime change.’”

We can see another example of Internet evangelistic backfire in the deployment of ZunZuneo, a Twitter-like app secretly created and deployed in Cuba by the United States Agency for International Development. After the app made headlines, NPR asked, “Was ZunZuneo to Promote Free Speech or Destabilize Cuba?” To some extent, the answer doesn’t matter — either way,

the incident created a credible intervention the Cuban government could point to in making claims of US imperialism. As Jon Lee Anderson wrote, “Episodes like ZunZuneo will only make the Cuban security state more paranoid and more fearful of opening up, and the losers will be the Cuban people.”

As for sanctions, a mounting body of evidence shows they tend to succeed in anything but preserving the “fundamental rights” of citizens. As the Center for Economic and Policy Research documented extensively in a recent paper, 30 separate studies have found sanctions negatively affect “per capita income to poverty, inequality, mortality, and human rights.”

A 2018 UN estimate found the US embargo of Cuba in particular had cost the Cuban economy a phenomenal \$130 billion over the course of nearly sixty years, a figure which has surely risen since. William LeoGrande, professor and former dean of the American University’s School of Public Affairs, writes that the embargo is “the oldest and most comprehensive US economic sanctions regime against any country in the world,” and that it “has never been effective at achieving its principal purpose: forcing Cuba’s revolutionary regime out of power or bending it to Washington’s will.” My co-host and I discussed the ongoing failure of America’s Cuba sanctions on our podcast with policy expert Rob Morris, who also discussed the devastating cruelty and failure of sanctions around the world earlier in the year.

To be clear, I’m no apologist for the Cuban government. But it is evident that, as we approach the 65th year of the island’s US sanctions without any semblance of the regime change they first promised, we should finally find a way to retire them.

A case study of Cuba

Now with the Internet, we can see the reality of the world... before it was just Cuba, but now we see on the Internet, England, France. We think 'what the f---?!' People are unhappy.

I heard this in Havana in May 2023 from Elizabeth, a waitress in her twenties. And I heard similar attitudes from others I met too — sentiments much different from my first visit to Cuba, seven years earlier. When I told a young man, José, that it was my second visit to the island, he replied with a resigned tone. “Oh, so you know. Things were much better then.”

What could have led to such a visible change in Cuban attitudes toward life on the island — a change large enough to allow Cubans to share their negative opinions of the country with me, a visiting stranger, despite their government’s intolerance of dissent?

A few salient events are worth noting:

— In 2017, Donald Trump entered the US White House and promptly reversed much of the economic normalization pursued by Obama. Joe Biden entered the US presidency in 2021 and has maintained most (though not all) of Trump’s Cuba policies.

— In 2019, Cuba’s state-run telecommunications company, ETECSA, finally began allowing the purchase of 4G data. This marked a crucial opening in Internet access for the average Cuban, which until then had primarily been confined to high-cost, low-speed wifi hotspots in public parks.

— In 2020, the Covid pandemic wreaked havoc on Cuba’s tourism industry and economy. This was soon followed by a sharp currency

devaluation, soaring food prices and one of the highest inflation rates in Latin America.

— On July 11, 2021, Cubans staged the largest protest movement on the island in decades — protests which locals say were fueled by social media, an idea corroborated by Freedom House. In response, the Cuban government arrested over 1,000 protesters, killed at least one and “disappeared” and detained hundreds for weeks. Internet access on the island was also completely shut for days after the July 11 protests.

So, we can observe all the elements here of the zombie ideas that some say should lead to protest and regime change under a government traditionally averse to it — strict sanctions, a rapid deterioration of living conditions, and rapid expansion of the Internet and information access.

All the underlying conditions are there. But where’s the change?

It’s not as though Cubans are naïve. I was told by a man working as a Havana tour guide, “Cuba is not like China, where they have the technology to control the Internet. If the Internet cuts out when you’re talking with a friend, the first thing you wonder is, ‘Where is the protest now?’”

But they also see what the government is doing, arresting and otherwise “disappearing” dissenters. And so many I met, rather than endanger their lives and livelihoods by continuing to try to change the government, are opting instead to do what many other rational people would in their same situations: leave.

“I don’t want the same life as my parents,” Elizabeth told me. She said she’d like to go to Mexico first, and then “maybe somewhere else.”

José, who recognized how much worse things had become in the country since 2016, told me he has a grandfather in Spain and would like to get a

“red [European] passport” within the year. Then he’d be gone too.

So we can see in Cuba a seemingly tight and tragic causal circle:

1. Sanctions immiserate a civilian population.
2. Internet access helps the population recognize and share their sense of immiseration, and perhaps even bind together to protest conditions.
3. The civilian government shows an unwillingness to tolerate this shared sense of immiseration and protest and works to quash dissent.
4. Members of the population who are able, rather than risk life and livelihood trying to change a government unwilling to change, give up and decide to leave.

There’s a fifth, and especially tragic, link in this chain. At least in the situation of Cuba, record numbers of refugees have fled to the US in recent years — surely at least in part because of the sanctions that have helped make life untenable there and the Internet that has raised awareness of this general untenability. We can see the same Rubio who has pushed for sanctions and increased Internet in Cuba to “protect the fundamental rights of Cubans” also pushing for their exile and working to block access to Cuban refugee benefits, ultimately pushing the US government to forcibly expel large numbers of the Cuban refugee population back to Cuba — back to the government and country they were trying so hard to leave.

A failed tactic

Does Internet access ever lead to regime change? Sadly, the answer seems to be no. Or at least not yet, and not in the long term.

We can see this in Cuba, as I’ve outlined above. The Internet can perhaps even help protests bond together, but the idea that protest movements will change governments hinges on an assumption of democratic responsiveness. And the places where policymakers and pundits focus their hopes on Internet-driven revolution are almost always countries lacking just this — indeed, a dearth of democratic responsiveness is the very reason for much of the focus on Internet and sanctions in those places to begin with.

