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Fair Observer
Independence, Diversity, Debate

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An Ode To Joy: The Sensational Charms of Basra

David Holdridge
March 05, 2024

Two representatives of an American charity venture into the Gulf to assist Hatem in bringing joy to a city ravaged by Saddam's rule and subsequent turmoil. In Basra, amidst the aftermath of conflict and the departure of British forces, they collaborate with Hatem, a vibrant figure envisioning prosperity through amusement parks and Internet literacy, defying the pervasive atmosphere of fear and despair. With clandestine meetings and unconventional methods, they navigate security concerns to establish transformative initiatives, illustrating the resilience of hope in the face of adversity.

Fifteen years ago, two representatives of an American charity were at work in the Persian Gulf; well beyond the regular menu for “development,” we helped a man named Hatem serve up joy to a benighted Arab city which had suffered for decades under Saddam Hussein and then more recently under the abuse of American contractors.

The following is an edited excerpt from David Holdridge’s book *Avant Garde of Western Civ*, Press Americana, 2017. David has recently published a new book, *The Water Above*, about the conflict between Israel and the PLO in 1982.

Al-Basra, 2009.

By the summer of 2009, Gaza (Operation Cast Lead) had been long gone from the headlines, and

I had transferred the mop, so to speak, to the designated director (none other than my pal from Walla Walla). I had arranged it with my deputy Paul for me to fly into Basra and to see what I could do about standing up a proper operation of literacy and connectivity in the ruins of what had once been a magnificent source of hydrocarbons and their derivatives before Saddam had starved it half to death in 1991.

It had been a year since the Jaysh al-Mahdi (a militia led by Muqtada al-Sadr) had been defeated in Basra by the Iraqi army. Its fighters dispersed into the surrounding mud and wattle slums, licking their wounds, though still quite able and willing to drop occasional mortars down the tube toward the airport base, hoping to hasten the departure of the remaining British soldiers and assorted contractors. Meanwhile, Iran would fiddle for advantage, and the multinational oil companies would sniff around, both aware that capital would remain the coward until a modicum of law and order could allow Basra its place in the sun — with time eclipsing the other bejeweled pretenders like Qatar and Kuwait.

We were getting there late, replacing another American charity, which had taken flight a year earlier, and assuming many of its local staff. Unlike our other offices, we had never had the chance to live together with these nationals and fully bring them into our definition of “right relations.” For security reasons, we had promised not to cohabit in their existing office; rather, we met in a clandestine way as we sought to take them from bricks and mortar to transformative investments. To replace the engineers with social activists. To reinvent the operations in Basra.

So about Java: Dr. Javanshir from Baku with a medical degree from Moscow, to be precise, sat at dusk with me on this bench of sorts, really no more than a plank from a nearby scaffold put atop some cinder blocks, with our backs leaning against a

chain link fence. We were not too far from a concrete bunker where, sometimes at the sirens call, we would need to rush. We were nursing some alcohol in a brown paper bag and trading stories on the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, where he, in his youth, had served as a medic on the front, until one fortuitous day, he had been picked up in the flush of national independence by a Western charity, then circulating freely within the former Soviet sphere, amply financed by the Peace Dividend from the recent rout of Russia in the Cold War. In fact, diving headfirst into that dividend, paying intellectuals like Java in big dollars to spread the gospel of Pluralism, Rule of Law and, above all, Freedom — not an unimportant advertisement, since Java seemed to my old eyes quite gay.

The Brits' departure and contractors' arrival

It was surely a buyers' market for these intellectuals, with professors driving taxis and doctors bartering their skills for Marlboros. Thus, a straight track soon emerged for Java to Afghanistan with the same Western charities, but this time with the expat chevron on his sleeve. Not a full-fledged expat, mind you — he was more like an expat in waiting — toward that day, if ever, when he would have Western Civ. flowing unequivocally in his veins.

All of which had led him to be sitting there with me on the bench — just one short hop, skip and jump from Basra City, temporarily renting a container in the Brit perimeter around the airport so as to set up a back office until we could insinuate into the city along the Shatt al-Arab. A time of transition, it seemed, as the Brits were packing out and thinning ranks, ceding the airport security to the Iraqis and the surrounding base to “contractors.” And so Java and I waited to get badged and otherwise authenticated so that we could leave behind our beds and our computers in the containers and hitch our way to the airport

from whence, sweet as you please, we could get to where the West was still being actively hunted.

Yes, thin as a pin with big bat ears, “un vrai sensitive.” It took but a little imagination, or alcohol, to see him rise off the bench as iridescent, tiptoeing across the deck of the baths in Baku. His mother now stricken with cancer in Moscow.

Java, of course, did not sit at the mess with the pneumatics, which is what we called all that pumped-up contractor flesh. In fact, we abhorred it, made jokes how it could deflate with just one quick cut of Java's scalpel. No, we un-pneumatics got there early and sat in a far corner. We, with frequent gestures, used words as a spring from which to tumble — and they, over there, who, other than commands, disdained words or any derivative eloquence. Excepting, of course, a certain kind of eloquence surrounding root words like “cunt,” “fuck,” “under a truck” or “putting holes through Arabs.” “Perforating them,” they laughed. And yes, as a for-profit concern, they did once make us an offer to escort us into town for an outrageous price.

The only other brush we had with them was after dark, when the mortars came in, as Java and I were sitting side by side in the concrete shelter, knee-to-knee with contractors, seeing their grim faces off the coals of our smokes. It was at close encounters like that, knee-to-knee, that one could know what one was made of, and Java, who liked life enough in spurts but not so much as to dread its passing, had a very unaffected knee — until the very garbled announcement came from the megaphones that we could emerge. We returned to our bench or, depending on the hour, to our containers whose corrugated roof, I might add, could not stop a falling rock, much less a descending shell made in Iran.

Unveiling Basra's potential

So, we waited to be processed. We fish in a barrel for the remnants of Jaysh al-Mahdi, with our heartfelt yearning for our original mentor, T. E. Lawrence, and the prospects of our future insinuation into the city growing in our minds by the day.

Enter Hatem al-Bachary, a notable from Basra known earlier to me as a remote recipient for some small funds for the propagation of Internet literacy. Now, with our container authorized by the Brits and our status as the so-called soft power of the US occupation in the right databases, we left the chain-link fence for the airport. One late afternoon, we watched Hatem swing up in his quite weathered car and beckon us in — wearing his trademark purple and orange barker's "get-up." Picture him best under a marquis, boisterous, an assault to the eyes. Not anything suggestive, subtle or sublime.

He was now moving on from our partner for Internet training to his most current brush with death, an amusement park. Yes, Sir, Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse in this marshland where the enforcers of "no joy" lurked in every recess and where the Persian Ayatollahs were no more than a stone's throw across the waterway. There stood Hatem, arms akimbo, who had visions of the great wealth at his doorstep should Basra be able to shed the war and give the Emirates a race for their money in pushing the liquid gold to the market.

Nothing dreary or backward about him: amusement parks on the banks of the Shatt al-Arab, a radio station with an arrangement for feeding the BBC. Breaking ground on a modern hotel, biding his time until the oil infrastructure could be reconstructed. A barker beyond belief for the progressive dream. More than I could have imagined with my comparatively modest attempts at transformation in South Central.

So he had secreted us into his driveway at dark and had bedding laid out for us and soft drinks and filter tips all arranged by invisible women. A bit unsure about the right way to receive such ragged representatives from the West, notwithstanding that he sensed we had loads of US government money somewhere up our sleeves.

Later that night, we all got filled up with steaming lamb and couscous heaped up before us in a dining room of blasphemous — if one was thinking of T. E. — Victorian kitsch, which, like his suit, was about 100 years behind the times and devoid of suggestive, subtle or sublime.

Basra's transformation from fear to joy

We scooted out his back drive and meandered down some roads till we were confronted with Jaysh's nightmare: a jangle of brightly colored pushcarts, pastel ice cream stands, little girls in sequined party dresses and cars jockeying for space near a rainbow arch. So under Hatem's wing and within the cover of his entourage, Java and I, with keffiyehs pulled tight, were ushered down a path through strings of gay festoons. All the mechanized amusements, the bumper cars and twirling swings, the carousels and extravagant slippery slides and delighted parents with their wide-eyed screaming children toward a once removed table on the banks of the river, assuming our backs to it.

With an almost electric astonishment, amidst the general cacophony, for the glorious platform now before us and "the joint... oh my God... was jumping." It had all happened so fast from curb to the table I hardly knew what hit me. I grabbed Hatem at the back of his barker's neck and shook him. The band struck up "In the Midnight Hour"... all that joy on earth... uninhibited... with all the Motown moves and the floor in front of us was hopping with boys... stomping those boards in a riot ... and then behind them were... God bless

them, the girls frantically up and down from their chairs. They broke my heart with their yearning, hijabs flying every which way and dancing as much as a body could from the waist up, hands to the heavens in a swaying ode to joy: “We Shall Rock You.”

I stared at Java and Hatem and feared this man was magic. Walpurgis Night in the heavy air of the marshland with Persia twinkling in the distance. I mean, when seen against the jihadi so recently ready in this here city to meet their maker as martyrs for the destruction of joy, Hatem was readying himself for his maker in unabashed praise of joy — to include the money to be gleaned off those girls going wild in the stands. I was breathless.

I mean, “You can’t kill it. Can you, Java?” I asked.

“Not forever,” he said.

Well, the rest was what I did — meaning if I had a business card, it would read, “Insinuating in strange and hostile places.” So, “me and Java” got into a neighborhood — very discreet — into the house of Hatem’s friend. Not to be seen on the street — just a cleaner, a car and driver, and a cook, courtesy of Hatem. So that was how we saw Basra — hunkered down in the back, face to the window pane. And with time — random and far from our house — popping out to meet someone close to our cause, probable kin to Hatem — more Internet investment amusement parks being far too far beyond the pale for any donor.

And then to the ensuing job. Now that the inaugural was done, Java and I started a little pipeline. Ensuring the same process for the subsequent recruits. Some few days inside the razor wire with the pneumatics, then sliding into the neighborhood as advised, “slowly, slowly, quickly,” followed tentatively by up and down the

street. And just like that, the new office in Basra slowly rose to the occasion, with the pneumatics back at base being an effective strainer of sorts as they fear-mongered what was lying in wait outside the chain-link fences. In so doing, it separated out those who would never be true to T. E. Most went through to Basra — excepting some American girls who ended quite too at home with the pneumatics. As it turned out, they never lived the South beyond the containers, but did, nonetheless, help with processing new folks in and out, as well as assuring us a reliable resupply of ink cartridges.

This, I concluded, was the best — with the likes of Hatem and Java, the Barker and the “Sensitive,” insinuating... my God... amusement parks. No one in the green zone would have believed it, could have fathomed such a tribute to Western Civ.

[[Liam Roman](#) edited this piece.]



David Holdridge served in the Vietnam War in 1969 as an infantry platoon leader outside of Chu Lai. He was wounded and spent 18 months getting repaired at various hospitals in the United States, culminating with operations at Hartford Hospital in Connecticut where neurosurgeon Dr. Benjamin Whitcomb freed David from his trauma. Subsequently, he spent 40 years working with humanitarian organizations amidst populations suffering from war, exploitation, and impoverishment, including assignments in West Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

India Now Faces a Scary Water Crisis

Yash Pratap Singh
March 08, 2024

India grapples with a dire water crisis as glaciers melt, rivers dry and groundwater depletes. Urgent action, including government initiatives and increased public awareness, is imperative to address this crisis.

On March 5, social media buzzed with a viral screenshot. A notice by a posh housing society in Bengaluru informed residents that the government had commandeered their private water tankers. As a result, this luxurious gated society now faces a water crisis. Note that this crisis has begun even before the onset of the famously parched Indian summers.

Bengaluru is not the only Indian city facing a water crisis. Chennai, the southernmost Indian metropolis, faced a dire crisis in 2019 when all its water sources completely dried up. Not only India but also other countries face such crises. South African metropolis Johannesburg has faced a recurring shortage of water and so have other cities in Africa and the Middle East.

At the heart of India's crisis is criminal water mismanagement. Groundwater tables have been falling over decades thanks to overexploitation. According to a Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) study, Punjab's groundwater fell by over a meter every year in 18 of its 22 districts from 1998 to 2018. In two decades, groundwater went from being available at three to 10 meters to below 30 meters. Tubewells in Punjab have been pumping out water thanks to subsidized electricity to grow

crops India no longer needs and the government procures these crops at guaranteed prices. Such distorted incentives are putting future generations at risk.

India is running dangerously short of water

India's struggle with water scarcity is a complex issue. Central to this challenge is the severe mismatch between the country's limited water supplies and its rapidly expanding population. Despite housing 18% of the global population, India has access to only 4% of the world's water resources. Historically, the country has relied heavily on the monsoon rains. Just one bad rainy season sometimes led to drought and famines. Over the years, climate change has made the monsoons more erratic, exacerbating India's water crisis.

Groundwater extraction has reached dangerously high levels. Rapid urbanization has increased demand and the rampant exploitation of both surface and groundwater. Bengaluru, once renowned for its numerous lakes, has become a concrete jungle where residents are running short of water. India's NITI Aayog, the apex think tank of the government, has a composite water management index as per which 21 major Indian cities are on the verge of depleting their groundwater. These include cities such as Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai.

Needless to say, water scarcity profoundly affects daily life. Lack of water means many people cannot cook or clean properly. Sanitation suffers. Inevitably, the risk of diseases rises. Indian cities, where millions are packed together in tiny spaces, face great peril during any water crisis.

The author remembers a three-day water cut in a major Indian city. To meet basic needs, he resorted to buying expensive bottled water, costing about \$2.00 (165 rupees) per five liters. Note that most

Indians cannot afford to buy such water. The author also has memories of watching people squabble for clean water in slums and a 2020 report found that 78% of toilets in Mumbai lacked reliable water supply.

Wasteful water usage and terrible policy cause water crisis

On a national scale, India grapples with a fascinating paradox. Despite an acute national water crisis, farmers in Punjab and Maharashtra persist in cultivating water-intensive crops. In Punjab, rice cultivation continues unabated, despite each kilogram of paddy requiring a staggering 15,000 liters of water. Experts point out that efficient water management could slash this figure to a mere 600 liters. If farmers transitioned to millets, that would save water further. It takes just 250 liters of water to produce one kilogram of millets. Yet farmers in Punjab are sticking to rice. The government subsidizes electricity, which allows farmers to use tube wells wantonly. They pump out free water using cheap electricity to grow rice, which the government buys at a fixed price. Ironically, Punjab was traditionally a wheat and millet growing state but misguided government policies have distorted incentives, which is leading to a dangerous depletion of groundwater.

Not only Punjab but also Maharashtra is wasting water. On the leeward side of the Western Ghats where rainfall is low, farmers are growing sugarcane, a water-intensive crop. As a result, a small fraction of cultivable land guzzles a disproportionate share of the state's irrigation. Reforms have proved impossible because a powerful sugar lobby is addicted to easy money through sugarcane cultivation. Like diabetes, Maharashtra's sugar addiction is a disease with disastrous consequences for the state.

At the heart of the water crisis lies a failure of governance. Water is a finite resource but neither politicians nor Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers who form policy acknowledge that fact. They pay lip service to water conservation without overhauling agricultural practices. Truth be told, politicians and IAS officers are not entirely to blame. The nation needs a collective shift to crop diversification. Growing millets and pulses as well as building ponds, tanks and bunds to capture monsoon rains and replenish groundwater is the need of the hour. Many farmers are dead set against reforms though. They prize the immediate over the important. In fact, farmers only recently blocked one of the major highways to demand higher government support prices for wheat and rice..

Farmers are behaving in a short-term manner in part because of human nature. Our cognitive limitations foster a sense of complacency towards long-term changes. We are wired to respond swiftly to imminent threats. This leaves us ill-prepared for the creeping menace of environmental change that unfolds over decades and centuries.

This challenge is compounded by hyperbolic discounting, a tendency to prioritize the present over the future. While we may acknowledge the theoretical threats of climate change and water scarcity, practical action often falls short. A water crisis needs collective, not individual, action and coordination costs in a stratified populous society are high. Hence, India suffers from societal inertia in the face of a dire crisis.

India's problems are exacerbated by the lack of institutions focused on long-term planning. Third World countries like Egypt, Nigeria and India lack planning, in part because of a colonial past during which they developed a sense of learned helplessness. The people focus on day-to-day survival while the matters of the state are the realm of the leaders. In India, social media handles and

YouTube videos are proof of how society looks up to IAS officers in particular to act as oracles for every problem. Tragically, IAS officers have no domain expertise and few even care about water management.

These days, IAS officers turn to consultants with fancy degrees for policy formation. These consultants have little domain expertise themselves. They prize Microsoft PowerPoint slides over substantive knowledge or practical action. As a result, India lacks an institutional framework to come up with a sane water policy and the criminal mismanagement of water resources continues.

What citizens and governments need to do

Both India's central government in New Delhi and state governments around the country have been making noises and taking action on water. Indeed, they have focused on supply-side policies and actions to solve the water crisis. Initiatives like the prime minister's Jal Jeevan Mission, which seeks to provide every rural household with tap water connection by 2024, and the Vrishabhavathi Lift Irrigation project, which seeks to fill up 70 lakes near Bengaluru in the first phase, are coming up with supply-side infrastructure solutions.

Schemes such as the Atal Bhujal Yojana and Paani Bachao, Paisa Kamao incentivize community efforts to conserve water. In fact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a vocal advocate for water conservation. He has repeatedly called for a shift in mindset during his radio addresses through Mann ki Baat and promoted 60,000 Amrit Sarovars as community-driven models for water conservation.

These policies primarily focus on improving infrastructure to ensure a nationwide water supply. However, India's water crisis is acute and worsening. Our glaciers are melting, rivers are

drying up and groundwater levels are falling. The author is from Agra and recalls witnessing the drying of the river Yamuna in his hometown. Other rivers in different regions of the country are drying too. There is the added problem of ever-increasing plastic pollution in the Himalayas and riverbeds in our mountains are inevitably full of plastic, a fact that Satya Prakash Negi, one of the nation's finest Indian Forest Service officers has pointed out clearly.

Given the scale of the crisis, India needs an almost wartime-like mobilization. The complacent chalta hai (anything goes) national attitude of colonial learned helplessness no longer suffices. We have to blend traditional wisdom with modern innovations. We need to combine both demand and supply-side solutions. Traditional models of water conservation, as pioneered by Rajendra Singh, the Water Man of India, are good models as are reforms to failed policies that are causing India's groundwater to disappear. Importantly, it is time for India to implement a water consumption tax. Even as the underprivileged queue for hours to secure a few liters of water, golf courses run sprinklers even in water-stressed Bengaluru. India can no longer afford rice in Punjab, sugarcane in western Maharashtra and golf courses in Bengaluru making demands on a scarce natural resource.

As per the World Bank, India's per capita income was \$2,410.90 (about 200,000 rupees) in 2022. So, advanced technological solutions such as waterless and odorless toilets, as well as smart taps and showers, will not see mass adoption. Yet people can use water more frugally. This modification of demand would require communication and messaging, which the author's professor at IIM Bangalore advocates. Training minds to conserve water is doable. India's political and civic leaders have to work together to increase public awareness, change policies and foster behavioral changes. Water is the essence of life

and we as a nation must treat it as a finite valuable resource.



Yash Pratap Singh is a young business professional who has worked in strategy and management consulting with global clients in sectors such as information

technology (IT), banking and financial services (BFS) and private equity. Yash holds an MBA from IIM Bangalore and a BTech from IIT Gandhinagar where he won the Director's Gold Medal.

Qatar's Wealth and Resources May Be Unwelcome in Germany

Johann Meyer
March 09, 2024

Qatar is an important partner for Germany, providing significant financial investments and much-needed natural gas to the German economy. This small Middle Eastern nation's influence has thus grown immensely. However, it is well known that Qatar has ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. The German government may be looking to come down hard on Qatar in their forthcoming negotiations.

On October 12, 2023, Gitta Connemann, a member of the German Bundestag for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, told Die Welt, “We cannot condemn the terror of Hamas in the morning and then have lunch with

the main sponsor of the terror.” By that, she meant the Arab emirate of Qatar. Germany points at the fine line Qatar has been walking for years between thinly veiled support for Muslim Brotherhood on one hand and various Western partners serving its strategic, multilateral and economic ambitions on the other. This only works with the silent consent of partners like Germany, a consent which is now being called into question.

A large business partner for Germany

Over the years, Qatar and Germany have developed considerable bilateral ties. Germany ships billions of euros' worth of civilian and military equipment to Qatar, and Qatar sends Germany a huge amount of gas in return. In addition, Qatari funds flood the German economy.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU adopted a huge list of sanctions against Russia. About 27% of Germany's energy comes from natural gas, of which 55% came from Russia before the invasion. It is clear why Germany began to scramble to find a new supply of gas.

New energy supply deals mean Qatar will send up to 2 million metric tons of liquefied natural gas per year to Germany for 15 years starting in 2026. Because of this, the Qatari–German relationship has jumped from considerable to strategic. It has also enabled Germany to break free of Russian gas supplies. The completion of the Qatari deal led German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to comment: “These are long-term contracts. This is also a good statement for the security of Germany's energy supply.” They slash German dependency on Russian energy by a factor of four.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency, Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Khalifa bin Jassim Al Thani noted that Germany is one of Qatar's largest trading partners, as the volume of trade exchange between the two

countries increased last year to 6.8 billion Qatari riyals (\$1.87 billion), compared to 6.4 billion riyals (\$1.76 billion) in 2020. Khalifa bin Jassim also mentioned the increasing mutual investments between the two countries. The immense income generated by the trade enables this small, autocratic Middle Eastern country to finance itself comfortably. The new energy supply agreement is bound to increase this trade exchange considerably.

With the Qatar energy deals and financial investments, Germany has taken another step towards securing its economy, but at the cost of placing itself under Qatari influence. This risks Germany being associated with ongoing investigations and tarnishing its image.

Not as peace-oriented and compliant as it may claim

Since the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, came to power in 2013, he has put major efforts into brushing up the image of Qatar. He aims to present the picture of a modern, moderate and reputable international partner. Ranging from infrastructure to sports, Qatar has spared no effort in connecting with Western powers. Al Jazeera Media Network, which receives funding from the Qatari government, is also a massive influence asset, with its global presence.

This quest for respectability, of course, included changing domestic policies. Following the UN Human Rights committee recommendations in 2014, Qatar joined two major international treaties guaranteeing basic rights for workers, namely foreign ones, after years of reported blatant abuse. Western partners and the UN unanimously applauded these progressive developments, but they are showing their limits today.

These reforms also afforded Qatar a level of influence that is disconnected from its actual

demographic, economic and military power. (An exception is in the case of gas exports to Germany, where Qatar actually does yield considerable power.) Qatar's public relations efforts were overall successful. Politico editor Jamie Dettmer writes: "For a small Gulf emirate located on a spit of desert jutting into the Persian Gulf, Qatar has long punched way above its weight in the corridors of Western power."

These efforts have successfully gone beyond classic public relations campaigns. In 2022, the EU underwent a corruption scandal. It became apparent that Qatari corruption efforts had penetrated all the way to the heart of democratic institutions. Timo Lange, an expert with LobbyControl, writes: "Several MPs and a former EU commissioner were supposed to exert influence on behalf of the governments of Qatar and Morocco and receive large sums of money in return." As more and more news outlets began to investigate the matter, Qatar's practices came to light.

Der Spiegel published an investigation in June 2023 about suspicions of corruption surrounding German electronics and defense subcontractor Hensoldt. It described how several German companies, with Hensoldt as the subcontractor to Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW), discreetly worked with several intermediaries for Qatar. The main one that KMW and Hensoldt worked with was Multi Services Company (MSC) — a Qatari company providing various services to aid businesses in expanding their operations.

MSC is 70% owned by a relative of a military general who is part of the Al Thani family and 30% owned by an investment fund for Qatar's armed forces. This goes against Hensoldt's own policy of not working with companies who are "directly or indirectly owned or otherwise controlled or managed by Public Officials or politically exposed persons." There were also

questions of whether bribes were made to military personnel involved in the transactions between the businesses, but Hensoldt vehemently denies this.

Finally, Qatar's support to Islamic fundamentalist movements is known to all. They have provided financial support to extremist and terrorist groups, harbored their exiled leaders and supported them diplomatically. They have done this with Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Bahraini Shia opposition groups. Qatar also still funds a large number of media outlets that support the Brotherhood's ideologies.

On October 7, 2023, the military arm of Hamas launched an attack on Israel, killing almost 1,200 people and taking roughly 250 people as hostages. Israel responded with an invasion, intent on rescuing the hostages and destroying the Hamas military. Qatar seized the diplomatic opportunity to act as a "peace broker" in the region, given its numerous pre-existing ties with Hamas.

Scholz accepted this position of respectability, but it does not well with many other German officials. Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, a representative of the Free Democratic Party, which is often in coalition with the CDU, finds the relationship with Qatar acceptable only to increase the chance of hostage release, and demands it be readjusted in the long run: "Nevertheless, this conversation with the Chancellor is unfortunately necessary in order to hopefully free as many hostages as possible from the clutches of the terrorist group."

These oppositions could snowball and reignite critical voices, which were heard during the World Cup and following the gas supply agreement. "Following the preventable human rights catastrophes of the Sochi Olympics, Russia's World Cup, the Beijing Winter Olympics and the Qatar World Cup, Germany should step up and tie funding to transparency and adopting and

implementing human rights policies," said Wenzel Michalski, Germany director at Human Rights Watch. Large international events, such as the Olympics, have systematically highlighted that human rights were not universally upheld and stressed how democratic nations such as Germany should use their economic and diplomatic power to protect minorities and the rule of law.

Will Qatar go down the same road as Saudi Arabia and Turkey?

Saudi Arabia, Qatar's neighbor, has already been down this road. For decades, the West created and maintained close ties with that Arabian kingdom, which it saw as a key partner in the region. There were many collaborations ranging from strategic to infrastructural and military. In 2019, Germany, along with many other nations, imposed an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

As time went by, Germany revealed itself as even more strict and demanding with Saudi Arabia than other European nations. Others, such as the United Kingdom, did not impose full embargos. Germany based its position, among other reasons, on alleged human rights violations in the Yemen war. The German Bundestag made the decision to suspend military supplies to Saudi Arabia. Although this has changed in recent times, no doubt it could do the same with Qatar.

At a more moderate but comparable level, Germany has been pressuring Turkey to act more in accordance with international standards and has supported embargos to enforce its policy in the past.

In 2013, Qatar purchased 62 Leopard 2 tanks, one of the world's most advanced models produced by German firm KMW. As the operator, Qatar is highly dependent upon maintenance and supplies from Germany, in order to keep its

military potential intact. Any further violations of international law, corruption practices and complacent attitudes towards minority discriminations from Qatar could lead Germany to limit interactions.

This could go as far as severing contractual ties, thus reducing Qatar's military power for the duration of a military program. A military program, which spans from the political initiation to acquire or develop a new weapons system to the retirement of said equipment, can last over 40 years, making military potential highly vulnerable to momentum breakdown.

As a major defense equipment exporter, Germany has the ability to influence partners towards respecting human rights. In cases of violence and injustice, silence amounts to complicity, something the German foreign policy has pledged not to do. This is in no small part due to Germany's painful past and responsibility for the Holocaust, a mass psychological feature named *Kollektivschuld* (collective guilt).

Qatar is putting less effort into its disguise as it gains power and self-confidence. That said, its true nature never changed. The small Gulf state is still a monarchical dictatorship, with no intention to align itself with international standards and respect basic human rights, save a few cosmetic reforms, designed to play along with Western diplomacy. Europe became aware of this — Germany most of all — when confronted with the dubious respect for minority rights Qatar displayed during the FIFA World Cup. The above-mentioned EU corruption scandal, dubbed *Qatargate* or the *Qatarstrophe*, also considerably damaged the Gulf nation's image and put the German government under pressure.

In 2023, *Der Spiegel* questioned economy minister Robert Habeck in a way that reflected the German public's incomprehension of the gap

between their nation's stance and practices: "Mr. Habeck, in 2022, you had to beg the emir of Qatar to sell Germany natural gas, coal-fired power plants had to be brought back online and you were forced to extend the lifespans of nuclear power plants in the country. As a member of the Green Party and as German economics and climate minister, it must have been an awful year for you."

Germany is attached to its influential image and will need to protect it, even as it seeks to replace formerly necessary Russian relations. The new strategy places Germany at the center of international attention, making it crucial for Berlin to align its values and its factual choices.

[[Will Sherriff](#) edited this piece.]



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Legitimacy Revisited: Can the Government in Exile Overcome Afghanistan's Challenges?

Fawad Poya
March 10, 2024

Afghanistan teeters on the brink due to the Taliban's repressive rule. The lack of international recognition further isolates the regime. An Afghanistan government-in-exile

emerges as a potential counterweight, offering representation and upholding democratic values.

The Pashtun-backed Sunni Islamist movement known as the Taliban emerged in the 1990s. Following rapid territorial expansion, they dominated much of Afghanistan between 1996 and their subsequent ousting by the United States in 2001. Their rule was marked by a stringent interpretation of Islamic law, resulting in severe restrictions on individual liberties, particularly for women. This, combined with their documented support for and harboring of international terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, attracted widespread international condemnation and ultimately contributed to their downfall.

However, on August 15, 2021, the Taliban recaptured the capital Kabul, forcing President Ashraf Ghani to flee. After two years in power, they continue their rule through brutal force and blatant human rights violations, shrouded in a false pretense of maintaining law and order.

Despite fervent attempts to secure international recognition, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan remains largely ostracized on the global stage. This lack of recognition severely restricts their legal and diplomatic capabilities, impedes their access to vital international organizations and isolates them from potential economic partnerships and security collaborations.

The prospect of an Afghanistan government-in-exile gains increasing traction in light of the Taliban's repressive policies and limited international recognition. Such a government could offer a legitimate alternative to the current regime, thereby ensuring the continued representation of the people of Afghanistan at the international level.

Taliban-led Afghanistan is a country on the brink

Since their swift return to power, the Taliban's resurgence has plunged Afghanistan into a crisis that threatens the very fabric of its society and jeopardizes the well-being of Afghanistan's citizens.

The initial hopes for moderation from the Taliban have dissipated, replaced by a stark reality of repression and regression. Women and girls, once again, bear the brunt of their oppressive policies. Restrictive measures dictate their attire, limit their movement and confine them to the private sphere, stripping them of basic freedoms and fundamental rights.

Under Taliban rule, dissenters face an era of heightened fear and persecution. Journalists, activists and former security personnel endure arbitrary arrests, torture and even extrajudicial execution. This systematic and discriminatory targeting constitutes a blatant violation of international law and raises serious concerns about the Taliban's disregard for human dignity and equality.

The economic situation in Afghanistan under Taliban rule is equally alarming. Their isolationist policies and strict restrictions have severely hampered economic growth. International sanctions, coupled with the withdrawal of foreign aid, have exacerbated the situation, leading to a severe shortage of essential goods and services. The private sector, already fragile, struggles to survive amidst limited trade opportunities and widespread corruption within the public sector.

The Taliban's self-proclaimed war on corruption appears hollow, as reports of nepotism, extortion and misappropriation of public funds continue to surface. This, coupled with the opaque nature of their mining practices has resulted in the

deterioration of vital infrastructure, hindering economic development and further marginalizing vulnerable populations.

Perhaps most concerning is the Taliban's apparent tolerance, if not tacit support, for international terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. Despite initial assurances of cracking down on such organizations, they have failed to suppress their activities within Afghanistan's territory. This inaction, coupled with the reported presence of high-profile jihadists, fuels fears that Afghanistan could once again become a haven for extremism. The recent killing of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri by a US airstrike in Kabul serves as a stark reminder of this alarming reality.

An authority in exile: an answer to the deteriorating conditions in Afghanistan

The concept of an authority-in-exile occupies a well-defined niche in both international law and political practice. This phenomenon typically arises from political upheaval or conflict, situations where a legitimate government is forcibly displaced from its home territory. Despite their displacement, these individuals or groups maintain their claim to authority and legitimacy, often seeking international recognition and support for their cause. Operating from abroad, they act on behalf of the existing state or a potential future state to be created. Their primary objectives are to uphold their rights and represent the interests of their people until a resolution or transition of power occurs.

It is crucial to distinguish an authority-in-exile from other related entities. Unlike a rump state, which retains control over a portion of its territory, or a secessionist movement, which seeks to establish a new independent state, an authority-in-exile claims to represent the entire existing state and its people. Furthermore, it differs from a

simple opposition group, which lacks the claim to represent the whole state and its population.

The establishment of exile authorities has a long and storied history, often employed by states when their territory falls under the effective control of a belligerent occupier or when a new authority comes to power through revolution or coup d'état. Notable past examples include the African National Congress in Exile, the Provisional Government of Bangladesh and the Afghan Interim Government.

In the specific context of Afghanistan, an authority-in-exile would be a body with legal status, empowered to protect its nationals and act on behalf of the people of Afghanistan in the international arena. This authority may not necessarily function as a "government" in the strict sense of international law. Instead, it may serve as a means to protect and advance democratic values within Afghanistan.