This is perhaps no better summed up than by Elizabeth, the waitress I met in Havana this spring. Because of the Internet, she says, “the government has less power over the people.” But when I asked if she thought the government would change as a result, she rolled her eyes, and stifled a laugh. “Change anything? No!”

I, in fact, largely agree with Friedman’s claim over 20 years ago that the Internet will allow “every citizen of the world ... to comparison shop between his country and his own government and the one next door.” But it’s evident from all that’s occurred since that this “comparison shopping” won’t usually lead to new and better governments for those citizens, it only means they’ll either grumble through it or leave that “store”, their country, for another, better one. And then hope that country doesn’t deport them.

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Sudan Is on the Brink of a New Catastrophe

Martin Plaut
December 23, 2023

Rebels have taken over Sudan's second-largest city. The latest fighting is exacerbating a terrible humanitarian crisis and 6.7 million have fled their homes. Foreign actors are backing their respective horses in this civil war, which has major implications for the entire region.

On Tuesday, December 19, Sudan's second largest city, Wad Madani, fell to one of the most brutal armed groups worldwide. This made few headlines in a world obsessed with the fighting in Gaza.

The Sudanese war — which erupted in April this year — has pitted the Sudanese Armed Forces against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). On the surface, it was no more than a quarrel between two generals. However, behind the military men are a range of outside forces. While the army has been the traditional bastion of the state, the RSF grew out of the notorious Janjaweed, a notorious Sudanese Arab militia charged with genocide for its activities in Sudan's western region of Darfur.

As Kate Ferguson of Protection Approaches wrote:

The RSF is the Janjaweed rebranded, the “devils on horseback” used by the Sudanese government from 2003 to implement widespread and systematic crimes against non-Arab communities across Darfur. The RSF was, and still is, commanded by Gen Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo.

The war is a tragedy for the Sudanese people. It has forced an estimated 6.7 million people to flee from their homes. According to aid agencies, this is “the largest displacement crisis globally.” Although apparently no more than a regional issue, Sudan's conflict has the potential to reshape the politics of the region, with implications for the entire Middle East.

That reshaping might come later. At the moment, the humanitarian crisis is dire and can be grasped from two maps. The first map, by the International Organisation for Migration, shows where the population has fled.

International Organization for Migration (IOM), Dec 12 2023. DTM DTM Sudan Weekly Displacement Snapshot 13. IOM, Sudan.

The second map, by the Famine Early Warning System, shows just how close many Sudanese are to famine, having been forced off their lands. Over half the population — 25 million people (including 13 million children) — urgently need humanitarian assistance.

The fall of Wad Madani after three days of fighting left the RSF with a precious resource. Not only did it capture a city that was home to the army's first infantry division, the RSF now holds the urban area to which most aid agencies decamped after the fighting erupted in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital. Now, the rebel RSF holds most of Khartoum and large parts of Darfur, while the Sudanese army, under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, has had to decamp to the relative safety of Port Sudan.

Chatham House analysts neatly summed up the situation: “An effective partition has emerged in Sudan, with the army controlling the east and northeast and the RSF controlling much of the capital and west of the country.”

International forces fueling the conflict

The African Union (AU) and its regional body — the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) — have made little headway in attempting to end the fighting. South Sudan, Djibouti and Ethiopia are attempting to appoint a special envoy, but even if they manage to select an appropriate mediator, it is hard to see how this envoy will make progress. The much vaunted African Standby Force, on which the AU and the international community have spent vast sums of money, is yet to be deployed. Instead, the only viable peace talks have taken place in Jeddah, which indicates that the Arab world, not the AU, is playing a more significant role in Sudan.

The fighting between the Sudanese army and the RSF is backed by external supporters. Burhan and the army look north for support. Historically, most Sudanese have looked to Egypt for support. Burhan was trained in Egypt and is a regular guest of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who has just won a third term in office. The Sudanese general can also rely on the Saudis for some backing. Also, the US gives Burhan and the army lukewarm support.

The reason US support is lukewarm is simple. President Joe Biden is bogged down by the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza. With his reelection bid kicking off, Biden has little time to concentrate on Sudan. This apparent indifference is a mistake. Alex de Waal argues that benign neglect does not serve Washington's interests. The Sudanese crisis will only end when the US engages more robustly.

Note that Burhan and the army have a poor support base. The RSF is much better resourced. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, generally referred to mononymously as Hemedti, leads the RSF. He is a former Janjaweed leader who was the deputy head of the Transitional Military Council following the 2019 Sudanese coup d'état. Hemedti has backers

and the RSF has more money, men and motivation than the army.

Hemedti has links across the border in Chad, which he has exploited to the full. In fact, the RSF, is a revamped version of the Janjaweed and has terrorized Sudan. Its Arab fighters have attacked and killed African populations in Darfur.

Hemedti has also taken control of the resources of the region in general, and its gold mines in particular. He was encouraged and supported by Russia's Wagner Group, which has taken a share of the spoils in return for supplying weapons to the RSF. This supply was tracked and traced by CNN. There is now clear evidence that the Wagner Group has been providing the RSF with missiles. Sudanese gold, flown out of Libya and on to the Russian base at Latakia paid for the weapons. This gold has not only funded Wagner, but also President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

Apart from Russia's Wagner Group, the UAE is the RSF's other major backer. The Sudanese army says it has "information from intelligence, military intelligence, and the diplomatic circuit that the UAE sends planes to support the Janjaweed." The UAE has established hospitals in Chad to provide treatment for refugees fleeing from the fighting. Although the UAE denies it, there is a widespread belief that the aid is little more than a front for weapons supplies for the RSF.