However, the success of such an entity hinges on its careful composition and structure. Key considerations include:

— **Inclusive Representation and Diverse Perspectives:** Comprised of prominent intellectuals of Afghanistan, activists and diverse ethnic and religious group representatives united by a vision for a democratic Afghanistan, the authority ensures comprehensive representation. This empowers it to effectively address the needs and aspirations of all citizens of Afghanistan within and outside the country.

— **Efficient Governance through Specialized Committees:** Establishing specialized committees dedicated to critical areas like diplomacy, trade, security and cultural exchange enhances the authority's efficiency in managing responsibilities and engaging with international partners.

— **Phased Transition: Parliament-in-Exile to Government-in-Exile:** An initial phase as an inclusive and pluralistic parliament-in-exile, later transitioning to a full-fledged government-in-exile, is crucial for maintaining the authority's legitimacy and relevance internationally.

— **Active Engagement with the International Community:** Active engagement with international partners is essential for the authority to establish itself as a credible and influential entity capable of contributing to global governance and diplomacy.

— **Drafting a New Constitution:** Involving experienced individuals in governance and diplomacy in drafting the new constitution is vital. Their expertise ensures it reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of the people of Afghanistan, laying the foundation for a stable and inclusive future government.

— **Smooth Transition of Power:** The authority-in-exile should provide a framework for a smooth transition of power, mitigating potential conflicts and disruptions in the future.

— **Location and Legitimacy:** While establishing the authority in a friendly nation with international influence can offer protection, the ultimate success in replacing the in situ government relies heavily on international recognition of the exiled entity as the legitimate representatives of a democratic Afghanistan. This recognition strengthens their position in negotiations for a peaceful resolution.

— **Quality and Representation:** The authority-in-exile's quality and representativeness are crucial, as it should act for the people and against the current regime. Its primary aim is to prevent further repression and establish a democratic Afghanistan, free from coups, revolutions and undemocratic power grabs.

Though aspirations for an Afghanistan government-in-exile endure, no recognized entity currently exists. Former Vice President Saleh's self-proclaimed caretaker presidency on August 17, 2021, lacks international recognition. Notably, self-declared leadership does not constitute a legitimate government-in-exile, which requires structure, functionality and global legitimacy — presently absent in this context. Until these elements are fulfilled, the idea of a functioning Afghanistan government-in-exile remains unfulfilled.

[[Ali Omar Forozish](#) edited this piece.]



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The Ruthless Political Agenda Behind 91 Indictments of Donald Trump

Andrew Morrow
March 13, 2024

The lack of substance to the criminal charges against Donald Trump makes it obvious that they are politically motivated. Career-conscious district attorneys use these charges to enhance their reputations. You can indict a ham sandwich, and you can indict Donald Trump

for whatever you want — all the while, members of the political establishment get away scot-free.

Allow me to be blunt: I think most of the criminal charges against Donald Trump are bogus. They are the precise product of political gamesmanship by leftist, activist district attorneys (DAs) meant to pad their bona fides with their co-belligerents and garner awards at the next bar association meeting.

Let's be honest. They don't do anything to sway voters because of how transparent the effort to do so is. Even less likely is Trump seeing the inside a prison cell. The cases are far too weak for that. If anything, the number and flimsiness of the indictments, 91 felony charges last I checked, (enough for their own dedicated Wikipedia page), merely has the chance of making fence-sitters sympathize with an embattled Trump.

There's a good reason that it's a tried-and-true phrase in law that "you can indict a ham sandwich." A motivated DA can indict anyone with any charge, since the DA controls the indictment process. The DA hand-picks the jury to return the indictment they want and shows them only the evidence that favor's the state's case, even if it would not admissible at trial.

The process is non-adversarial. Very rarely, like in the famous case of JonBenét Ramsey, does a grand jury go "rogue" and defy the will of the charging DA. In that case, the DA did not want to prosecute, but the grand jury returned an indictment. All the same, the DA got the outcome he wanted by refusing to proceed to trial despite the indictment. So great is the DA's discretion that nearly everything until the trial itself begins is a matter of choice. I daresay that if a DA today wanted to, they could get a grand jury to indict the

late Queen Elizabeth with the murder of JFK using one of Napoleon's pistols. It is that one-sided and stacked in favor of the charging DA.

So, the number of charges against Trump is meaningless to me and should be to you, too. Frankly, I'm surprised they stopped at 91. Why not go for 100? Why not 1,000? Bury the man if you want to. After all, if you come for the king, you best not miss. And he's not called "Teflon Don" for nothing. So, let's take a look at the highlights. For this article, "whataboutism" is not a dirty word. We live in times where one side is pursuing the other criminally for things they do. Alinsky would be proud of his progeny.

The political agenda: jamming Trump in the election

In New York, authorities indicted Trump on 34 charges related to "falsifying business records," which allegedly involved payments made to the adult actress Stormy Daniels for services rendered. The former is particularly funny. Democrats have made a lot of hullabaloo over the story of a liaison between Daniels and Trump, all the while ignoring that Hunter Biden fathered a child with one of his favorite strippers. His father Joe Biden hardly acknowledges the existence of the child. The idea that money didn't, and doesn't, change hands for adult entertainment in the halls of power is laughable, but Trump is the one getting attacked for it.

On the strength of broad references to his efforts to "overturn the election," Trump faces indictments relating to the January 6 protests in Georgia and the District of Columbia. I want to point out that Trump has not been indicted for the only crime that would matter here, insurrection, which refers to rebellion, despite the antiquity of the term "insurrection." He is also facing charges of "fraud" and "racketeering." (Please try to hear the sarcasm.)

Our country's priestly caste openly brags about "The Secret Shadow Campaign that 'Saved' the 2020 Election," despite Trump facing indictments for election fraud. They call their efforts "fortification" rather than the word they charge Trump with. "Racketeering" is another legal weasel word. A "pattern of unlawful activity" can really just mean "we're gonna get you with something." Prosecutors are charging Trump with things that wouldn't disqualify him from office. They are fragile charges anyway, because prosecutors know the goal is not to put him away but to jam him up in this election. And let's not forget that House Democrats have recently threatened not to certify a Trump win. You may want to remind yourself what the protestors wanted to happen on January 6, 2021.

The only indictments that hold any real water are the Florida classified documents case. After leaving office in 2021, Trump took classified documents home. There are genuine questions about the legality of this action. It's not obvious that the president can simply declassify things on a whim, in the exercise of an executive prerogative, without any paperwork. There may be something genuinely here.

However, the government's effort is again undermined by hypocrisy. When Hillary Clinton used a private, poorly secured email server for official business, she faced no consequences. When Joe Biden, after leaving his job as vice president in 2017, did the very same thing as Trump and walked home with classified documents, he faced no consequences either. The special prosecutor said in early February that even though Biden did, he can't be charged with anything because he's too old and senile for any prosecution to be successful. So, prosecutors will charge Trump forty times for something Democrats have also done but will not be charged for.

The end of political decency has already occurred

If I am beating this horse too much, please stop me. It looks pretty dead. Why does this sort of stuff bother me so much? It both does and doesn't.

It doesn't because I think Carl Schmitt was right when he wrote in his book *The Concept of the Political* that "the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy." I am well aware that those who rule us are our enemies and are not our friends. That is, it doesn't bother me in the same way it doesn't bother me when the lion gets the zebra on the nature documentary, that's just lions being lions.

Still, it does bother me, because we're not supposed to treat one another like lions and zebras treat each other. Even so, it does always bother me when the lion gets the zebra because horses are my favorite animal. It's a tightrope of conflicting ideas about how the world does work versus how I think it should work. Maybe this is just my conventional, conservative heritage coming out in some last gasps at relevancy. It feels like we shouldn't be doing this sort of thing to each other. But we are, and it won't stop.

If you haven't already come to the realization that Trump is being unfairly treated because he is Orange Man Bad, then you won't today. I could write another entire article about why Trump, despite being a 1990's blue-dog Democrat when it comes to policy, is so unacceptable to the Left. He's not being treated the way he is because of his qualities as a person; remember that the Clintons were guests of honor at Trump's wedding to Melania in 2005. He was the same person then as he is now; the leadership caste found him acceptable then and doesn't now.

I must make a caveat here too. I don't particularly like Trump as an individual. I find his mannerisms hilarious, and appreciate all he's done for meme culture, but he is still a morally odious person. He's uniquely, personally unworthy of the movement that has coalesced around him. But Trump doesn't hate me as a person. Trump doesn't despise me for who I am as a white, heterosexual, Christian man. Trump doesn't want to dilute my political power with an immigrant vote bank. The same cannot be said for the administrative state that stands in opposition to him. You go to war with the army and the general you have, not the one you wished you had. The opposition thinks this way too, just in the direction back at me.

That's the concept of the political for you.

[[Liam Roman](#) edited this piece.]



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from Arizona State University. He earned his law degree from Arizona Summit Law School, a school that no longer exists, which is fine by him.

From Mumbai Central to the Willingdon Sports Club of Bombay

Atul Singh
March 13, 2024

The posh colonial world collides daily with the crazy street life of India. Anglicized local elites

have replaced white Brits in many clubs. Thankfully, they are not taxing the peasants during famine, but questions about colonial legacy, injustice and identity persist.

Dear FO° Reader, On Thursday, March 7, one of our donors hosted a dinner at the Willingdon Sports Club in Mumbai, India. We had donors, alumni and readers show up. We spoke about politics, economics, different cultures and more over a delectable dinner. As I ate, I could not help but marvel at the imperial splendor of the dining room and indeed the entire club. In the not-too-distant past, only colonial administrators got to have such a jolly good time here; the club was a refuge for Brits in a wildly exotic land.

Even today, many Europeans and Americans speak of India as the final frontier. Like an onion, this part of the world has many layers. My trip to the Willingdon Club took me through many worlds in a few steps. Unlike the vast majority of the folks who graced the club, I arrived by local train. A friend very kindly guided me by telephone to get off at Mumbai Central after changing trains at Dadar. Google Maps had not given me the most accurate instructions. In fact, Google Maps often fails me in Mumbai, but that is a story for another day.

The dinner was at 8:00 PM, and the local train was not terribly crowded because I was headed in the opposite direction to most commuters. It was evening, so people were rushing back north to their homes after work whilst I was heading south.

A walk through many worlds

I got off at Mumbai Central, where the platforms were still full of people, and exited west. Cars were honking crazily and pedestrians were weaving through traffic to cross the road in a

relentless game of chicken that goes on almost at all hours of the day and night. I managed to cross the road without jeopardizing life and limb.

The shops I walked past were mainly Muslim-owned. Elegant men sat with their long flowing beards and white caps waiting for customers to stroll in. As the road turned, I ran into a Hindu wedding procession with the groom on a white horse, with a band playing Bollywood tunes in front of the horse and some members of the marriage party dancing in wanton abandon before the band. The procession was moving at a glacial pace, but no one in the neighborhood seemed to care two hoots about it.

I watched the procession for a bit, wondering how austere-looking Muslims were living cheek-by-jowl with music-blaring Hindus, and walked on. I came across a drug rehabilitation center as I walked on, and the smell of urine mixed curiously with the spring evening air. The pavement (sidewalk in American English) was unwalkable because some people were living on it. So, I walked along the side of the road before weaving through cars in some sort of strange parking lot for taxis. I smelled a mix of rubber and oil as I walked between the vehicles.

Eventually, I entered the Willingdon Club and was transported back in time. Clearly, this was a club built in the heyday of empire. Faux Greco-Roman columns, tennis courts and swimming pools adorned the exquisitely colonial bungalow-like building. A sumptuous bar and a restaurant with an exquisite mural covering an entire wall made for impressive viewing. Uniformed waiters seemed a throwback to another era. I can see why the British found it so hard to let go of their empire.

The King's favorite tennis partner

I got to the Willingdon Club before everyone else and could not help but leaf through a fat coffee table book about the history of this storied institution. It turns out that the chap Indians refer to as Lord Willingdon began life as Freeman Freeman-Thomas. Like Boris Johnson, David Cameron and Rory Stewart, he was an Etonian, although unlike these three musketeers, Freeman-Thomas went to Cambridge, not Oxford. In fact, he went to Trinity College, a place where the likes of Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and Lord Byron went before him.

Freeman-Thomas was a top sportsman, a quality expected in a colonial governor. After all, the Duke of Wellington, who served for eight years in India, had reportedly declared that “the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.” Freeman-Thomas joined the army, married well and rose up the social ladder smoothly. He became King George V's favorite tennis partner and was elevated to the peerage as Baron Willingdon of Raton in the County of Sussex.

In 1913, Lord Willingdon rocked up in India to become the Crown Governor of Bombay. He later went on to become Governor of Madras and the Viceroy as well. The good lord thought Mahatma Gandhi a Bolshevik and, in 1917, raised taxes by 23% in spite of a severe famine gripping in the Kheda region. Nevertheless, Gandhi is safely dead, and the Willingdon Club is suitably thriving in modern Mumbai. The city may have changed its name from Bombay, but the coffee book is still hagiographic about the smooth Etonian who squeezed every penny from dying brownie fuzzy wuzzies.

The club itself is a closed shop. Membership has been closed since 1985. The only new members are reportedly children of current members. Wealthy, old-money families have formed a good

caste that shuts out the hoi polloi a stone's throw away and maintains its colonial splendor. The King's favorite tennis partner and his wife still have their portraits hanging proudly at the entrance and, except for a stray dog or cat, the hustle and bustle of the chaotic world outside does not disturb the good lord's soul.

History is a poisoned chalice

The evening at the Willingdon Club was wonderful. I found our host gracious, warm and kind. All dinner companions were thoughtful and knowledgeable. The food was delicious and the ice cream sensational. Yet the evening at the club set me thinking. There are many relics of the British Raj all around the country. The common law system is an implant and few really buy into the law because it is in a language most people do not understand.

India's army officers celebrate victories for their erstwhile British masters on their mess walls. The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) is an even more powerful version of the Indian Civil Service the British created. The Indian Police Service (IPS) is a modern day avatar of the Imperial Police. The Police Act of 1861, drafted when power transferred from the British East India Company to Queen Victoria's government to ensure that the Indian Rebellion of 1857 did not recur, is still in place.

In short, India's bureaucratic, judicial and military elite still suffers from the coconut complex. Even though they look brown, they act white. Increasingly, the children of the elite refuse to speak their mother tongue or any of India's numerous languages.

One argument in favor of such a trend is that change is inevitable. Africa is now home to megachurches and names like Simon or Samuel. Like the weather, the Anglo-Saxon soft power of

James Bond, Google and McKinsey is irresistible. To quote a Punjabi scholar, educated Indians have come through Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's system and aim to become modern day rai bahadurs, a resonant yet meaningless title that the British bestowed upon their toadies. Gandhi is dead, while Macaulay lives, and we have to just accept today's realities.

Arguments against this trend range from traditionalists seeking to go back to the past to leftists who want to bring down colonial institutions in their quest for justice. Still others are deeply confused. Indians aspire to join colonial clubs and colonial institutions just like Africans and Latin Americans throng to colonial churches. Yet the very elites who belong to these institutions constantly blame the colonial masters for all their ills.

Nowhere is the confusion more stark than in the offices of the state. I have met numerous IAS officers gloating over the decline of the UK and claiming English is now an Indian language even as they down their scotch in these poncy clubs. Never have I really met anyone who is entirely comfortable in their own skin. India's elite has a strange superiority complex vis-à-vis its own people while suffering an inferiority complex when it comes to the West. Nearly 77 years after independence, we are still struggling to make sense of the British Raj and come to terms with Anglo-Saxon culture.

I could go on, but the time has come for me to bid adieu. In our own way, we are trying to make sense of what is going on and give you perspectives from around the world, including and especially non-Anglo-Saxon ones. Yes, it is true I write in English, love my Shakespeare and went to Oxford, but we are questioning sensibly and sensitively issues that are driving our societies apart. So, send us your thoughts and make sure

that you get your circle to subscribe to our newsletter and join a global conversation.

Sincerely,

Atul Singh

Founder of Fair Observer



Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He has taught political economy at the University of California, Berkeley and been a visiting professor of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar.

How New Technology Can Help Japan Cope With Aging Population

Maciej Bazela
March 14, 2024

As the world's population begins to age and retire faster than they're being replaced, we still have a chance to avoid economic oblivion. New technological and social practices in Japan could be the key to understanding our path forward in this new era.

Overall, the world is at serious risk of demographic non-replacement. According to recent UN Population Division data, the global average birth rate is 2.3. This average,

however, masks a severe problem. Globally, the countries still above 2.0 children per woman are those in Sub-Saharan Africa, some in Asia and very few in Latin America. On the other hand, Europe, Russia, Australia, Japan and North America, including Mexico, are below 2.0. This means the 15 largest economies in the world have a birth rate below the replacement rate, with a ratio of 0.8 children under 15 for every person over 65. Today, people aged 65 and over represent 20% of the global population. In 30 years, that number will double, from 700 million to 1.6 billion people.