Uganda is seen as an alternative route for the UAE's support for Hemedti's operations. Reportedly, when a plane landed at Uganda's main airport Entebbe in June this year, its flight documents said it was carrying humanitarian aid sent by the UAE for Sudanese refugees. Instead, "Ugandan officials said they found dozens of green plastic crates in the plane's cargo hold filled with ammunition, assault rifles and other small arms."

Little surprise then that the Sudanese army declared 15 members of the UAE embassy persona non grata on December 11. But outgunned and with limited diplomatic support, Burhan's position appears to be weakening. At this moment there seems little chance of his allies providing the Sudanese army with the backing they require to hold off the Hemedti-led RSF. If Hemedti was to succeed in his campaign to oust the Sudanese military (and he is still some way from that objective) it would be a huge boost for his backers. The UAE would have extended its influence deep into Africa. The Wagner Group would have enhanced its operations across a vast swathe the Sahel. Hemedti's victory would strengthen Putin's influence and finances. It would also be a major blow to the US and the West. Already the Wagner Group has effectively chased the French out of Mali. Needless to say, a great deal is riding on the outcome of the Sudanese civil war. The future not only of a country but also of an entire region is at stake.

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How to Know God Exists

Mehdi Alavi
December 25, 2023

The majority of the world believes in God. Evidence of His existence surrounds us, from the sense of sight we take for granted to the laws of our astonishing world. We have a unity with each other and the universe that can only come from an omnipotent Creator. Introspecting and observing God's bountiful creation is all it takes to find Him.

Christmas is a proper time to introspect, ask forgiveness, forgive others, and express our gratitude to the Almighty for our abundant blessings. If we can still walk, talk, hear and see, we should be grateful. It is easy to underappreciate these God-given abilities.

Recently, when the question of God was raised, a good and canny friend of mine said, "I find the very idea of an omnipotent, omniscient god frightening." That remark shocked me as if someone denied the light in the middle of the day. The truth is, I am indebted to an all-powerful, all-knowing higher power. I wish to share some of my reasons for having this perspective.

You see, all cultures regardless of language, race or religion have some sort of faith in the supernatural. People throughout the world have independently envisioned a unique, transcendent source. Aristotle christened it the First Cause, Hindus know it as Brahman and Muslims call it Allah. Many Native Americans refer to it as the Great Spirit. Others call it Father, Lord, Spirit, Source, Universe, Supreme Intelligence, etc.

In April 2022, a survey found that more than two-thirds of the world's population believe in God, an afterlife and heaven and hell. Around 90% of the US population believes. This implies that God exists and that we are accountable for our actions before Him. That is, we each must assume

responsibility and act wisely. Knowing this truth, we will thrive in a healthier, more peaceful world.

Despite this, there are doubters. These people shy away from God, thinking such a concept contradicts science. On the contrary, the belief in Him strengthens science and directs scientific results for good purposes.

Sir Isaac Newton, who is considered by many the father of classical physics, was a theist. In his book, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, he wrote, “This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.” Michael Faraday, who gave us electromagnetism, held that “everything was created by God in a unified way—that if you opened up one little part of it you could see how everything was connected.” Max Planck, who initiated the concept of quantum physics, believed that being humble before a supernatural power “controls our weal and woe.”

God binds us together

The modern man sees himself as uniquely intelligent and separate from everything else. He fanatically strives to subordinate the world to his whim. He arrogantly asserts the theory of the Big Bang, insisting that the universe spontaneously sprung into existence 14 billion years ago without causation. He holds to Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinian theory of the “survival of the fittest” to explain human destiny. It never occurs to him that taking a silent pause, freeing all his senses from preconceptions and allowing himself to sense his inner peace might show him that he is one with the whole universe. Moreover, man’s role in this world is not to dominate the universe but to serve it. But that reality is achievable by knowing his actions imply accountability.

Like the realization of self-existence, the perception of a universal oneness climaxing in God represents a profound awareness that requires neither reasoning nor rationalization. Knowing one’s self or God is a feeling lying deep within our existence.

Science tells us that matter is energy, which can be visible or invisible. Energy does not have a finite boundary. One example is a lightbulb emitting light from its interior filaments. Its light is not bound by the surface of the bulb. People on Earth can see light emitted by stars millions of lightyears away. All forms of matter, whether derived from humans, plants, animals, planets, stars or the rest of the universe, are forms of energy-emitting radiation.

The personal radiation fields we all possess mingle with one another as well as other matters as if we are just one entity. In other words, we are one with each other, one with everything near or distant, and one with the universe as far as it stretches. And the power that perfectly connects us all as one defines the notion of God.

Creations have creators

Reason dictates that if I acknowledge the fact that most of the world’s population believes in God, I should give this further thought. Having looked at the world we inhabit and have made a few observations, I cannot escape the thought that it all points to the existence of an almighty Creator.

Let’s say you are walking in a park. Somebody tells you with a probability of 10%, 5% or even 1% that if you take one more step forward, the ground beneath you will give way and send you tumbling into a den of poisonous snakes. You quickly change direction to avoid the suggested peril. It is wise to do so. Similarly, many religious people say making ungodly choices results in

damnation to hell. Wouldn't this make some people want to believe in God?

Now let's say you leave the park and walk through town. You see a building and instantly arrive at a builder. You see a car and find an automaker, then a piece of equipment and its manufacturer. The universe is the same way. How could you see the vastness of space and not think it has a Creator?

Then you pass through a beautiful mall, sports arena or market. You instantly know that none of it can exist without an architect, planner or intelligent designer. How can you then look at the elegance of the universe that surrounds you and dismiss the idea that this is the work of a perfect Designer?

Next, you enter a restaurant and consume a delicious meal. You immediately know that an experienced chef picked the right recipe and closely watched the stove, constantly checking on the temperature, fluid and heat. The recipe includes many ingredients like herbs and vegetables, and it was delicately assembled. Why can't you conclude that a Master made each of those elements possible?

If the above reasoning seems too cumbersome, just look at your human body. It is composed of over 50% water and 99.9% void, constantly changing in space. But all that appears to you is connected as one, functioning without disruption. Why can you not admit that there is a perfect Operator?

Belief without seeing

Imagine you are lost somewhere, alone, and do not know the way back to safety. Or you are in a hospital bed and the doctors say there is nothing more they can do for you. Or you are in a plane facing a terrible windstorm, and you feel that death

is imminent. Throughout all these ordeals, you have no time to think about money, position, family or friends. Instead, something deep within keeps giving you hope. Why can't you admit that when you are free from the material world, you can feel God's presence shining in your soul and giving you inner peace?

Like soothing comfort, phenomena exist in nature that you cannot see, but know with certainty they exist from their impacts on the environment. You do not see light but you know from its reflection that it exists. Astronomers do not see the dark matter in space but they know from its attractions that it is there. When you look at the universe in motion with such beauty and magnificence, why can't you admit that it is operated and managed by an omniscient God?

As another hypothetical, let's say you are visiting your mother across town. You get a feeling that you must hurry home. Although your mother insists you stay the whole evening, you follow the hunch and leave. That night, your phone rings. Your mother says there was a fatal car crash on that road after you left, one you unknowingly dodged. Did you fall to your knees to thank your Creator for giving you the inclination to leave early?

Eyes and brain reveal the divine

We can find more evidence of divinity by taking a closer look at the human eye. We have sight because light passes through our cornea, pupil, iris, and lens to the retina. Photoreceptors turn that light into electrical signals and send them to the optic nerve and then to the brain. For all that to work, we must have tears to keep the eye moist. This process involves 4-6 billion neurons organized in a sophisticated manner. From the cornea to the brain, if any component does not do its part correctly and in a timely way, we see nothing. For

all that to repeatedly, continuously and flawlessly work, it requires a perfect Guardian.

Among the over eight billion people on Earth, no two have identical eyes. As a measure of security, our eyes may be used for identification. That implies a perfect Designer and Diversifier.

The eyes also express the state of our health. A good physician can look into a patient's eyes and tell that they are sick. Evidence shows that some illnesses in our body with about 30 trillion cells can be seen through the eye. That implies a design done by a Perfector.

The brain is another amazing body part God has blessed us with. Not only does it provide us with conscious thoughts, but unconscious ones as well. Dreams are generated while we sleep, which entertain us, warn us of danger, and help us solve problems we have during the day. That implies a super Originator.

The brain is made of about 86 billion neurons. Each receives around 10,000 synapses per second. The probability of a synapse to release the right neurotransmitter is 10-50%. Thus, the probability of any synapse releasing the right neurotransmitters is 50% at best. Doing that correctly each time for even ten seconds, mathematically speaking, is nearly impossible. Thus, there must be a higher order to keep the billion neurons and trillion synapses in such a way for the brain to work. That power has to be an omnipotent, omniscient Sustainer.

Closing remarks

Try this experiment. Just lie down on your back, relax and look at the sky on a clear night. Clear your mind of all mundane thoughts. You will see the sky decorated with shiny stars, all moving in organized paths. While you are doing this, the Earth beneath you is traveling about 30 kilometers

(18.5 miles) per second around the sun. The sun is traveling about 230 kilometers (144 miles) per second around the Milky Way Galaxy. The moon that makes Earth livable is constantly revolving, circulating about every 28 days. You are created in such an ingenious way that you do not feel the impacts of all these movements. Yet all follow gravitational, centrifugal and quantum laws. Any reasoning person would conclude that there ought to be an omnipotent Creator and Lawgiver.

In God alone can we have prosperity and universal peace. His presence is so overwhelming that one has to be detached from reality to miss it. Finding Him requires no education, simply deep introspection. As the Persian proverb goes, "If something is everywhere, it cannot be seen anywhere."

[[Lee Thompson-Kolar](#) edited this piece.]

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How Azerbaijan Found Victory, and Armenia Defeat, in Nagorno-Karabakh

Atul Singh, Anton Schauble
December 26, 2023

Armenia has played a weak hand badly while Azerbaijan has grabbed a once-in-many-

generations opportunity with both hands. After taking over Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan now eyes a corridor through Armenian territory to the Azeri enclave of Nakhchivan. This could draw Turkey and Iran into the fight, threatening the stability of the entire region.

On February 21, one of the authors of this piece explained the backstory of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Armenia was once a part of the Ottoman Empire, while Azerbaijan belonged to the Qajar dynasty of Iran. As both empires weakened and fell, Armenia and Azerbaijan ended up in the Soviet Union.

In 1991, the Soviet Union fell as well. Since then, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at odds with each other over Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan. Until two months ago, Armenians lived in Nagorno-Karabakh, an area within Azerbaijan. Azeris still live in Nakhichevan, an area within Armenia that borders Iran and Turkey. Yes, this sounds complicated but so are most imperial hangovers.

On September 19, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh. This autonomous ethnic Armenian enclave called itself the Republic of Artsakh. Within 24 hours, this so-called republic ceased to exist. Now, Azerbaijani military forces control Nagorno-Karabakh. The Artsakh Defense Army stands disbanded and people who lived here for centuries, if not millennia, have fled to Armenia.

David J. Scheffer of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) states that Armenians are “experiencing ethnic cleansing at warp speed.” Others defend Azerbaijan and argue that its troops are only restoring sovereignty to territory that is rightfully theirs. Armenia had controlled Nagorno-

Karabakh and surrounding areas, all legally Azerbaijani territory, until a few years ago.

Azerbaijanis claim that this Armenian exodus is voluntary. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev promised to protect Armenian civil rights in Nagorno-Karabakh, but fleeing Armenians feared persecution and massacre “after years of mutual distrust and open hatred between Azerbaijan and Armenia.”