These demographic changes have profound implications for the labor market. Those unfamiliar with it often think of the market as something abstract, but we forget that the market is made by and embedded in society and thus influenced by political and social factors. An analysis of the business environment is expected to focus on economic factors: GDP, unemployment, balance of payments, exchange rate and inflation; social and political factors are wrongly left in the background.

For example, some societies are more productive than others. The reason is multifactorial; however, that answer cannot be merely economic because productivity is not only a function of available resources and their proper allocation. The productivity of an economy also depends on political and social factors; among these, it is essential to mention the customs and habits of a society, the work culture and the formal and informal rules that shape a given social environment.

Demographics are the most overlooked factor for understanding productivity, innovation and the direction of economies in the coming decades. What is the relationship between aging demographic trends and productivity and innovation in the context of the fourth industrial

revolution? This is the central question of this article.

The dominance of 65+: the beginning of the silver economy

The labor force participation rate (among those aged 20–64) will decline in most member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as Russia and China among non-OECD countries, in the coming years. By 2060, the number of dependents per 100 working-age people will increase from around 1:20 in 1980 to 1:58.

This trend will have the most acute effects in countries like Japan, Finland and Italy (the three aging the most), while other countries with accelerated aging will follow close behind. These countries include Greece, South Korea, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Brazil, China and Saudi Arabia.

The "demographic dividend," broadly understood as the economic benefits of a demographic pyramid where the share of the working age population is much larger than the dependent population, is now ending. Baby Boomers are retiring. The benefits of the demographic dividend, such as high demand for goods and services, low interest rates, cheap labor and abundant liquidity for savings funds, are fading. When societies age, governments face unsustainable social and healthcare expenditures, and companies lose innovation and productivity.

Japan: a laboratory of the future to come

As previously mentioned, Japan is among the three oldest populations in the world: 30% of its citizens are already over 65 years old. According to projections, its labor market will lose eight million workers in the next six years. In 20 years, it will go from 67 to 52 million people working — in a

country of more than 130 million inhabitants. By 2060, its population pyramid will look more like an obelisk. This is already evident as unemployment in Japan is at its lowest point in 26 years, with 1.5 job vacancies for every applicant.

The government recognizes that the country is aging and losing strength. However, the national development strategies seek to return to 4% productivity and growth above 3%. Japan aims to achieve this by relying more on advanced technologies, shoring up labor discipline and productivity, and adopting global best practices.

There are many exciting new technologies and practices in Japan that offer tailor-made solutions to the growing segment of the 65+ population. Curves International, Kozo SNS Village and Club Tourism offer leisure activities and travel packages that take into account the specific needs and interests of the "platinum segment." Companies such as 7-once and Benry Convenience Services specialize in food delivery, home maintenance and daily errands. While these kind of solutions are valuable to society at large, they are particularly meaningful in case of the 65-and-older. Going out to do shopping, walking your dog or even taking the trash out may be a challenge for some elderly people. Whill Corporation provides short-distance automobility solutions. Whereas there are plenty of medium to long-distance shared mobility services to get to the airport, to the doctor or to your office, there are very limited transportation options when it comes to buying groceries in your convenience store "just behind the corner". Whill's solutions allow people to remain mobile, active and independent within a few miles around home. Mysteryminds offers inter-company mobility services, which become especially important when talent is scarce and there is a clear need to build highly flexible multi-generational teams that pool together different skills and experience.

If one sector in particular is changing dramatically, it is undoubtedly the health sector. Medical care is expensive, and hospital stays are often three times longer in Japan than the US average. Hospital treatments are not sustainable for either public or private spending, especially with chronic conditions. Increased robotization and automation of various tasks are necessary to meet the demand. Humanoid robots are being employed in remote patient management, assisting with self-medication and automating administrative support. The average nurse in a nursing home can take up to 90 seconds to move an older adult. With a robot to help stabilize hip issues and provide leverage, this goes from 90 to 40 seconds. In an aging society, the difference of 50 seconds adds up quickly.

Not having "healthy" demographics is a severe structural problem for the future of any country. Because the classic options such as pro-family, pro-equality and pro-immigration policies have not yielded significant results, Japan has moved from denial to correction, mitigation and adaptation. In the near future, the government will use technology to remain among the most advanced economies even with an inverted demographic pyramid.

Technology advances v social customs: an ongoing battle

The case of Japan provides an insight into the relationship between society and technology, which can be both positive and negative. One way of looking at this relationship is a two-axis matrix. On the vertical axis is technological sophistication, and on the horizontal axis are the types of social uses and customs, from upbeat and creative to harmful and destructive. This combination gives us four quadrants.

Of course, it is not in any society's interest to be in the quadrant with the double negative: low

technological advances and, at the same time, destructive habits and customs. In the adjacent quadrants, there is a lack of alignment between the degree of technological advancement and the prevailing customs and practices, which prevents progress. For many countries, the challenge is that a lot of technology that could lead to more productivity is available, and yet society may reject those technological advances for fear of losing relative social status and acquired legal privileges.

What society wants may be very different from what the public sector sees as a national priority. The case of Japan is relevant here. On the one hand, there is the national agenda: Japan wants to remain among the seven most advanced economies in the world. On the other hand, there are the priorities and personal expectations of millions of people who want to retire, or work less which conflicts with that national agenda.

Because of this, Japan is a social experiment reshaping the society–technology relationship as a means of satisfying both sides. However, these complex issues such as the broader social contract in terms of public policy and social obligations will not be so easily solved. The public sector is facing the sociocultural limits of necessary reforms regarding gender parity, immigration and social diversity and pro-family policies. This is why other sectors, especially business, should be involved in mitigating the impacts of rapid aging and adopting the economy to a new social reality.

Lessons for the world

The social experiment conducted in Japan is a cautionary tale future economies should try to avoid. Although Japan seems to have the resources, know-how and political will to make the combination of aged society and advanced technologies work, the risks of failure are high. Advanced technologies are not an easy substitute

for structural reforms. In an aging population, the state will probably have to privatize more and invite more foreign direct investment to have economic growth and maintain state revenues.

The silver economy will certainly have many new opportunities in terms of products and services. But in an aging society, there will be a risk of lower actual returns for investors because they have a smaller economy, less growth and fewer young people (who are more disruptive). That lack of dynamism can lead to capital outflows, lower dividends and financial crises.

The next decade or so will tell us whether technology will help Japan cope successfully with an aging population.

[[Beaudry Young](#) edited this piece.]



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Philippine Energy Crisis Threatens to Escalate Tensions with China

Mehmet Yasin Bozkuş
March 17, 2024

The Philippines relies heavily on the electricity and natural gas acquired from the Malampaya gas field. This reserve is expected to run dry in 2027, causing an energy crisis. The nation must now choose between transitioning to renewable energy or exploring new fields in the gas-rich South China Sea. The former is economically unattainable in the short term, and the latter will escalate tensions with China for the Philippines and the United States.

Demand for energy resources is steadily rising thanks to the increasing global population and economic activity. To address their increasing energy needs and enhance energy security, countries are seeking alternatives to exhausting fossil fuels. Simultaneously, they are exploring undiscovered natural gas and oil fields, both within their main continents and territorial waters. A nation may invest in alternative and renewable energy sources, such as wind or solar energy, while continuing to investigate new fossil fuel fields.

Unresolved borders of territorial waters and conflicting claims among countries intensify competition between nations for fossil fuel fields underneath the seas. For example, the melting Arctic region sparks confrontations between the United States, Russia, Canada, Norway and Denmark. Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean region create competition among Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt.

The South China Sea region is teeming with natural resources. With China emerging as a rival to the US, competition is rising between China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam. To further complicate matters, the Malampaya offshore gas field, which supplies almost all of the Philippines' natural gas needs and one-fifth of its

electricity, is nearly depleted. The fact that it will run dry by 2027 adds heat to the already volatile region.

At this juncture, the Philippines faces two options to mitigate rising energy costs and bolster energy security: exploring new gas fields or transitioning towards renewable energy. Pursuing new fossil fuel reserves risks increasing tensions with China. As the Philippines is a key US ally, this move could escalate conflicts involving the United States. Conversely, investing in renewable energy offers a more sustainable and less confrontational path.

The Malampaya gas field

The Malampaya gas field was discovered in 1992 through a partnership between Shell Philippines Exploration BV and Occidental Petroleum. It boasts proven reserves of approximately 76 billion cubic meters of natural gas, 85 million barrels of condensate and 40 million barrels of oil. The oil field is strategically positioned 820 meters deep and 80 kilometers off the coast of Palawan Island. It was inaugurated in October 2001 and commenced commercial production in June 2002.

The Malampaya field plays a pivotal role in fueling 2,700 megawatts of gas-fired power plants in the city of Batangas, Philippines. It was designed to produce 4.1 billion cubic meters of gas annually. The field is the Philippine energy sector's crowning achievement, as it represents a milestone in the nation's natural gas industry and energy self-sufficiency.

This project marks a pioneering venture in the country. Since its inception, the Malampaya project has contributed over \$12 billion in revenue to the Philippine government, making a substantial impact on the country's energy landscape. Notably, it has met up to 20% of electricity demands in the island of Luzon. Being the largest

island in the Philippines, its energy consumption is vital. The Malampaya field now faces a catastrophe: Its remaining supply is expected to be entirely spent by the first quarter of 2027. Even with an extended service contract, the projected exhaustion of reserves signals a looming energy crisis for the Philippines.

The ideal alternative: renewable energy and cooperation

The primary alternative to address the Philippines' energy scarcity is twofold: The Philippines should make substantial investments in renewable energy and foster cooperation with key stakeholders, including China, to explore potential offshore gas fields. Unfortunately, this appears infeasible due to conflicting claims between the two nations. Additionally, the short-term substitution of current resources with renewable energy is deemed excessively expensive and, therefore, almost unattainable.

The anticipated depletion will impact energy prices. It will pose threats to and cause increased expenses for various sectors, including the general populace. The country's current energy mix comprises coal (47%), natural gas (22%), renewable energy (hydroelectric, geothermal, wind and solar) (24%) and oil-based sources (6.2%). Despite the nation's interest in clean energy, this commitment does not come at the expense of development, and there are no established incentives or penalties for utilizing different energy sources.

The Philippines' current transition plan aims to achieve 35% renewable energy by the 2030s. However, nearly 97% of the country's commitment is contingent on external funding. Without this support, meeting emissions targets becomes unlikely. Essentially, a complete transition to renewable energy is deemed impossible for the Philippines.

Other fossil fuel alternatives lack efficiency. The Marcos administration has expressed interest in reducing electricity prices, which hints at a continued role for coal in the energy mix. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) could serve as a transitional fuel from coal, but its introduction in the Philippines has been slow — it lacks a clear government roadmap for its incorporation as a baseload source. Despite the approval of seven LNG terminal projects, those expected to become operational this year will not significantly contribute to meeting the country’s targets. Long-term contracts for LNG terminals also remain unconfirmed.

The expected alternative: escalation

In the near future, the Philippines’ most reliable and cost-effective energy source is likely to remain natural gas. This runs in contrast to the high cost of transitioning to renewable energy and the challenges posed by other fossil fuel sources. However, the absence of onshore reserves compels the Philippines to turn to the waters of the South China Sea, escalating conflicts with China. Energy companies are hesitant to bid on offshore blocks offered by the city of Manila — not because of concerns for their economic viability, but rather the security risks of energy exploration in waters around China’s nine-dash line.

The US expresses concern for the Philippines’ claims despite existing tensions with China in the South China Sea. This animosity has roots in the past. In 1994, China occupied the Philippine-claimed Mischief Reef in the South China Sea. In response, then-Philippine President Benigno Aquino increased military spending to defend Malampaya, seeking assistance from the US. The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruled in favor of the Philippines in 2016, but subsequent policy changes under President Rodrigo Duterte aimed at accommodation with China rather than confrontation.

Duterte’s policy shift involved setting aside the PCA ruling, “separating” from the US and exploring joint energy exploration with China in the South China Sea. However, China’s cooperation has been limited, particularly in regard to acknowledging Philippine sovereignty and sharing resources. Furthermore, China has contributed to ongoing tensions through numerous actions. These include the nation’s militarization of islands in the Spratly archipelago, routine naval and coast guard activities within the Philippines’ territorial waters and harassment of Philippine fishing boats.

Considering the whole situation, the Philippines’ pursuit of alternative energy sources is domestically urgent and geopolitically imperative. However, the prohibitive cost of switching completely to renewable energy renders this shift unrealistic for the Philippines’ short-term policy. The Philippines evidently is seeking new offshore resources, a move that will have political consequences. Moreover, the ongoing strain between China and the US is likely to intensify due to energy disputes in the South China Sea. The complex interplay of territorial claims, international arbitration and major power rivalry heavily affects the Philippines’ energy landscape.

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



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The Khaksar Women Who Fought for Indian Independence

Nasim Yousaf
March 19, 2024

Allama Mashriqi’s recruitment of female fighters into the Khaksar Movement made a striking move for women’s empowerment in early 20th century India. Their involvement inspired organizations including the Indian National Army and the Women’s National Guard.

“**A**fter several centuries, we are again giving this lesson to every Muslim woman that the very existence and bringing up...of humankind is because of you...so is the life of a nation and Ummah also based on your commandment...”

— Allama Mashriqi (“Quol-e-Faisal”, 1935)

The Khaksar Movement played a major role in challenging British colonial rule in India until its culmination. Led by Allama Mashriqi, it was notable for being a social movement that recruited women. The pivotal role these women played in shaping the demise of the British Raj has been largely overlooked in historical narratives. They are mentioned only briefly. To address this historical oversight and pay homage to their valor, I have penned a book entitled “The Khaksar Women: Warriors for Independence,” scheduled for release soon. With International Women's Day on March 8 and Khaksar Martyrs' Day on March 19, 1940 this article is dedicated to honoring the resilience and sacrifices of Khaksar women, shedding light on their activities, and remembering the victims of March 19. Another reason for

writing this piece is to commemorate the bravery of the Khaksar martyrs who laid down their lives in Lahore for freedom.

In the Indian subcontinent, women were largely restricted to domestic roles in a male-dominated society with few exceptions. Their duties revolved around managing households and caring for the family. This trend was mirrored in America by the 1955 article "The Good Wife's Guide" in *Housekeeping Monthly*, which emphasized wives attending to their husbands' needs, writing: “Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice. Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him. A good wife always knows her place.”

Allama Mashriqi was born into an enlightened family; apart from the men in his family. Even his mother and sisters were educated, a rarity at the time. Mashriqi emerged as a pioneering Muslim leader who recognized the crucial role of women's empowerment not only in advancing societal progress but also in liberating India from the shackles of British rule. After Mashriqi founded the Khaksar Movement, his first wife, Wilayat Begum, played a significant role in its launch, as documented in Mashriqi's book titled "Isha'raat" and the journal named "Al-Islah" dated August 12th, 1938. Despite resistance from orthodoxy, Mashriqi took a monumental step towards fostering female emancipation in 1935 by launching the feminist movement through his groundbreaking and revolutionary work "Quol-e-Faisal." This marked a significant departure from prevailing societal norms.

Women in large numbers joined the Khaksar Movement throughout India. Among them were Mashriqi’s daughters, Khaksars’ wives, sisters,

daughters and other relatives. These women proudly donned the Khaksar khaki uniform, adorned with a shoulder band bearing the inscription "Akhuwat", meaning brotherhood. They attended Khaksar Camps, underwent military training, drills and parades and carried spades on their shoulders as they marched beside men or in independent groups. In the 1930s, even in the American military, women were mainly restricted to nursing and clerical roles. Khaksar women in India were allowed to pioneer combat training, street marches and political activism—a groundbreaking movement that captivated thousands, reshaping women's roles in Indian society and elsewhere.

Some of these extraordinary women held prominent positions and titles within the movement, delivering public speeches and recruiting more Khaksar women. Additionally, preteen Saeeda Bano and the Khaksar women, both holding titles as mainstream members, played a crucial role in community service initiatives. During the 1943 Bengal Famine, they were instrumental in saving lives, providing essential aid and aiding in the rehabilitation of tens of thousands alongside the men Khaksars.

Women agitators against colonial rule

In addition to their humanitarian endeavors, these women were deeply involved in anti-British rule activities. They distributed Khaksar literature to promote the movement's goal of ending British rule and organized women's meetings to propagate Mashriqi's message. In 1939, they played a pivotal role in paralyzing the Government of United Provinces (UP), leading the British governor of UP to sign a peace agreement on Mashriqi's terms. Following this agreement, Mashriqi established a parallel government and appointed Khaksar governors. These included women who were appointed to Punjab and United Provinces to assist the Khaksar Governors.