A complicated history that goes back centuries

Over time, various empires have conquered and controlled the South Caucasus. Generals like Cyrus, Alexander and Pompey swept through this mountainous region. In antiquity, winning in the South Caucasus was essential if you wanted to be called “the Great.”

Why is the South Caucasus so important for the likes of Cyrus or Alexander the Great? Geography provides us the answer.

The South Caucasus lies at the crossroads of empires. To its west, lies the Mediterranean Sea which was the locus of the Macedonian, Roman and Ottoman empires. To its north and east (beyond the Caspian Sea), lie the great Eurasian grasslands that were once dominated by the Mongols and now by the Russians. To the south of the South Caucasus lie the Tigris and Euphrates rivers — historically known as Mesopotamia — and the Iranian plateau that was the power base of the Persian Empire.

This mountainous region has been the meeting place for great empires and the battleground for great powers. Romans and Persians traded Armenia back and forth. Over the past five centuries, Safavid Persia, Ottoman Turkey and the Russian Empire have controlled different parts of this territory at different times. Their successor states still jostle over the South Caucasus today.

World War I was critical in forging modern South Caucasus. Tsarist Russia faced disastrous defeat. In 1917, a revolution erupted and Russian control of this region evaporated. Idealists forged the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, which disintegrated into Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia within five weeks. In this age of ethnic nationalism, a multiethnic state proved a bridge too far, especially for the fractious South Caucasus.

Like the Russians, the Ottomans fared poorly in World War I. Armenia took advantage of Ottoman weakness to take control over Nakhchivan. Rebellions by the local Muslim population followed but Armenia managed to retain control. In the case of Zangezur and Karabakh, Azerbaijan stood in Armenia's way and both these young countries fought inconclusively.

When World War I ended, the Ottoman Empire collapsed as well. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk set out to create a modern Turkish nation state. Out went a multiethnic empire, in came a more ethnically homogeneous nation. The Turks expelled the Greeks and the Armenians from this new state. Modern Turkey was built through ethnic cleansing, although the Ottomans had set the ball rolling with the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

Atatürk was rebelling against the peace settlement imposed by the victorious allies in 1920. The Treaty of Sèvres wrested the Arab and Greek portions of the Ottoman empire from Turkish control. The British and the French divvied up the Arab lands between themselves. Along with Italy, they also carved Turkey into spheres of influence. Atatürk defeated the occupying forces, scrapped the old treaty and negotiated the far more favorable 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

The now largely forgotten Treaty of Sèvres provided for an independent Armenia. The

idealistic Woodrow Wilson proposed that the US be the protector of this new Armenia. The 1920 treaty envisioned an Armenia four and a half times larger than the one today. Sadly for Wilson and Armenia, the US turned isolationist at the end of the war. The US Senate withdrew from the League of Nations and torpedoed Wilson's plans for Armenia.

While the US turned inward, the newly formed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), now better known as the Soviet Union, went back to its expansionist imperial Russian roots. As one of the authors explained in his earlier piece, the Soviet 11th Army took over the South Caucasus, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, in 1920 itself. The Treaty of Sèvres was stillborn.

For the next seven decades, Armenia and Azerbaijan were Soviet republics. Moscow drew their borders largely on ethnic lines. The USSR granted Zangezur to Armenia, Nakhchivan became an Azerbaijani exclave and Karabakh became an autonomous province within Azerbaijan. The Soviets dubbed Karabakh the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) because Nagorny Karabakh in Russian simply means the highlands of Karabakh.

The dormant Nagorno-Karabakh volcano explodes

By the late 1980s, the Soviet empire began disintegrating. The Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989. On December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union itself dissolved. Ethnic tensions held in check by communist repression erupted like a dormant volcano.

In 1988, ethnic Armenians living in the NKAO demanded their region be transferred from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. Conflict exploded into all-out war when the Soviet Union collapsed. Fighting only ceased in 1994 and Armenia

emerged as the winner. Armenian troops took control over Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts. Armenia now controlled 20% of Azerbaijan. An estimated one million Azerbaijanis became refugees and internally displaced persons. Armenia did not have it all its own way though. About 300,000–500,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan made their way to Armenia.

The end to war in 1994 did not lead to peace. Deadly incidents continued. Both sides used troops, special operations forces, artillery, other heavy weaponry and, more recently, drones. In April 2016, fighting broke out but stopped after just four days. Yet hundreds died on both sides. On the whole, an uneasy peace persisted until 2020.

During this uneasy peace, Armenia forged a security partnership with Russia while Azerbaijan developed a close relationship with Turkey. A shared Muslim faith and a common Turkic ethnic identity helped. Even though Armenia and Russia are part of the Oriental Orthodox Christian traditions, Moscow still sold weapons to Azerbaijan and played both sides.

Starting 2007, things changed dramatically. BP discovered gas at “a Caspian-record depth of more than 7,300 meters” about 70 kilometers southeast of Baku. Flush with gas wealth, the balance of power began to shift in Azerbaijan’s favor in the 2010s. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey rejected Atatürk’s secular European identity and embraced a neo-Ottoman foreign policy. Erdoğan’s political Islam led to greater military support for Azerbaijan and Baku’s geostrategic position improved. More gas money and Turkish military support gave Azerbaijan the edge over Armenia in the latest edition of South Caucasus geopolitical chess.

In late 2020, Azerbaijan made its decisive move and succeeded in reclaiming much of the territory

Armenia had occupied since 1994. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War lasted 44 days and left at least 6,500 dead. Azerbaijan was unable to break through the defenses of Artsakh and Russia brokered an uneasy truce. Nearly 2,000 Russian peacekeepers were to enforce the peace. These troops were deployed along the three-mile-wide Lachin corridor, the sole overland route connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

The ceasefire agreement granted Azerbaijan control of Nagorno-Karabakh’s cultural capital, Shusha, which Armenians refer to as Shushi, and several other towns. Azerbaijan also gained surrounding Azeri territories that Armenians had held since 1994. Local Armenians got to retain control of the northern half of the region, along with Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh. Future peace talks were to decide the final political status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan grabs a historic opportunity with both hands

Needless to say, the peace did not hold. In December 2022, Azerbaijan closed off the Lachin corridor. The Russia-Ukraine War had broken out on February 24, 2022. The 2018 Velvet Revolution had ousted the Russia-friendly Republican Party that had been in power since 1999. After the revolution, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan took charge. Armenia began to extricate itself from the arms of Russia and started flirting with the US. This poked the Russian bear and earned Pashinyan’s Putin’s ire.

Azerbaijan had a once-in-many-generations opportunity and Baku seized it with glee. In December 2022, Azerbaijan violated the 2020 ceasefire agreement and closed off the Lachin corridor. This ten-month blockade denied 120,000 Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh food, fuel and medicine. Putin’s peacekeepers stood idly by and Artsakh’s fate hung in the balance.

By April, Armenians found themselves in a dire situation. Pashinyan dramatically relinquished Armenia's claim to Nagorno-Karabakh in an effort to stop the long-running conflict. This failed to bring peace. On April 23, set up a checkpoint on the Lachin corridor, which was called "the road of life" for Artsakh. Neither Russian peacekeepers nor Western powers did much to help. By September, it was all over. Azerbaijan controlled all of Nagorno-Karabakh, Artsakh evaporated and Armenians fled to Armenia.

A little more than two weeks before Azerbaijan's decisive move, Pashinyan had declared that "solely relying on Russia to guarantee its security was a strategic mistake." History may judge his ill-judged statement as a historic blunder. Pashinyan turned to the West in general and the US in particular to guarantee Armenia's safety. However, to paraphrase a Chinese proverb, the mountains were high and the emperor was faraway. The US had far too many pots on the boil to worry about Armenia.

Pashinyan forgot one simple fact: realpolitik is a rough game. The EU needs Azerbaijani gas after putting sanctions on Russia. In 2021, Europe imported 8 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas from Azerbaijan. This year, gas imports are expected to be 12 bcm and are on track to double by next year. Clearly, gas supplies trump the unity of Christendom for the EU. Post-Brexit UK is in the money because of BP. So, Armenia can expect little help from a land that was once the realm of Richard the Lionheart.

Azerbaijan has also been able to win over Israel to its side. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 13% of Israel's arms exports were destined for Azerbaijan in the 2017-2021 period. They comprised more than 60% of Azerbaijani arms imports and included drones, missiles, and mortars. Furthermore, the Observatory of

Economic Complexity (OEC) reveals that 65% of Israel's 2021 crude oil imports came from Azerbaijan.

Much more discreet than SIPRI and OEC figures are the close strategic collaboration between Israel and Azerbaijan for realpolitik reasons. Intelligence Online claims that Israeli military and intelligence contributed to Azerbaijan's victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. Naturally, Israel has an ax to grind. Azeris comprise 16% of Iran's population, three times the population of Azerbaijan. Although they have yet to rebel against Tehran, Azeris report widespread discrimination despite being largely Shias. By backing Azerbaijan, Israel is winning over Azeris and could foment trouble in the future against Iran. More importantly, Israel's elite organizations — Unit 8200, Mossad and Sayeret Matkal — reportedly use Azerbaijan as a base of operations against Iran. For Israel, Armenia is eminently expendable in the pursuit of its national security goals.

For the US, Azerbaijan is of vital national interest because it borders both Russia and Iran, two key enemies. Washington cannot displease Baku too much and push it into the arms of Russia. Despite a powerful Armenian American diaspora that has historically backed the Democrats, the Biden administration turned the Nelson's eye to Azerbaijan's actions and did not back Armenia.

In contrast, Turkey is backing Azerbaijan to the hilt. Less than a week after Azerbaijan's victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, Aliyev hosted Erdoğan in Nakhchivan. The two hailed this victory and signed a deal for a gas pipeline. Erdoğan was "very pleased" to "connect Nakhchivan with the Turkish world." Turkey's support for Azerbaijan paralyzes NATO, which cannot support Armenia. Most Muslim countries in the nearby Arab world to the more distant Pakistan, support Azerbaijan.

Poor Pashinyan is isolated. He has found himself with two not-very-useful friends: neighboring Iran and faraway India. Both are not powerful enough to stave off disaster for landlocked Armenia. Besides, the Israel-Hamas war raging has cast Armenia further into the shadows. No one is likely to act against further Azerbaijani aggression.

What happens next?

Erdoğan and Aliyev have clearly signaled that Nakhchivan is next on the menu. They fear that Armenia could do this 460,000 strong Azeri enclave what Azerbaijan did to the Armenian enclave in Nagorno-Karabakh. Ethnic cleansing is a game two can play and Azerbaijan must press home its advantage before the tide turns.

Therefore, Baku seeks the Zangezur corridor, a transport link through Armenia's southernmost province Syunik to Nakhchivan. This landlocked Azerbaijani territory has a small border with Turkey and a much larger one with Iran. The former backs the Zangezur corridor while the latter opposes it. The descendants of the Ottomans and Safavids are clashing again in the South Caucasus.

Under Erdoğan, Turkey aims to breathe fire into the Organization of Turkic States, an attempt to bring together Turkic peoples all the way till Kazakhstan. Once Turkish horsemen dominated Central Asia. Today, Erdoğan is looking east and south, not west and north, to expand Turkey's influence. Therefore, the Zangezur corridor is an opportunity to create a new trade route between Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and China.