Following the brutal murders of Khaksars on March 19 in Lahore, Khaksar women participated in protests and joined their Khaksar brothers when they launched the Civil Disobedience Movement. Their demonstrations became so nerve-racking for the British Government that they had to induct women police to control them, a first in the history of British India. The Khaksar women attended the historic All-India Muslim League Session held from March 22 to 24, 1940, in Lahore, where the Pakistan Resolution and Khaksar Resolution were passed. At the session, alongside men, these women demanded the release of Allama Mashriqi and Khaksars and the removal of the ban on the Khaksar Movement.

On May 31, 1940, in a tragic turn of events, Mashriqi's son Ehsanullah Khan Aslam died as a result of police brutality. Women in uniform paraded with Aslam's body, some of them were in burqa, in a massive funeral procession comprising over 50,000 people. It was the largest funeral for any child in British India.

During the ban on the Khaksar Movement and Mashriqi's imprisonment, these women also played roles as spies, conveying messages between Mashriqi's home and Khaksar leaders, and vice versa. They continued to hold secret meetings and engage in activities to keep Mashriqi's mission of seeking freedom alive. Young women also played a role. Saeeda Bano, a 10-year-old girl from Delhi, played an amazing role in the freedom movement. She was a daring and a fiery, eloquent speaker. She led women's marches and protest demonstrations. During these public demonstrations, they repeated anti-British rule slogans such as "Down with the British Raj" and "Death to the British Government." As a result of their anti-British activities, several freedom-fighter women were threatened, harassed and even beaten, yet they persevered.

Saeeda Bano's involvement gained national recognition. On June 18, 1940, Bano, along with men and women Khaksars, marched in uniform and belcha towards Punjab Premier Sir Sikander Hayat Khan's house to hand over a letter to the Premier. However, Bano and others were arrested. The Tribune (Lahore) reported on June 19, 1940: "They were taken into custody...the ten-year-old girl...took out a letter from her pocket addressed to Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, premier of the Punjab, and began reading it in the Kotwali. The letter contained a reference to the Premier and the Khaksar agitation. The letter was seized by the police."

The next day, when Khaksar men and women along with Bano were presented to the Duty Magistrate, The Tribune dated June 20th, 1940 reported: "[W]omen after arrest were persuaded by the police officers to go back and not to join the Khaksar movement in future, but they did not agree as a result of which they were sent to female jail...they are also persecuted for alleged parading in military formation and being members of an unlawful association..." Despite imprisonment, they would not surrender. Instead, they continued to bear the atrocities of prison all the while separated from their families, who remained vulnerable to persecution by the British. On August 19, 1940, the Magistrate gave his verdict and released Bano on the grounds that she was a minor. He issued orders for the release of other women as well under certain terms. According to The Tribune dated August 30th, 1940: "One woman consented to furnish security, and the rest refused...and preferred jail".

Khaksar women's influence transcended their involvement with the Khaksar Movement, inspiring other organizations. Hindu leader Subhas Chandra Bose integrated women into his Indian National Army in the early 1940s. Mohammad Ali Jinnah's All-Indian Muslim League established the Women's National Guard in 1944. It is evident

that Khaksar women's courage and dedication reshaped women's roles in the Indian subcontinent.

Furthermore, in the mid-1940s Mashriqi incorporated talented Khaksar women into the team that contributed to the framing of the constitution known as "The Constitution of Free India, 1946 A.C.". Others distributed copies or delivered lectures on the publication's contents to garner support. Mashriqi's constitutions found favor among the public as they safeguarded the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims to maintain India's unity—a sentiment shared by the majority who never desired their country to split apart. Based on the support for the said document and other favorable factors, throughout the 1945-1946 elections both men and women Khaksars campaigned vigorously for Khaksar candidates. Despite their efforts, the British establishment ensured that Khaksars did not emerge victorious. The British went to great lengths to secure the All-India Muslim League's sweeping triumph, establishing their party as the legitimate sole representative of Muslims. Mashriqi, fellow leaders and Khaksar men and women protested vehemently against the electoral rigging. Unsurprisingly, their grievances remained unaddressed by the British establishment. For further details, read my work titled, "Jinnah Paid Subsidy for Pakistan: 1945-1946 Elections Manipulated."

In 1947, when Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced the transfer of power to Indians no later than 1948, according to Mashriqi, the delay gave violent elements time to carry out horrific killings of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. These killings were exploited as the justification that Indian people were not ready for freedom and self-governance. Mashriqi's assessment was bolstered by reality. The British had no plan to leave India for many more years. Aware of British intentions, Mashriqi ordered 300,000 Khaksars to reach Delhi on June 30th, 1947. This action alarmed the British and

Lord Mountbatten hastily accepted. The partition plan before the assembly of the Khaksars. Yet, in June, despite strict restrictions and the enforcement of Section 144, well over 100,000 — The Tribune (June 04, 1947) reported 70,000 to 80,000 — reached Delhi, including Khaksar women. The omission of Mashriqi's role in ending the British rule and other facts highlights the selective nature of historical narratives chosen for presentation. Furthermore, the important work of Khaksar women — protecting lives and rehabilitating Muslims and non-Muslims in refugee camps remains virtually unknown. To discover the reasons behind Mountbatten's acceleration of the partition plan and the swift transfer of power, it is crucial to watch the documentary *The Road to Freedom: Allama Mashriqi's Historic Journey from Amritsar to Lahore* from beginning to end. Additionally, reading my article titled "The British Chessboard: Jinnah, Gandhi and the Strategic Divide of India" will provide further insight into this historical context.

The legacy of Khaksar women

In conclusion, the Khaksar Muslim women stood firm in their fight against colonial power until its rule came to an end, which was no mean achievement. Moreover, despite the patriarchal challenges they faced, Khaksar women overcame disapproval and played a crucial role in the Khaksar movement by providing vital organizational support. They exhibited exceptional confidence, individualism and pride. They inspired other women and boosted morale. The role of women in the Khaksar Movement in India was indeed groundbreaking and way ahead of its time, prompting other organizations everywhere to follow suit.

The credit for this indeed goes to the visionary Allama Mashriqi who, despite heavy criticism from non-Muslims and conservative Muslims, stood firmly in his belief. In the 1930s, Mashriqi

empowered women during a period in the East and West when they did not have equal rights. He was ahead of his time and his efforts had a profound impact on the country. Mashriqi's actions laid the foundation for the global movement that eventually integrated women into various fields including the Indian armed forces of today.

Allama Mashriqi's Khaksar Movement, founded on a self-help basis, is a compelling case for the establishment of an army without national training. The Khaksar Movement consisted of over five million male and female members. Mashriqi was able to accomplish this despite the British Raj and without financial support from either domestic or foreign sources. This feat is particularly remarkable given the absence of modern communication technologies and the anti-Mashriqi British-controlled print media.

[[Gwyneth Campbell](#) edited the piece.]



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The grandson of freedom fighter Allama Mashriqi, Yousaf has authored 18 books and digitized 19 rare works, including Mashriqi's historic journal *Al-Islah*. Nasim's writings cover figures like Jinnah and Gandhi, as well as the partition of India.

Western Press Gets CAA Wrong: Here Is the Truth About the New Law

Rashmini Koparkar
March 20, 2024

India's new legislation is a long overdue humanitarian measure designed to end the suffering of non-Muslim minorities who have suffered rape, torture, killings and ethnic cleansing for decades in the fundamentalist Islamist societies of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

On March 11, Indian Home Minister Amit Shah announced the rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). This 2019 legislation was a key component of the pre-election manifesto of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Both houses of the Parliament of India passed this legislation with a resounding majority. In 2019, heavy protests, long sit-ins and violence followed the passing of the CAA. Now, the government has brought out the long-awaited rules and blamed the delay on the COVID pandemic.

The CAA has proved controversial. Both the foreign press and much of the English-speaking media have accused the act of being anti-Muslim. The US State Department has said that it is concerned about the implementation of the CAA. In response, India's Ministry of External Affairs has dismissed the US statement as "misplaced, misinformed, and unwarranted."

It is time to take a step back and examine this legislation coolly. In fact, we must ask the

operative question about the CAA: Why did the government pass this legislation?

The dark view of the CAA

Asaduddin Owaisi, the leader of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen party claims "CAA is meant to only target Muslims, it serves no other purpose." In his long post on social media site X, this Muslim leader asserts, "Once religion is accepted as the basis of Indian citizenship, the next step is to deny it on religious grounds." Note that Owaisi's party wanted the then feudal Hyderabad state ruled by an autocratic Nizam to join Pakistan in 1947, The Nizam's militia, the Razakars, conducted genocide of the ruler's own Hindu majority population before Indian troops liberated the long-suffering Telugu, Marathi and Kannada people in his realm.

Kerala's ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) has called for state-wide protests as has the All Assam Students' Union. Opponents take the view that the BJP is weakening the secular character of India. The communists blame the ruling party for practicing the politics of what Indians call "communalism" or what some in the West might call majoritarianism. Opponents of the BJP argue that the party has announced the CAA rules as an opportunistic move to mobilize the Hindu votes just before the election.

Most international outlets such as the Qatari-funded Al Jazeera and the British government-backed BBC have also termed the CAA anti-Muslim. In fact, the BBC's headline says it all, "CAA: India to enforce migrant law that excludes Muslims."

The context of the CAA

Given the sound and fury generated by the CAA, examining the context behind the parliamentary act becomes critical. The legislation aims at

expediting citizenship for refugees who have suffered as members of persecuted minorities in three neighboring Islamic countries, one of whom is ruled by the Taliban.

The CAA does not pertain to Muslims who are Indian citizens. The legislation does not exclude a single Indian Muslim from citizenship, making the BBC's headline far from true.

All the CAA does is give Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians living in India after having fled from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh a fast track to citizenship. Members of these persecuted minority religions must have migrated to India before December 31, 2014. The BBC makes a big deal about the fact that "the new law does not cover those fleeing persecution in non-Muslim majority countries, including Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka." It also says that the CAA does not cover Rohingya Muslim refugees from neighboring Myanmar.

Such arguments are specious because existing provisions allow all refugees to claim citizenship, including Muslims. In 2016, India granted Pakistani singer Adnan Sami citizenship. The Indian government grants other Muslims like him Indian passports too.

Both the BBC and the State Department could do well to note that the CAA is only emulating the 1990 Lautenberg Amendment. The US Congress passed this legislation to facilitate the resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union. It was "later expanded to include persecuted religious minorities in other countries, such as Jews, Christians, Baha'is, Sabaeen-Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians from Iran."

India is only offering an expedited path to citizenship to refugees from minority groups who have been subjected to ethnic cleansing, not just discrimination. Afghanistan, Pakistan and even

Bangladesh have practiced a conscious policy of exterminating non-Muslim minorities for decades.

The reality of Islamist South Asian nations

In 1992, Sikhs and Hindus numbered 200,000 in Afghanistan. Even before the Taliban took over a second time, this number had dropped to 500 by 2018. Today, there are practically no Sikhs or Hindus left in Afghanistan. The Taliban views both these communities as pagan kafirs who can be raped, tortured, enslaved and killed.

The Sikhs and Hindus who lived in Afghanistan for decades have now fled to India as have the handful of Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians. The Taliban did not even spare statues and destroyed both the priceless ancient Bamiyan statues of the Buddha. India owes these persecuted people of minority religions in fundamentalist Afghanistan some responsibility. The CAA seeks only to fulfill India's moral duty. It is hypocritical and self-serving of Islamists and leftists to criticize a profoundly humanitarian legislation.

Pakistan is hardly more tolerant than Afghanistan. When British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan in 1947, the countries signed the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement, promising minorities equal rights. India has abided by that agreement and given all minorities equal rights. In fact, India gives minorities multiple protections that the Hindu majority lacks. For instance, minority educational institutions are run entirely by their religious organizations and many of them do not admit students of any other religion. This privilege is not available to Hindu institutions that are overseen and even administered by the state. In contrast, Pakistan is an expressly Muslim state where minorities are often raped, killed or forced to convert to Islam.

Innumerable reports have chronicled Pakistan's genocidal treatment of its minorities. During the

original sin of the partition in 1947, Pakistan engaged in ethnic cleansing of Hindus and Sikhs, which the state still celebrates. While the Indian state became a secular and democratic entity, Pakistan has become a factory for jihad, exporting violent terrorists around the world. Note that the Taliban was backed by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and Pakistani society has become increasingly more radicalized over time.

Unsurprisingly, minorities in Pakistan fell from 23% in 1947 to 3.7% in 2014. The figure today is even lower. Note that the population of Muslims in India both in absolute numbers and in percentage has grown since 1947. In other words, both the BBC and the State Department appear to be either mistakenly or deliberately maligning India for being anti-Muslim when in reality its policy is guided by the principle of giving refuge to minorities fleeing death and destruction in fundamentalist Islamist nations.

In 1971, India liberated Bangladesh despite opposition from the US. Henry Kissinger famously ignored the "Blood Telegram" of his own diplomat who detailed mass rape, brutal torture and mass killings by Pakistani troops. The Indian army chief was a Parsi, a Zoroastrian community that fled from Iran when Islam took root in the country. The general commanding troops on the eastern front was Sikh and Indian troops came from a variety of religions, regions and races.

Despite the contribution of such diverse actors in liberating Bangladesh, today this country has become intolerant. Non-Muslim communities are often killed and forced to convert. Their women are frequently raped. In 2001, no less than 200 of them were raped in a single incident. The United Nations has expressed alarm over the fast-dwindling population of non-Muslim minorities in Bangladesh as a result of de facto ethnic cleansing.

India's only concern is to give those who fled before 2014 a long overdue safe haven. Thanks to its reputation as a democratic, tolerant and inclusive society, religious minorities have fled to India for centuries as the cases of the Gujarati Parsis, the Kerala Jews and Syrian Christians demonstrate. Non-Muslims in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh have no place to go other than India. Those who came here before 2014 need a sanctuary. India has done the just and right thing by implementing the CAA, which the BBC, Al Jazeera and the State Department could and should make the effort to understand.



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A Sultan's Shadow: The Truth About Neo-Ottomanism

Ali Omar Forozish, Halil Avni Güzelyurt
March 24, 2024

Neo-Ottomanism was initially born out of a desire to elevate Turkey's international standing and transform the nation from a medium-scale state into a regional and even global power. The policy has yielded mixed results at best. Turkey has experienced an

economic, cultural, and demographic decline despite limited military and diplomatic benefits.

The latter half of the 19th century witnessed the birth of a concept — Ottomanism. At the time, the Ottoman Empire, with its base of power in Turkey, ruled a vast domain stretching from Southeast Europe to North Africa, Arabia and the Caucasus. Ottomanist intellectuals envisioned a unified Ottoman nation transcending the diverse ethnicities, religions and languages within the empire's vast borders. The ideology of Ottomanism aimed to foster a sense of shared identity and belonging that superseded these traditional divisions.

However, Ottomanism's journey has gone through detours and complexities. Under Sultan Abdulhamid II, the ideology took on a more pronounced Islamic character. The main point was the sultan's role as Caliph of the Islamic world. This new approach aimed to unite the empire's Muslim population under a shared faith.

Ottomanism could not save the empire, which succumbed to internal dissent and external pressures. With the abolition of the Sultanate on November 1, 1922, and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Ottoman state became a historical relic. The once-hopeful vision of unity faded alongside the civilization it sought to preserve.

Emerging in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Neo-Ottomanism revived ideas from the original empire within the context of the Republic of Turkey. Current proponents of Neo-Ottomanism advocate for a more active Turkish foreign policy in regions that once belonged to the Ottoman Empire. They emphasize Turkey's potential role as a leader and mediator in the Middle East and surrounding regions.

However, Neo-Ottomanism has resulted in a downgrade of Turkey's position, both politically and economically. Its emphasis on past glories and a more interventionist foreign policy has strained relations with key countries and diverted resources from addressing crucial internal challenges.

The rise of Neo-Ottomanism

The term “Neo-Ottomanism” first emerged in the 1970s in Greece as a response to concerns about Turkey's interventions in Cyprus. However, until the late 1980s, Turkey's foreign policy remained largely focused on the West. This was evident in its close relationship with the United States and its pursuit of membership in the European Economic Community (EEC), the precursor to the European Union.

The military coup of 1980 marked a turning point that led to significant changes in Turkey's political landscape. Turgut Özal, who became prime minister in 1983, played a pivotal role in this transformation. He implemented a neo-liberal economic model that aimed to integrate Turkey more deeply with the global market. He also recognized the growing economic importance of regions beyond Europe and the US.

Özal shifted the focus towards fostering good relations and economic ties with countries like Iraq, Iran and Libya. While maintaining connections with Europe and the US remained an important aspect of his foreign policy, Özal emphasized Turkey's historical and cultural connections with the Turkic world and the broader Islamic world. This newfound emphasis on these historical ties marked the incorporation of elements of Neo-Ottomanism into Turkish foreign policy. Özal strategically used concepts like Islam, Turkism and Ottoman history to build bridges with countries in the Middle East, Balkans and Central Asia.

Özal's death in 1993 marked the end of the first era of Neo-Ottomanism. The following years were characterized by internal political instability and economic problems, leading to a temporary halt in the development of this foreign policy doctrine.

A shift towards assertive regionalism

The 2002 elections marked a turning point in Turkish foreign policy with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The AKP, rooted in a center-right Islamist ideology, promised a fresh approach to foreign policy that would depart from the previous era of coalition governments' focus on Western alignment. This new vision drew heavily from the doctrine of "Strategic Depth" developed by political scientist Ahmet Davutoğlu. Strategic Depth emphasized Turkey's unique geopolitical position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. It argued that Turkey could leverage its historical and cultural legacy, particularly its Ottoman past, to become a pivotal player in a multipolar world order.

Initially, the AKP adopted a "zero problems with neighbors" policy, prioritizing soft power tools. Turkey significantly increased its foreign aid contributions and became a major donor in the region. Cultural programs attempted to foster closer ties with neighboring countries by promoting Turkish language, music and cuisine. This approach resonated with many regional actors, particularly those wary of Western dominance.

Simultaneously, the AKP pursued EU membership with renewed vigor. They introduced domestic reforms to align with European standards, and Turkey actively participated in regional initiatives to showcase its commitment to stability and cooperation. A key example was the significant improvement in relations with Syria, a former adversary. Diplomatic ties, increased

economic cooperation and energy partnerships between the two countries flourished.

However, the EU accession process proved to be a slow and frustrating experience. The EU's internal resistance to Turkish membership fueled a growing sense of disillusionment in Ankara. Turks perceived the whole process as foot-dragging.

Ahmet Davutoğlu amplified this sentiment when he became Foreign Minister in 2009. A strong proponent of Neo-Ottomanism, Davutoğlu envisioned a more assertive role for Turkey on the world stage. He argued that his country's future lay not solely in aligning with the West, but in re-establishing its influence as a regional leader.

Several events served as catalysts for this shift. In 2009, Erdoğan delivered a scathing critique of Israel's actions in Gaza in his One Minute speech at the World Economic Forum. Erdoğan highlighted his growing sense of divergence from traditional Western foreign policy positions. The following year, the deadly Mavi Marmara flotilla attack, where Israeli forces raided a Turkish humanitarian aid convoy headed for Gaza, further strained relations with the West. These incidents resonated deeply with Turkish public opinion, strengthening the appeal of Neo-Ottoman ideals that emphasized a more independent and assertive foreign policy.

The Arab Spring uprisings of 2010 presented a golden opportunity for Turkey to advance its Neo-Ottoman ambitions. Embracing a pro-Arab stance, Turkey actively supported rebellions against established governments in Egypt and Libya. Ankara hoped to cultivate close ties with these new governments, fostering economic partnerships and establishing itself as a champion of democratic reform in the region. This approach aligned with Neo-Ottomanism emphasis on fostering regional leadership and projecting Turkish influence beyond its borders.

However, the Arab Spring's aftermath proved to be far more complex than anticipated. The rise of Islamist movements to power in Egypt and Libya initially bolstered Turkey's foreign policy ambitions. However, the subsequent descent into instability and violence in these countries exposed the limitations of the Neo-Ottoman approach. Turkey's ability to influence events on the ground proved to be limited, and its regional standing became entangled with the ideological struggles within Arab societies.

The 21st century descent into instability

Turkey openly supported the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt. When a military coup overthrew it in 2013, Turkey's regional ties with Egypt became strained. Turkey's condemnation of the coup and its staunch backing of the Brotherhood led to a diplomatic rift with Egypt and its allies in the Gulf, leaving Turkey increasingly isolated in the Middle East. This isolation had significant economic consequences. Trade and investment between Turkey and the Arab states declined sharply.

Internally, Neo-Ottomanism's emphasis on the ummah (Muslim community) fostered a sense of pan-Islamism that challenged the core tenets of the Turkish Republic's secular identity. The concept of ummah fueled the rise of Islamist tendencies within Turkish society, particularly among conservative segments of the population. Educational reforms introduced under the AKP placed a greater emphasis on Islamic history and culture, eroding secular values in the public sphere. These social tensions manifested in increased polarization and a decline in religious tolerance towards minority groups.

The year 2013 marked a turning point for Turkey on multiple fronts. The Gezi Park protests erupted in response to a government development project that threatened a beloved public space in

Istanbul. The protests morphed into a broader movement against the AKP government's perceived authoritarian tendencies. The government propagated further emphasis on Ottoman history and identity. Grandiose infrastructure projects like the replica Ottoman barracks on the banks of the Bosphorus deliberately attempted to romanticize the Ottoman past and distract from present-day challenges.

The Syrian Civil War, which began in the same year, added another layer of complexity to Turkey's foreign policy. While Turkey initially supported the rebels fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime, the emergence of extremist groups like ISIS and the Kurdish YPG (People's Protection Units), backed by the US, posed a significant security threat on its borders. ISIS carried out a series of deadly terrorist attacks within Turkey, targeting tourist destinations and civilian populations. The YPG (affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Kurdish separatist group designated internationally as a terrorist group) clashed with Turkish security forces along the border and further destabilized the region.

Additionally, Russian and Iranian support for the Syrian government forced Turkey into a precarious geopolitical balancing act. Turkey's attempts to contain the Syrian conflict within its borders and prevent a mass refugee influx strained its economic resources and humanitarian capacity. Ummah-oriented propaganda aimed at Muslim countries encouraged uncontrolled migration towards Turkey. Millions of refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War poured into Turkey, straining its social services, economy and infrastructure. The influx of refugees also contributed to rising social tensions and xenophobia within Turkish society.

Turkey's political landscape was particularly tumultuous between 2015 and 2016. Internal power struggles within the AKP and a surge in terrorist attacks by ISIS and Kurdish separatists

exposed the potential dangers of an expansive foreign policy. The controversial downing of a Russian jet by the Turkish military, which resulted in the crew's deaths, strained Russia–Turkish relations further. This put heavy pressure on bilateral trade and tourism.

Turkey critically needed to evaluate Neo-Ottomanism costs and benefits. The pursuit of an ambitious foreign policy had diverted resources away from addressing pressing domestic issues like poverty, unemployment and social inequality.

In 2016, after a failed military coup attempt against Erdoğan, Turkey declared a state of emergency and subsequent purge against the alleged plotters. Erdoğan began the transition to a presidential system which allotted him significant power. Interestingly, Neo-Ottomanism played a role in legitimizing his new system. Supporters of the president appealed to Islamic pride sentiments within a segment of the population by portraying him as a strong leader akin to an Ottoman sultan.

Concerns have arisen among citizens regarding the Turkish government's commitment to democratic principles. In response, the government cracked down on popular dissent. It arrested thousands of protesters, purged its civil service and military, and tightened its control on the media and the courts. These actions attracted criticism for stifling free speech and weakening the system of checks and balances that underpins a well-functioning democracy.

Moreover, the government's pursuit of a more conservative and religious agenda deviates from the secular foundations of the Turkish Republic as established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This and its attempts to augment presidential power through constitutional amendments have lost the new government the trust of a large portion of Turkish society. Secularists apprehend a reversal of Atatürk's reforms, liberals express anxieties about

curtailed freedoms, and many nationalists harbor reservations concerning the foreign policy ramifications of Neo-Ottomanism.

Neo Ottomanism is a challenge to NATO's cohesion

Turkey's growing emphasis on Neo-Ottomanism presents a potential challenge to its critical role within NATO. Established in the aftermath of World War II to deter Soviet aggression, NATO functions on the principle of collective defense by requiring member states to come to each other's aid in the event of an attack. Neo-Ottomanism's prioritization of regional issues works against the principle of collective defense, potentially weakening the alliance's ability to respond effectively to external threats.

Thus, Turkey's involvement in the Syrian civil war and its support for the Libyan government have strained relations with allies like the US, whose interests in these conflicts diverge significantly from Turkey's.

Furthermore, Neo-Ottomanism focuses on reviving Islamic influence and potentially Islamic state structures that could be fundamentally at odds with NATO's commitment to secular and democratic values. Ambitions associated with Neo-Ottomanism, such as aiming to reclaim former Ottoman lands, could lead to disputes and border conflicts with neighbors, some of whom are also NATO members or partners. This raises concerns about internal strains within the alliance and the erosion of a unified front.

Military interoperability — the ability of allied forces to work together seamlessly — is essential for NATO's effectiveness. However, Turkey's acquisition of military equipment incompatible with NATO systems, such as the S-400 missile system from Russia, disrupts this seamlessness. The S-400 system's incompatibility with NATO air

defense architecture could endanger the ability to distinguish between friendly and hostile aircraft. This incompatibility not only hinders joint military exercises and operations but also casts doubt on Turkey's commitment to the alliance's collective defense strategy. The United States' suspension of Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet program due to the S-400 deal further exemplifies this strain.

Neo-Ottomanism appeal to Turkish nationalists across the political spectrum could create divisions and factions within the Turkish military, potentially fracturing internal cohesion and undermining Turkey's readiness to cooperate effectively with NATO allies.

Neo-Ottoman rhetoric, often critical of Western powers and their actions in the region, creates tension with some NATO members, particularly those with whom Turkey has historical or ongoing political disagreements. Tensions with Greece, a fellow NATO member, over control of the Eastern Mediterranean could escalate due to Neo-Ottoman pronouncements. These tensions hinder cooperation and trust within the alliance.

Furthermore, the emphasis on anti-Western orientation and aspirations to free Turkey from dependence on the United States could create a perception of Turkey as a rival or competitor rather than a partner among some NATO members. This erosion of trust and the perception of divergent goals significantly complicate efforts to maintain regional stability.

The current state of Turkey's EU membership

EU membership is contingent upon fulfilling a set of core principles enshrined in the Copenhagen criteria. These include robust democratic institutions, an independent judiciary and an unwavering respect for human rights. Furthermore, the EU emphasizes peaceful resolutions to international conflicts and close cooperation with

member states, principles outlined in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Herein lies the crux of the tension between Turkey's aspirations under Neo-Ottomanism and EU membership. Turkey's assertive actions and territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly with Greece and Cyprus, raise concerns among EU members about its commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and regional cooperation. Additionally, Turkey's involvement in the Libyan Civil War has further strained relations with EU countries. These escalating tensions threaten the stability and security of the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Internal developments within Turkey further complicate the picture. Growing concerns about weakening democratic institutions, notably the independence of the judiciary and freedom of the press, cast doubt on Turkey's adherence to the Copenhagen criteria. Criticism from the EU and international organizations regarding crackdowns on dissent, erosion of the rule of law, and human rights violations have intensified scrutiny. Indicators rank Turkey low in terms of judicial independence and press freedom.

Furthermore, Turkey's economic and social policies increasingly diverge from EU norms. Protectionist trade policies clash with the EU's focus on free trade while a perceived shift towards a more conservative social agenda creates friction with the EU's emphasis on social liberalism. Turkey's recent economic policies, characterized by increased state intervention, nationalist rhetoric and rising public spending, further distance it from the EU's economic model. Accusations of a growing conservatism in Turkish society raise questions about Turkey's compatibility with the EU's social values. Environmental and social welfare concerns may also diverge from the EU's established approach, creating additional obstacles to full integration.

The economic fallout of Neo-Ottomanism

The initial period of robust economic growth under the AKP party in Turkey (2002–2011) witnessed a remarkable 5.6% annual average GDP growth. However, this progress has subsequently been overshadowed by a series of economic woes. The execution of Neo-Ottomanism has contributed to a period of economic downturn.

A cornerstone of a healthy economy is trust in its central institutions. However, the politicization of key economic institutions under Neo-Ottomanism, such as the central bank, severely damaged domestic and international confidence. Investors and citizens alike questioned the independence and competence of these institutions in managing economic policy, particularly regarding interest rates and inflation control. Trust in the Turkish lira's stability has eroded, discouraging foreign investment and hindering long-term economic planning. For instance, the abrupt 2021 dismissal of Naci Agbal, the Central Bank governor by Erdogan, who advocates for low interest rates despite high inflation, sparked a sharp currency decline and raised concerns about central bank autonomy.

Neo-Ottomanism strained ties with the European Union, a major trading bloc, and the United States, a significant source of foreign direct investment. Decreased trade volumes ensued. Additionally, tensions with regional neighbors like Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have disrupted tourism revenue and potential regional economic cooperation. Turkey's involvement in the 2020 conflicts in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, alongside its exploration for natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, provoked diplomatic disputes with several European and Middle Eastern countries. These disputes negatively impacted Turkey's trade and tourism sectors, which contribute approximately 25% of its GDP.

The Turkish economy has become heavily reliant on foreign capital to finance growth, exposing it to external shocks. The lira's value fluctuates significantly in global currency markets can lead to significant, disrupting commerce. Import costs have increased and inflation is a growing predicament. Additionally, a high dependence on energy imports makes Turkey susceptible to global energy price fluctuations. Furthermore, a lack of sufficient domestic savings and foreign exchange reserves weakens Turkey's ability to weather these external economic storms. The 2018 diplomatic row with the US over the detention of an American pastor serves as a case in point. It triggered a currency crisis that saw the lira lose 40% of its value against the US dollar. This crisis also exposed Turkey's large current account deficit, which reached 6.5% of GDP in 2017.

Turkey's focus on foreign policy under Neo-Ottomanism has diverted attention away from crucial domestic economic reforms. A lack of investment in infrastructure, education and technological innovation still hinders long-term economic growth and competitiveness. The economy remains reliant on low-value-added sectors such as construction, agriculture and tourism. This lack of diversification makes the Turkish economy less resilient and hinders its ability to compete in the global marketplace. In 2019, the Global Competitiveness Index ranked Turkey poorly on indicators such as innovation capability, quality of education and macroeconomic stability, placing it 59th out of 141 countries.

Despite the economic downturn, Turkey achieved a notable recovery in 2021, with an 11% growth rate to become the fastest-growing G20 economy. This was driven by the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and expansionary fiscal and monetary policies. However, Turkey's 2021 growth came with challenges like high inflation (reaching 21.3% in November 2021) and a

widening current account deficit (reaching 7.1% of GDP in the third quarter of 2021). Moreover, devastating February 2023 earthquakes caused significant human and material losses, further pressuring the already fragile macro-financial situation. Turkey's current inflation stands at 67.07%.

The government's new Medium-Term Program for 2023–2025 aims to achieve an average GDP growth of 5.3%. However, the success of the program will depend on the implementation of structural reforms, the diversification of trading partners and the restoration of credibility and stability in the economic environment.

Originally, Neo-Ottomanism aimed to boost Turkey's global influence and transform it into a major regional and possibly even international player. However, Turkey has suffered in the economic, cultural and political arenas under Neo-Ottomanism.

[[Gwyneth Campbell](#) edited this piece]



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London: Inhaling 2,000 Years of History and Culture

Alan Waring
March 28, 2024

London is a city with a long, dynamic history. In the modern day, it stands as a vibrant hub for many people and walks of life. As its size and population have grown, it has developed such distinctive quirks as the Cockney accent and rhyming slang that are famous across the world. While the city continues to modernize, it holds fast to some ancient legislations and traditions that still persist to this day.

A tul Singh's reminiscences of London in his FO° Wednesday newsletter on November 29, 2023, were just wonderful. I felt I was walking next to him. He asked, "What makes London special: history, beauty or community?" For me, it is all of these, plus some indefinable "glue" that binds them all into a unique culture.

Am I a Londoner?

Since my “yoof” (youth) in the 1960s, I lived, studied and worked in London for nearly 40 years. Yet, even though I feel more attuned to London than any other place in Britain, I cannot honestly call myself a true Londoner. To acquire that distinction would require that I had been born and bred there — not necessarily in the East End “within the sound of Bow Bells” (an old phrase referring to the bells rung at the church of St Mary-le-Bow). That would make me a traditional Cockney. But no, at least somewhere within the 32 boroughs of Inner and Greater London or within the City of London, the smallest and oldest local authority right in the center of the metropolis.

Still, I can join in with fellow patrons in one of the traditional pubs (short for “public houses” or licensed drinking establishments) in singing “Maybe it’s because I’m a Londoner” and other ditties (short, simple songs), especially if it’s backed by an old Joanna (piano). Or, I can join in traditional pub sports such as darts, dominoes, skittles or cribbage. Nowadays, one has to seek out such traditional nightspots, since most metropolitan pubs cater for fast-moving modernity and youth, and they eschew parochial signaling.