Despite academics like Anna Ohanyan calling the Zangezur corridor a violation of Armenian sovereignty and a challenge to the global rules-based order, Yerevan and Baku are engaged in peace talks. On December 7, they agreed to exchange prisoners of war. After failed mediation

by the EU, the US and Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are engaged in direct bilateral discussions. Yet mutual distrust is high and both sides are unlikely to come up with a lasting peace deal.

So far, Armenia has played a weak hand badly. Pashinyan has lost much of the goodwill he gained during the Velvet Revolution. Even before Azerbaijan's conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, Pashinyan's popularity was declining precipitously. Now, many Armenians revile him as a weak and ineffective leader who has led the country to disastrous defeat.

Pashinyan has continued to offend Moscow by refusing to allow Russian troops to conduct military exercises and declining to attend an alliance summit. Armenia has also joined the Treaty of Rome that established the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC has issued an arrest warrant for Putin. By joining such an organization, Pashinyan is spitting in the tsar's face and inviting further Russian wrath.

Notably, Armenia is economically dependent on Russia. The country's landlocked geography does not make things easy. Turkey lies west, Azerbaijan east, Georgia north and Iran south. Therefore, about 40% of Armenian exports make their way to Russia. Armenia depends on Russian grain, oil, gas and basic goods almost completely. Gazprom owns all of Armenia's gas distribution infrastructure. The country depends on remittances from Armenians working in Russia. In 2022, \$3.6 billion out of the total remittances of \$5.1 billion came from Russia.

Armenia still remains a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, Commonwealth of Independent States and Eurasian Economic Union. Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine War, the Armenian economy has become even more dependent on its Russian

counterpart. Currently, Pashinyan is visiting Russia, promising greater economic bloc cooperation but Putin is unlikely to give his rebellious satrap much of a break. Russia is grinding down Armenia into submission and will only relent when Pashinyan is no longer prime minister.

With little external support or internal legitimacy, Pashinyan is in no position to make peace. With Turkey's help, Azerbaijan will put Armenia under duress and drive a hard bargain. If Pashinyan does not capitulate, Azerbaijani troops can drive home their advantage. This time, the conflict might draw Turkey and Iran into the fight. Russia will wait and watch but eventually intervene. Israel, NATO, the UK and the US might also find themselves sucked into this conflict. Yet again, the South Caucasus has become a powder keg but few are paying this region the attention it deserves.

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Japan's New LDP Scandal Is Unlikely to Change Much

Atul Singh
December 27, 2023

A number of bigshots have resigned after a party-funding scandal. Unlike previous scandals, the prime minister is not threatened because potential challengers within the party lack support and the opposition still stands discredited. Barring minor reforms, the status quo will persist.

Japan is a democracy, but voters tend to vote for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) almost all the time. As observers wryly remark, there is little liberal or democratic about this party. The LDP is a political machine dispensing patronage with jostling factions.

A day after Christmas, prosecutors questioned the LDP's former policy chief, Koichi Hagiuda. They have questioned four other top officials, who have all resigned. They are all loyalists of Shinzo Abe, the late Japanese prime minister who was in power from 2006 to 2007 and then again from 2012 to 2020. Abe was Japan's longest-serving prime minister and was extremely powerful.

A very Japanese-style scandal

It turns out that the LDP made hay when Abe's sun shone bright. The Abe faction, still the largest in the LDP, "systematically underreported about ¥500 million in ticket sales for fundraising events" over five years. This amounts to \$3.51 million, which is mere piffle by Nigerian or Pakistani standards. However, Japan is a country that prizes

probity, and this financial scandal is turning out to be a big deal.

The Abe faction allegedly gave the excess amount to lawmakers who sold more than their allotted quota of tickets. Kickbacks from fundraising events are not illegal, but failing to report these payments violates the law. That is why so many bigshots are in hot water.

Many in Japan are calling for reform. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has promised “to do everything necessary to regain trust” for the LDP. He will set up a new party body. This will discuss reforms to the political funds law, cashless payments for fundraising party ticket sales and auditing of such fundraising events.

Despite his promises, Kishida is in trouble. Public anger is running high and his approval ratings have fallen to 17%. Analysts are calling this scandal a “once in a generation” political crisis. Yet it is important to remember that the LDP has been through many scandals before. The party has been in power almost all the time since 1955.

As a well-oiled political machine, the LDP needs off-the-books slush funds. Its leaders used these kickbacks to take care of their buddies in their political fiefdoms. This elaborate patronage machine is how the Japanese system works. In some ways, it is no different to the US or India. In both democracies, politicians have to watch out for the interests of their donors and reward loyalists who work on their campaigns. Yet money in politics evokes a whiff of disgust and, in the case of Japan, has led to outrage.

Prosecutors are probing not only the Abe faction but also the Nikai one. They are also investigating the prime minister’s faction, too. Kishida has been in power since October 2021, but scandals have dogged him since. This includes the LDP’s links to

the controversial Unification Church and Kishida’s son’s use of the prime ministerial residence for a house party.

As pointed out earlier, these scandals are minuscule in comparison to most other countries. However, they have already caused heads to roll because they have come at a time of rising discontent.

Times are tough and people are hurting

Like many other first-world countries, Japan is experiencing a cost-of-living crisis. In January, Japan's inflation rate jumped to a fresh 41-year high. Rent, food, fuel and almost everything cost more. Salaries have not risen accordingly. Increased military spending to counter China portends tax increases. A new invoice system is likely to lead to higher taxes for freelancers and self-employed people. Tellingly, the Japanese chose “tax” as the kanji character of the year. The last time they did so was in 2014 when the consumption (sales) tax rose from 5% to 8%.

Japan has long been known for being frightfully expensive. In part, this explains the low birth rate. In addition to many other reasons, young couples find high education costs daunting. Coming during a cost-of-living crisis, the LDP scandal has angered many Japanese who find politicians increasingly removed from their day-to-day realities.