Nevertheless, the pub tradition doggedly remains. An old college professor once advised me that the role of the pub was not to get the patrons inebriated but rather to provide social affirmation. The sociologist Victor Turner referred to this phenomenon as “social liminality and communitas.” A pub is a congenial place for social cohesion — what the Germans would call *Zusammenhalt* — where patrons rub shoulders and engage with friends, acquaintances and complete strangers from all walks of life and hopefully leave feeling moderately uplifted. Long before psychiatrists and antidepressant medications, the publican and fellow patrons provided a ready

sounding board for lay diagnosis, problem solving and support.

Then, there is the distinctive London lingo or patois, a diluted form of Pure Cockney with terms and rhyming slang such as “apples-and-pears” (stairs), “butcher’s” (short for “butcher’s hook,” meaning “look”), “cor-blimey” (may God blind me), “guv” (boss, governor), “geezer” (a man), “bloke” (a man), “wedge” (sizable bundle of banknotes), “sov” (£1, short for “sovereign,” a gold coin), “pony” (£25) and “monkey” (£500).

Given my name, Alan, how could I ever forget the expression “Don’t get your Alans in a twist”? Alan Whicker was a well-known BBC television journalist from the 1950s to 80s. Rhyming with Whicker are “knickers” (underpants). Since “getting one’s knickers in a twist” means getting unduly frustrated and annoyed as a result of one’s own actions failing to solve a minor problem, the Cockney expression’s meaning becomes all too clear.

No one today, except perhaps a few diehard Cockney “Pearly Kings and Queens,” stuffs their colloquial speech with such language like Dick Van Dyke did in the 1964 film *Mary Poppins*. Nonetheless, many Londoners of all social and educational strata do drop the odd Cockney expression into conversations for effect, usually to convey an emphasis, exasperation or absurdity.

In the past 50 years or so, London itself has continued to evolve and change, as it has done since at least the time of Roman Londinium. Encircled by the M25 motorway, the Greater London population is now somewhere between 10 million and 14.4 million, depending on boundary definitions, with a multi-ethnic polyglot character. Ever since Roman times, London has been a magnet for foreign immigrants of all kinds — invaders, traders, entrepreneurs, students, refugees and so on.

Moreover, starting in the 1960s, the population who work in London has continued to spread out across the surrounding Home Counties and beyond, often seeking more affordable housing. The government encouraged this migration as part of post-World War II reconstruction and development and to control urban sprawl. Eight “New Towns” were designated within a 50-mile radius of London alone to accommodate London's population overspill, but many more existing towns have also continued to attract Londoners.

Nowadays, commuting 200 miles into London every day is not uncommon. A gradual modification of spoken English has also accompanied this population spread, so that within a 100-mile radius from Central London it has become “averaged out”; a mild Cockney-ish accent. Even in the posh spoken English of lawyers and university dons, one can often now detect the odd glottal stop or disappearing “T.”

This new spoken English is called Estuary English, alluding to its prevalence in the populations spread out across London and counties on both sides of the River Thames and the Thames Estuary. I am an exponent of the genre, although I do check myself when conversing with non-Estuary speakers. Pronouncing a final letter “L” as a “W” (e.g. we-w instead of well), or not enunciating a final “ow” (e.g. tomorra instead of tomorrow), or omitting the letter “T” (e.g. be-uh instead of better) may convey laziness or poor education.

Feeling personally connected

In many ways, my own ancestry reflects the post-Roman history of London and Britain generally: a melange of Celtic, British, Norman, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon DNA. The surname Waring does not appear in British documents until after 1067; it first crops up as Warin, Warenger, Warrene and Guerri in the Domesday Book, William the

Conqueror's infamous taxation register of all real estate and other property ownership, completed in 1086. Of ten Warins listed in the Domesday Book, none had owned properties in Britain before 1066, but by 1086, some owned dozens of properties.

Other Norman variants of Waring include Guerin, meaning guard or protector. The Normans themselves were of mixed descent from both Romano-Celts, Franks and seaborne invaders from North Germany, Denmark and Norway. The Waring name via the Normans may also be related to the German Wahrung, also meaning guard or protector.

In the late 1970s and early 80s, I worked as a Principal Officer at the Corporation of the City of London. This local authority was formed in the 12th century. It covered the original Londinium of the Roman era. The City further developed in Saxon times, and it successfully defended itself against Viking invaders, but not the Norman takeover of London in 1067. In 2006, the word Corporation was dropped from its branding and public-facing name, becoming just the City of London — but for me, it will always be the City Corporation.

My office was in the oldest part of the Guildhall over the ceremonial main entrance doors into the Guildhall proper, where the many state banquets are held. There are many guildhalls across Britain, the name likely stemming from the Saxon “gild” or “geld” (money) and the place (“hall”) where local taxes and dues were paid. But this Guildhall, originating in 1411, is the most famous and prestigious. My office window was the perfect reconnaissance point to observe all the comings and goings of staff, visitors and dignitaries as they crossed the Guildhall Yard below.

Down in the Guildhall vaults, the Museum of London (run by the Corporation at its own site at the junction of London Wall and Aldersgate

Street) keeps City records from all the way back in Saxon times, including the original freedom charter that William the Conqueror granted the city elders in 1067. This was a way of buying their loyalty and deterring them from opposing his takeover after King Harold II lost Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Quirkiness and hidden talents

The City has retained its ancient legislature and administration (The City Aldermen, the Common Councillors, the Court of Common Council, the Town Clerk) and the over 100 ancient livery companies and trades guilds whose titles all start with “Worshipful Company of...” (examples include “Fishmongers”, “Haberdashers”, “Salters”, “Vintners”, “Wax Chandlers”, and “Tobacco Pipemakers and Tobacco Blenders”). Freemen of the City are entitled to join a livery company. By the way, since 1872, the term “freeman” has applied equally to men and women!

The livery companies elect the Aldermen, whereas the eligible resident and business population of the City elects the Common Councillors. The quaint livery companies, many of whose actual trades died out centuries ago, facilitate the interests of big business corporations and their bosses who operate in the so-called “Square Mile,” which is the nation’s financial hub. It’s all about power, privilege, contacts and doing business.

The term “alderman” in British administrative law evolved from Anglo-Saxon times and probably stems from the North Germanic term of “Æltermann” (elder), a term for a person recognized for their age and wisdom. It was still part of local authority structures throughout Britain when I was a boy, but largely disappeared as a result of local government streamlining in the 1960s — yet not in the City of London. Similarly, the chief executive of a local council, big or small,

was the Town Clerk before they all became Chief Executives — but not in the City of London. These quaint historical relics remain unchanged.

The Corporation also has a surprisingly wide range of responsibilities. For example, it manages and maintains the Tower Bridge, operates several major iconic markets (such as Smithfield meat market and Billingsgate fish market), runs several elite schools including the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the two City of London Schools (one for boys, one for girls), manages “for the people of London” the whole of Epping Forest (an ancient hunting forest just inside the region of Essex) and curiously runs the Animal Quarantine Service at Heathrow Airport. It also provides and administers the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey and owns the freehold (the property and the land that it is built on) on vast tracts of prime commercial property across London.

A sense of history, continuity and loyalty

My own sense of history, continuity and loyalty to the Crown grew during my time in the City and was cemented by two particular privileges that I was granted. One was being allowed to see the original City freedom charter, a very rare honor. The other was being granted Freedom of the City, the honor that allows a person to call themselves a freeman. One archaic privilege of being a freeman was that, in past centuries, I could have run my sheep and livestock through the City streets and traded them at fairs and markets, all without paying any tithes or taxes. Most of these anachronistic privileges are long gone, and most contemporary privileges are more symbolic than practical.

The City Chamberlain (complete with fur stole and regalia!) officiates the Freedom investiture of an individual in his own court. The first recorded instance of this ceremony took place in 1237. During my own, I read out a special oath of

allegiance to the monarch (then Queen Elizabeth II) from “the little red book” entitled Rules for the Conduct of Life (there are 36 of these rules). Although written in slightly archaic English, it is packed with both common sense and guidance on steering one’s life with honesty, integrity, honor and being ever mindful of one’s own limitations and the rights of others.

Perhaps it should be required reading for all politicians, corporate executives and public officials!

[[Will Sherriff](#) edited this piece.]



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Scarce Water Is an Urgent Wake-up Call for California

Rakesh Kaul
March 29, 2024

California faces a water crisis, with groundwater resources dangerously overtaxed. Community engagement and the use of new technologies can help Californians mobilize. We

can digitize water data for public access, form neighborhood water stewardship groups and employ nanosatellites for monitoring. Collaborations with private sectors and startups can drive innovation. Every citizen can be a proactive water steward.

The Golden State stands at a crossroads. Despite passing the ambitious Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014, California today faces a water crisis that oscillates between severe droughts and devastating floods. It will take more than a temporary change in the weather to solve the alarming trends in groundwater depletion.

Groundwater, in drought years, can comprise up to 60% of California's water supply. Cutting demand on this limited resource through water rationing efforts can only go so far. We must now focus on the supply side. Recent legislative measures like the California Water Supply Solutions Act of 2023 and the inclusion of aquifers as natural infrastructure in Senate Bill 122 signal a recognition of the worsening situation. Yet, they are only pieces of a much larger puzzle.

Managing California’s natural resources means tapping into its human resources

Making California's water future sustainable has hit roadblocks. Not enough people are getting involved, and we are not leveraging technology effectively.

Take the California Natural Resources Agency's (CNRA) Open Data website as an example. It's filled with over 2,100 data sets of important water information, but hardly anyone uses it. Out of California's 39 million residents, only a tiny fraction, about 0.1%, check out the site each

month. These are usually experts like hydrologists and academics, not the general public. What's more, the CNRA barely has any followers online — the topic “water” has just two on the CNRA’s own website, and although the agency is a bit more popular on Twitter with 5,800 followers, that's nothing compared to the 492,600 followers that CalFire, California's firefighting agency, has. This shows a big disconnect between the wealth of information available and the level of public engagement, and between the urgent versus the unstoppable.

The conclusion is inescapable. We must tap into the untapped: the collective strength of an innovative, inclusive and more accelerated approach to water management that unlocks the power of community action and technological innovation.

A simple first step would be to digitize all water data. Through the use of AI and natural language processing, it should be easy to query from your smartphone and know your local waterscape in real time. It should be as easy to ask a question about water conservation on the CNRA website as it is to ask ChatGPT how to bake a soufflé. Water districts, much like school districts, have high variability and while the cause may be global, the information has to be local to have personal relevance.

For this to be useful in starting conversation, one has to know what is the source of one’s water; its sustainability, whether growing or shrinking, including recharge and discharge rates; how much different classes of customers in one’s community use it; what the consumption patterns are; what delivery leaks through one’s infrastructure there are; what restrictions apply to one at any given point in time; what the quality is; what the age of the infrastructure and planned improvements and their capital costs are; how much water costs; what it is predicted to cost in the future.

To achieve this, the state should direct the California Department of Technology’s Artificial Intelligence Technology group to create a special task force to track the mushrooming number of companies globally that are bringing AI-driven solutions to every aspect of water management. This is a takeaway from the Dutch example, AI4WQ AI for Water Quality initiative.

Every connected citizen, armed with this knowledge and technology in real-time, can then act more responsibly and also become an advocate for solutions that actively contribute to the health and sustainability of their local water systems.

But to truly make a difference, our approach must extend beyond individuals. The state should require local water agencies to establish neighborhood social media groups, inspired by the US Justice Department's Neighborhood Watch program but with a focus on water.

To facilitate this, the state could develop a "My Water Manual," providing a clear blueprint for forming these community groups. This manual would encourage partnerships between the community and local water agencies, aimed at tackling local water issues and corrective actions thereof. Corporations would be tasked equally as citizens because their corporate social responsibility now needs to incorporate water accountability.

Such groups would act as modern guardians of our water, akin to larger watershed and river conservation organizations. By making water stewardship a collective community mission, we can leverage civil society as a force for united, impactful action. As an example, Xylem has initiated a version of this with New York, Manchester and Mumbai.

Leveraging new technologies to manage water more effectively

This recommendation of empowering the people to be stewards of water gains an edge with extending Professor Jay Famiglietti's pioneering work on the use of satellites for water monitoring. Going forward, his suggestion is to consider using nanosatellites. Unlike the occasional insights from helicopters or drones, these cost-effective, mini-satellites can provide continuous, comprehensive observations on groundwater levels, detecting both replenishment and depletion, as well as monitoring land subsidence. They can be crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of water conservation measures like spreading grounds and injection wells.

Californians could significantly enhance their Managed Aquifer Recharge efforts with this technology. This will be the only viable technology that will function in the event of a prolonged extreme weather phenomena. Bruno Aragon et al demonstrated the proof that this technology works with their research study of fields in Nebraska.

The actionable step is for the state to place a proof-of-concept order for these micro satellites' data, making it accessible to every local water agency and community. This revolutionary approach promises improved local water management in California along with state supervision. It will also make the financial aspects of water usage and conservation more transparent and efficient.

Professor Upmanu Lall, an authority on climate and water, has pointed out America's urgent need to replace aging water infrastructure, such as dams and pipes, now at high risk of failing. The staggering costs make a complete overhaul impractical. During my interview with him, one proposed solution? Turn to decentralized water purification systems installed directly at the point

of use. These systems are increasingly affordable and can avert disasters like that of Flint, Michigan, by providing clean, safe drinking water. This approach sidesteps the expense and complexity of massive infrastructure upgrades. Again, it showcases how technology is inexorably driving us to consider new, community-centric alternatives to obsolete, centralized, legacy water systems.

To effect this, we must leverage partnerships between the government and private sector. Such collaborations are key to injecting much-needed financial capital into local water projects, allowing us to catch up on delayed efforts. While the state has initiated larger-scale projects with private partners, it's equally crucial to establish straightforward regulations that enable smaller initiatives to launch without excessive bureaucracy.

The Integrated Regional Water Planning Management Act encourages local entities to create regional management groups through grants. This initiative needs to be driven deeper at the micro-local level. Simplifying and multiplying this investment process will hasten the introduction of innovative, clean water technologies tailored to the specific desires and necessities of local communities. By involving everyone in this journey, one ensures widespread commitment and support. Ultimately, the decisions made will mirror the unique needs, cultural values and perhaps even the spiritual considerations of each community, ensuring solutions are as diverse and nuanced as the people they serve.

Taking these steps forward, the state can become a driving force in nurturing water technology startups. In some cases, it can even encourage tech giants from Silicon Valley to contribute their expertise for free. Their reward? Perfecting their innovations in California opens the door to markets beyond, fueling job creation and economic growth. A dramatic example is Google's

flood forecasting service, first launched in India, which helps save lives and property by predicting floods in advance. It has now been rolled out in over 60 countries!

California grows if its water grows. Californians can change how they view their own water — not as something one simply uses, but something that good neighbors must care for and preserve. This kinship approach not only champions technological innovation but will also integrate a culture of water stewardship and sponsorship across California’s diverse communities, making every citizen a proactive participant in safeguarding their water future. IBM’s Dr. Juan Bernabe-Moreno earth science work, in partnership with NASA, has been characterized as the democratization of weather and climate — putting weather and climate accountability of the government in the hands of the community. This is the future.

Nothing prevents us from starting pilot programs for each of these recommendations immediately. Time is of the essence here.

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



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Why Would God Want Jesus to Suffer a Painful Death?

Anton Schauble
March 31, 2024

Fair Observer’s Editor-in-Chief asked me why it was that Jesus had to die in such a horrible way on the Cross. In truth, the Crucifixion is not just an episode of torture and death. It is the self-emptying sacrifice of one who took on human life in order to make it whole.

Atul Singh, our Editor-in-Chief, is a cultured man. He always makes sure he understands and respects the traditions of those he deals with. Atul makes no exception of Christian traditions, especially during the Paschal Triduum, the 72 hours from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Sunday which are the holiest part of our year. So, on the morning of Good Friday, Atul asked me what to say rather than “happy” Good Friday. I told him that “blessed” always works. He chuckled.

Then, Atul asked me another question. “I never understood why there needed to be so much suffering,” he said. “Why did God want Jesus undergo all that torture?”

I was dumbstruck. All of a sudden, I had nothing to say. It was not because I had never thought of the question before; indeed, I have been pondering the meaning of Jesus’s death all of my life. But how does one even begin to express the answer to that question in a sentence or two, without it falling flat like some stolid answer from a theology textbook?

It's a little bit like when a woman asks a man why he loves her. The obvious answers just don't seem to do the question justice.

Yet Atul's is a question that deserves to be answered. Is the central drama of the world's most widespread religion simply absurd? How can the religion that preaches a message of love really teach that God demanded his own son to suffer and die on a cross to satisfy the demands of his justice?

God is not a sadist

When I finally did manage to stammer out an answer, it was something along the lines of, "Well, that would be what the Calvinists would say." An unsatisfying answer, sure, but one that was true enough. The Calvinist tradition has proposed a theory of the Crucifixion which, I think, is the cause of a lot of the concern that underlay Atul's question. In many ways, it is the concept that the rest of the world has perhaps now come to see as the Christian idea of redemption. The name of this theory would be penal substitution.

According to the theory of penal substitution, what Jesus did on the Cross was take all of the punishment that was really ours, the wrath of God that we had merited by our sins. God imputes the sins of humanity to Christ, and he punishes him with all of the fury that his divine holiness has for the wickedness that we commit. In a paradoxical way, God treats his own son like a sinner and unleashes his wrath on him.

There is something about this picture that does not sit right with our ideas of what Christianity should be. God is so angry that he needs to take it out on somebody, and that somebody turns out to be Jesus? Is God really pleased by the suffering of an innocent man? Sure, you can say the innocent man voluntarily accepts his suffering. But one still finds it hard to accept. In this picture, God seems

to be acting more out of wrath than out of love, or even justice.

That is not the God of scripture, the God who "is love." The Old Testament book of Wisdom tells us that "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living." And God loves none of the living, human beings or angels, as much as he loves his own beloved Son. Jesus is the offspring of the very bosom of Father's divinity, the son whom he loves more than the entire created universe. No, God is not pleased by the torturing of his son.

This theory is a distortion of the biblical truth: Jesus did the will of his Father by bravely accepting death in an act of pure love, obedience and self-sacrifice that is worth more to the Father than the sins of the whole world. Jesus paid the debt for evil men, not by taking the punishment they deserved — which would be Hell — but by showing the Father a love that was greater than all of the worship that sinners had denied him throughout the ages. This is why Jesus is our ransom and our justification and our savior — not our whipping-boy.

A sacrifice of love

It is love that God desires, more than anything; Jesus earned our salvation by his love, because love deserves a reward, and love covers a multitude of sins. But then, one might justifiably ask: Why did Jesus have to die? Was not his love enough?

In a way, this is true. One single act of Jesus's perfect love is worth more to God than the sins of the whole world. He could have merited our salvation with a single prayer, a single day of fasting or a single act of mercy for the poor. And indeed, Jesus spent his entire life sanctifying the world with acts of unspeakable love. Yet God desired our salvation to be accomplished by the

greatest act of love — and there is no greater love than this, which is to lay down one's life for one's friends.

We will never fully unpack the mystery of the supreme act of saving love that Jesus poured out on the Cross. Perhaps God desired to show his infinite love for us by saving us in a gratuitous way, something more than was strictly necessary. Perhaps God wanted to show us how Jesus was betrayed by Christians, accused by Jews and tortured by Gentiles, to teach us that we all have a part in rejecting God's goodness. Perhaps it was fitting that God had turned death itself, which had been the weapon the Devil used to oppress humankind, into his own instrument for frustrating the evil one's plans. Thomas Aquinas lists five reasons. He could have listed five hundred more.

I will try, in my own little way, to offer three reasons that I hope will answer Atul's question.

Why did Jesus have to die for the salvation of mankind? Because doing so was the greatest act of sacrifice, of sincerity and of solidarity.

Sacrifice is an ancient concept. Nearly all human cultures have had sacrifice as a way of displaying devotion to the gods. Today, with the spread of Christianity and Islam worldwide, animal sacrifice has become much rarer than it was in ages past. Yet the basic idea is universal: Human beings, who owe everything to the divine, must out of gratitude give back in some way. We do this by sacrificing, because, as an ancient Sumerian proverb expressed, "What has been destroyed belongs to a god. No one is able to take it away."

The Jewish religion was full of animal sacrifices, especially bloody sacrifices of cattle, sheep and goats. The essential act was not merely the killing of the animal, which could be done by laymen, but the offering of its blood upon the altar

by an ordained priest. In this way, the animal was dedicated to God. Christians believe that Jesus is our priest, and that, while he was slain by the hands of other men, it was by offering his own blood on the altar of the Cross that he gave God an act of pure, saving worship.

What has been destroyed belongs to a god. No one is able to take it away. Jesus gave up everything to God on the cross, accepting the abandonment of his friends, the stripping of his possessions, the defamation of his good name and the loss of his very life. In doing so, he showed us that he held nothing back in order to save us. At the same time, he taught us to hold nothing back from God, but to offer ourselves wholly. And, in time, God was to restore to Jesus everything that he had offered a hundredfold, precisely because he had given it up so freely.

Why do I bring up sacrifice? It seems an archaic concept, and perhaps an excessively technical one. But it's important to remember because sacrifice is the biblical concept that was distorted and made unrecognizable by the theory of penal substitution. Jesus is not so much the scapegoat of Yom Kippur as he is the lamb of Passover. And that is why this day, Easter, is called the Pasch — pascha, פסחָ, the Passover, when the blood of the Lamb rescued God's people from destruction.

An act of honesty

Even beyond this perhaps esoteric conception of sacrifice, I believe that something far simpler is too at the heart of the Crucifixion. That is the plain fact that to die is hard.

This world is full of false prophets, would-be messiahs and cult leaders. It is easy and profitable to make yourself look holy and sound profound. With it come fame, wealth and even, a lot of the time, sex. (One sure way to tell that you have a cult leader is to see that he has a lot of girlfriends.)

We are much more willing when we believe preachers who are capable of denying themselves. The Buddha and St. Francis made themselves credible by casting away their wealth, not by amassing it like televangelists do. Yet perhaps even for selfish reasons one might cast away one's wealth. After all, a good reputation is worth more than gold. Someone might prefer to be revered rather than be rich. What someone will not do, unless they are insane, even for the sake of fame is die.

Jesus is a preacher who tells me that he came down from heaven, that he comes bearing God's message for human beings, that I must call upon him to be saved, love him more than my own kin and deny myself and be willing to die for him. This is not just a purveyor of good advice, to whom I might listen and gather some pearls of wisdom and go on my merry way, even if the rest of his sayings are not trustworthy. I can glean pearls of wisdom from a Christian televangelist or a Hindu self-named guru. But I cannot trust them. With the demands that Jesus makes of me, unless I can trust that this man means what he is saying, I cannot listen to him.

I daresay that if Jesus had not died on the Cross, he would not have had many followers. But this is a man who is willing to go the whole nine yards. This is someone who is willing to give it all up — everything — suffer the betrayal of his followers, the condemnation of his own people and the most humiliating and cruel form of torture-execution designed by the Romans, who were masters of cruelty. And he tells me that he is doing it all for me.

Because Jesus died on the Cross, because he withstood horrible tortures and refused to recant or make excuses, I know that he meant everything that he said. His suffering proves his sincerity. And his wisdom proves his sanity. This was no lunatic with a death wish, but a wise, compassionate,

strong and capable man who gave it all up for the truth.

Only such a man will I trust with my immortal soul.

A savior who was not ashamed to be like me

The sacrifice of the crucifixion tells us something about God. The sincerity of it tells us something about Jesus. But what does it tell us about ourselves, and about our own suffering?

On the Cross, God the Son embraced suffering. He took it into himself. He bore what all human beings bear — pain, humiliation, death. Jesus did not consider these things to be beneath himself.

Jesus lived an entire human life, complete with all of the things that a human life includes, except for sin. We can miss the profoundness of this truth for how obvious it is: Everyone suffers.

God created this entire world, with suffering in it. He did not create evil, but he did not disdain from making even those creatures which he knew would experience evil. He creates human lives, fully knowing all of their joys and their sorrows, their successes, failures, deprivations, long lonely nights, heartbreaks. God looks at the entirety of a human life and, in his all-knowing decree, he says yes.

Jesus did not select some parts of our humanity, the pretty ones and the pleasant ones, to take to himself. He did not disdain any part of it, consider it unworthy of his dignity. He took it all. Thus, he testifies to the truth that human life is worth living, human life is fundamentally good, despite and even within suffering.

Even more: Jesus chose suffering. Even suffering itself then is not without value, without meaning. When I suffer, I am not experiencing the

absurd uncaringness of a cold universe. Nor am I experiencing simply something unfortunate, a mere flaw in the universe that God simply did not feel like fixing, something not meant to be.

No, even suffering has meaning, because Jesus embraced suffering. So I will embrace suffering, too. I will take on all that my human life has to offer me, not shrink from pain out of fear, not fly from humiliation because I have an inflated sense of how dignified I should be. I want to live it all. I want the world that God created. Wrinkles and all.

And Jesus shows me that suffering is part of the story, but not the end. He gave everything to God in an act of utter self-emptying. And yet God gave still more back to him, because of his love. God raised Jesus, today, not reversing his sacrifice but completing it: A man, fully alive, fully devoted, full of truth and of love, having given up his life for others, now becomes the fountain of life for all of them.

Evil does not have the last word. Suffering is more than evil: It is what the soul does when it confronts evil, wrestles with it in order to defeat it. And in the end, life wins. After all the suffering of Good Friday, the morning of Easter comes.

Why did Jesus need to undergo so much suffering? Because he is the way of self-sacrificing love. He is the truth of honest teaching. And he is the life that embraces suffering, and even overcomes it.



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America's Security Council Resolution Abstention a Message to Israel

Gary Grappo
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The US-Israel relationship continues to be special. The US understands Israeli security concerns about Hamas. However, Washington wants Jerusalem to temper its current campaign in Gaza and commit to a two-state solution to ensure the Jewish State has support in a potential conflict with Hezbollah and Iran. The Americans are trying to rein in the Israelis "for their own good."

Ever since US President Harry Truman made the decision to recognize the State of Israel in 1948, the two countries have had what both have called a "special relationship." It's important to note that the US deems other relationships "special" such as with the UK, Japan and even Saudi Arabia. In the case of the Gulf Kingdom, the reasons are very different from the others.

Over the decades — encompassing Israel's several wars with neighboring states, two Palestinian intifadas, incursions into Lebanon during its civil war, a major war with Hezbollah, and the existential threat posed by Iran — the US—

Israel relationship has become only closer. In the past, it included substantial flows of both economic and now substantial military aid, exports of America's most sophisticated weaponry, sharing of sensitive intelligence, unflinching support of the US Congress, and the nearly predictable US veto of any United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution undermining Israeli security or political standing.

The US broke with tradition on March 25 when it abstained from a UNSC vote calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all hostages held by Hamas — but importantly not linking the two as the US preferred. Nevertheless, under increasing pressure from the Democratic Party's political base for its heretofore staunch support of Israel in the war, the Biden administration finally felt it necessary to respond with the abstention.

There are two issues to bear in mind with this important but not unprecedented vote of the US. First, the action of the US administration was the least impactful of those it could have taken if it truly wished to change Israel's current course of action in the war. UNSC resolutions, though mandatory under the UN Charter, are unenforceable. Israel, Turkey and other countries have frequently ignored previous UNSC decisions without any consequences. So, the US abstention and the resolution itself are mostly symbolic.

Second, this was not the first time the US has abstained on a UNSC vote seen as critical of Israel. On no fewer than 55 occasions, the US has abstained on such votes, more under Republican administrations than Democrat, including Richard Nixon (15) and Ronald Reagan (21). Donald Trump had the fewest abstentions (none), followed by Barack Obama (1).

On the relationship, full steam ahead

The second point is the more relevant one. None of the US abstentions fundamentally changed the nature of the US–Israel special relationship. Most of them have been done to register American pique with a particular Israeli policy or political action at the time. Before departing office in early 2009, Obama's UN representative abstained on a UNSC vote critical of Israel's settlement expansion in the West Bank to make a point.

The abstention had no appreciable impact on the relationship, however. In fact, also prior to leaving office, the Obama administration negotiated the most generous long-term military assistance package for Israel in history, amounting to over \$3.8 billion per year for ten years. Israel's unchanged settlement policy remains a neuralgic issue in the relationship. Trump offered nearly a blank check to Israel in his administration, pronouncing settlements no longer illegal, recognizing Golan as part of Israel, moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and closing the US consulate in Jerusalem intended to serve the Palestinians.

US President Joe Biden has been extremely supportive of Israel and even called himself a "Zionist." So, Israel need not be overly concerned necessarily with the US abstention, though it needs to pay attention to the message behind it. Nor should Israel's enemies, whether Hamas, Hezbollah or Iran, necessarily rejoice over a seemingly microscopic victory at the UN. America has no intention of abandoning its friend. Not now ... and not ever.

Biden, Bibi and the big stakes on the global stage

The rift between Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, aka Bibi, is widely known. Recent conversations between the two have ended

up in obstinacy and rigidity on Bibi's part, abject frustration on Biden's, and bitter acrimony on the part of both. So, America's anger with Israel is partially attributable to the rapidly dissolving relationship between the two leaders.

Netanyahu's single-minded pursuit of the destruction of Hamas by leveling Gaza, with the border town of Rafah next up in the battle plan, was the administration's last straw. It had to act, if only symbolically, with a minimalist non-veto in the UN Security Council. More significantly, the abstention represents the end of the Biden administration's patience with and tolerance for Bibi. Expect the animosity between the two to worsen.

So, as on previous occasions, US pique, if not fury, is one clear reason for sheathing its veto sword.

But it is much more than US pique that is driving Biden's actions. There is the aforementioned growing dissension within Biden's own party, with which Bibi will have no sympathy. More important, however, for both countries, is the growing isolation of Israel, but also America, in the international community. The Global South (with few exceptions, India perhaps the biggest) has condemned Israel's military campaign in Gaza as akin to a war crime if not genocide. America, also a vociferous backer of Ukraine in its war against Russia's occupation of Crimea and eastern areas, is criticized for holding a double standard in the Palestinians' battle against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and its current military campaign in Gaza.

Even more biting, some of America's closest allies and Israel's staunchest supporters in the West have also criticized Israel publicly and the US more quietly for the two countries' policies and actions.

For the US, these aren't customary foreign government barbs that it can easily dismiss. This administration set out early on not only to shore up its traditional alliances, e.g., NATO, Japan and South Korea, but also to broker newer ones with nations of the Global South, e.g., India, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil. America's support for Israel in Gaza threatens to undo much of that. Israel has become a strategic liability for Biden's grand plans to preserve and advance liberalism and global prosperity in the face of the challenge of illiberalism and authoritarianism.

The irony is that the Biden administration actually gets it when it comes to Israel's security. They understand that Israel can never be secure as long as an incorrigibly hostile Hamas exists on its southern border. They have also made clear their support for the two-state solution, a ceasefire in Gaza and immediate release of all remaining Israeli hostages. It's Israel's tactics, not its longer-term objective, to which the US — and most of the rest of the world — objects. But Israel's tactics and resistance to even entertaining discussion of an eventual two states rile Biden and the rest of the world.

The bigger threat

Perhaps the biggest concern of the US administration is the grand battle to come — Israel versus Hezbollah and Iran. Biden's concern is that if Israel loses the support of the international community over Gaza, it will face enormous problems if war erupts between Israeli troops in North Israel and Hezbollah in South Lebanon. The Jewish state will need all the help it can get, and not just from the US.

Moreover, having effectively stood down in intervening on behalf of Hamas in the war in Gaza, Iran would feel strategically obliged to stand up for its most important ally, Hezbollah. If not, Iran's "axis of resistance" falls apart. War between Israel

and Hezbollah/Iran would be a full-on Middle East war. And though all the parties profess their preference for avoiding such a conflict, the tensions are stratospheric at the moment, and confrontations between Israeli and Hezbollah forces on and across Israel's northern border continue to escalate. One miscalculation by either side could easily explode into another major war, dwarfing what's occurred in Gaza.

The mood of the international community at the moment is decidedly — and unfairly, in the view of many in the US — against Israel. Those critical attitudes have not translated into support for Hamas, but they have placed Israel on the defensive in having to justify its war against an avowed terrorist organization bent on its destruction. The reasons for these critical and even hostile views toward Israel are many, the most prominent being its continuing occupation of the West Bank and (before the war) blockade of Gaza.

The US administration wants to overcome this with its proposal that Israel acknowledge the necessity of a two-state solution, thereby diffusing much of the animus now directed toward Israel. Failing this acknowledgment, were a war to break out against Hezbollah, these same critics and even some of Israel's friends might decide to sit on the sidelines. Neither Israel nor America can afford that scenario. In a war with Hezbollah and potentially Iran, Israel will need the world's support. A world hostile to Israel in such a case would be a gift to Hezbollah, Iran and every illiberal, authoritarian state.

America's extraordinary UNSC abstention undoubtedly has caused heartburn in Jerusalem. But the message for Israel is simple: The Israeli government must change its approach in Gaza and more generally toward the Palestinians to keep its friends in the event of a much bigger challenge in the future. Washington hopes that, over time, this message is received and embraced.



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