In the past, scandals have damaged prime ministers. In 1974, Kakuei Tanaka resigned as prime minister and was arrested two years later for taking bribes from Lockheed. In 1989, Noboru Takeshita lost his premiership after allegations of insider trading and a succession of prime ministers followed. Thanks to this instability, “the LDP lost its Diet [parliament] majority to a coalition of opposition parties, ending its 38-year rule.” In 2010, the Democratic Party of Japan was in power,

and it turned out that its officials had underreported fundraising proceeds. As a result, Yukio Hatoyama had to resign from the prime ministership.

This time, things might be different. For now, Kishida has little to fear. The LDP leadership contest is only due in September 2024. Taro Kono and Shigeru Ishiba are popular with the public but lack support within the party. Kishida has reshuffled his cabinet twice, and the scandal weakens the Abe faction, strengthening the prime minister's hand.

Kishida is also secure in the knowledge that national elections are only due in October 2025. The opposition Democratic Party of Japan still stands discredited. It was in power from 2009 to 2012, a time when the economy tanked and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant suffered a meltdown.

Given the lack of alternatives and entrenched interest groups, the status quo will continue. Kishida might introduce more stringent reporting measures on party fundraising, but he does not command enough support within the LDP to push through any fundamental reform.

No wonder young voters increasingly shun politics. Only 34% of 18- and 19-year-olds voted in 2022. This low turnout is not healthy for Japanese democracy, and the current scandal might increase political apathy further.

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The Tremendous Legacy of the Late Jacques Delors

Nathalie Barthes
December 30, 2023

On December 27, Jacques Delors, former president of the European Commission (1985–1995) passed away. He was the architect of the European single market and of the unity the EU now enjoys. With nationalism rising and European elections on the horizon, Europeans are challenged to carry on his legacy.

On December 27, Jacques Delors passed away at the age of 98. He served as president of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995. With his death, a certain idea of the left and of European integration is in danger of disappearing.

For many French people, Jacques Delors will remain above all the great architect of the European Union, the leader who was at the origin of the Euro and the European Single Market.

They also remember the politician, François Mitterrand's economy minister, whose humility and modern conception of socialism led him to give up the race for the presidential election in 1995. "Either I lied to the country or I lied to the Socialists," he explained, pointing to the gap between his project of reconciling solidarity a

market economy and the incantatory, quasi-revolutionary discourse of the French Socialist Party.

His daughter, Martine Aubry, tried to take up the torch 17 years later, without success.

Delors' realistic vision of socialism

For a generation of European activists who defined themselves as “left-wing,” Jacques Delors was above all one of the architects of European social democracy and of the “second French left” alongside Michel Rocard.

Rooted in Christian trade unionism but also in the legacy of Hannah Arendt and the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Delors' socialist thought was marked by a certain conception of reform, social justice and the rejection of ideological posturing. He sought a third way between economic liberalism and totalitarian communism.

The social democracy of this great politician is above all that of dialogue and the social contract between employers and employees' representatives. He combined budgetary rigor with aid to the most deprived. He believed that the best weapon against unemployment was lifelong learning. At both the national and European levels, he advocated negotiation between divergent interests and social contract rather than the myth of a grand soir, or revolution, that would overthrow all inequalities overnight.

What remains of this realist left? In today's France, not much. During the last presidential election, in 2022, its natural candidate, Anne Hidalgo, mayor of Paris, former advisor to Martine Aubry, barely reached 2% while the radical left embodied by Jean-Luc Mélenchon galloped into 20.3%.

Some see the current French president, Emmanuel Macron, as Delors' heir. Admittedly, the current occupant of the Elysée seeks to make the European Union a real power, but his mantra of following left- and right-inspired policy proposals “at the same time” does not find its source in the vision of a social market economy based on a culture of consensus. Macron's "at the same time" is above all a tactical pragmatism that seeks to occupy the center-right.

Delors' legacy of European integration

What remains of Jacques Delors' vision at the European level?

The very glue that holds the European Union together today is Delors' legacy. As president of the European Commission, Delors created the founding elements of the cohesion of the European Union as it is today. Alongside François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl, his influence was decisive in the adoption of the 1987 Single European Act, which created the European single market, and then with the Maastricht Treaty, which set the eventual adoption of the single currency in motion. Indeed, it was at the European level that Delors was able to put his mantra into practice: “Competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, solidarity that unites.”

In terms of solidarity, Delors was at the origin of the Cohesion Fund, which supports the enlargement of the EU by subsidizing less developed new entrants. He also championed the Erasmus university exchange program and the Fund to Assist the Most Deprived. These concrete achievements have proven wrong the detractors who claimed that the EU would be nothing more than a large liberal market whose policies would run counter to the priorities of European citizens.

Today's EU remains an alliance between market efficiency and solidarity. It has shown this during

the COVID-19 crisis with its major recovery plan and in the face of the climate emergency with its Green Deal. The recent adoption of a new pact on asylum and immigration is also a good example of consensus among divergent visions of welcoming foreigners on European soil. But this European unity is only built in response to crises.

Nationalism and the far right are now threatening the general European interest and its fragile unity. On the eve of the European elections in June 2024, the generation of activists for the European cause is facing this challenge: to keep Delors' humanist legacy alive and renew it, to innovate and to build a more inspiring idea of Europe for future generations.

Renewing this heritage means giving job prospects and social well-being to the working classes tempted by extremes and populist votes. It is only in a new social contract, built sector by sector around a reindustrialization that takes social rights and the environment into account, that this European cohesion can last. This profound economic transformation, along with a new, more assertive European diplomacy based on co-development, can constitute this necessary renewed European social contract dear to Jacques Delors. It is still possible to take this path.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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