REFRAMING FINANCIAL LANDSCAPES
With warm thanks to the KCL Department of Political Economy
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Happy New Year!

This edition of Dialogue is about the reframing of financial landscapes. Since 2008, international finance has gone through times of tumult but has above all been marked by the restructuring of regulatory frameworks and institutional reforms. On a national scale, central banks are reformulating their relationships with private banks where on an international scale supranational bodies are experiencing a restructuring in their spheres of influence. Where the IMF and the World Bank as tokens of the Bretton Woods system led the financial world, new regionalized initiatives, particularly the Asian Development Bank, are redefining the financial institutional heavyweights. Some of these changing financial landscapes are extensively explored in the cover section of the magazine.

The debate section for this issue explores another highly relevant topic of the day: terrorism. Although there is no debate around the immense grief and despair after the recent Paris attacks, the grand question is how to respond on regional, national and international levels. Notably in the UK, the prevent strategy has been gaining traction. However, this strategy gives rise to opposing viewpoints. In short form, the prevent strategy aims to hinder radicalization of potential resident terrorists. However, in practice, the scheme instrumentally involves increased monitoring by the state on private lives which is invariably a deeply controversial topic.

Finally I would like to extend a warm thank you to my talented friend Dilruba Tayfun from Central Saint Martin’s for designing this issue’s cover.

Best wishes for 2016 and happy reading!

Naomi Roba
Editor-in-chief
From today’s vantage point the Bretton Woods Institutions appear to be permanent fixtures of the global economy, despite the rapidly shifting landscape of global economic governance. This is, perhaps, a surprising position for the International Monetary Fund (the Fund) and the World Bank (the Bank) to enjoy in 2015. Throughout their 71-year history both institutions, and especially the Fund, have been the target of repeated and severe challenges to their legitimacy. This has ranged from charges that they suffer from a serious democratic deficit, to claims that they serve as agents of neo-colonialism, to being blamed for policy mistakes that have impoverished the countries they are tasked with assisting. This chorus of global discontent, which sometimes grows stronger and sometimes weaker, is one of the few dependable features of both organisations’ histories.

In the late 1960s when the Fund formalized its ‘conditionality’ guidelines for the first time, this was driven by trenchant criticisms from developing countries that it had been operating a double standard. Rich countries like the UK had an easy ride when Britain borrowed from the Fund in 1967, while developing country borrowers at the time were expected to meet strict conditions. During the 1970s some developing countries responded to the volatility in the global economy caused by the breakdown of the Bretton Woods international monetary system, the 1973 ‘oil shocks’, and the policy vacuum as governments scrambled to resurrect new rules for a changing international monetary order to call for negotiations over a ‘New International Economic Order’ that might tilt the rules of the game more in favour of ‘the South’ rather than ‘the North’. In the 1990s, the ‘Fifty Years is Enough’ campaign called for a radical overhaul in how the Fund and the Bank operated when they celebrated their 50th Anniversary celebrations in 1994. A few short years later, many observers around the globe called time on the Fund following the Asian financial crisis in 1997-8. Critics ranging from mainstream to heterodox economists, politicians on both the Left and the Right of the partisan divide, and advocacy groups of all stripes argued that the Fund (and, to a lesser extent, the Bank) had to fundamentally change. Without a thorough transformation, critics contended, the Fund would face obscurity and irrelevance in a globalising world economy, especially one where the centre of gravity was fast shifting from ‘the West’ to ‘the East’ (or, at least, towards East Asia).

As recently as the summer of 2008 the Fund, in particular, appeared to be doomed to a slow decline. Many of its previous middle-income clients were now able to tap capital markets, commercial banks, and other sources of external finance rather than turning to the creaking machinery of the Fund, with its bothersome and heavy-handed ‘Washington consensus’ loan conditions. Powerful states such as the USA had set up rival institutions such as the Financial Stability Forum, which was established in 1999 and later reconfigured by the Group of Twenty into the Financial Stability Board in 2009. Even during the largest sovereign debt default in history by Argentina a few years earlier in 2001-02, when the Fund might be expected to be at its most powerful as a policy enforcer and crisis manager, it came across as surprisingly impotent in the face of stalling tactics used by the government, which played hardball to secure a far better deal from the Fund than observers’ had expected. To top it off, faced with
increasingly tight budget constraints of its own, the Fund was forced to announce at the end of 2007 that it would lay off 15 percent of its staff the following year. Those few borrowers still interested in the Fund’s assistance at this low point in its history were mostly ‘Heavily Indebted Poor Countries’. The end, if not of the Fund itself then at least of the era in which the organisation could dictate terms and structural reforms across its developing country members, seemed nigh.

Only seven years since the collapse of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. sent global financial markets further into a tailspin and contributed to the onset of the Great Recession, it is easy to view the Global Financial Crisis as a case of the International Monetary Fund being ‘saved by the bell’. Following a thirty-year period in which no Western country borrowed from the Fund after the UK in 1976 and Italy in 1977, a US$2 billion loan for Iceland in November 2008 was followed over the next two years by new loans for nearly twenty countries totalling some US $163 billion, in addition to sizeable precautionary loan arrangements to the tune of US$50 billion for Mexico, US $21.5 billion for Poland, and US$11 billion for Colombia. The onset of the Eurozone debt crisis subsequently saw the organisation lend over €100 billion to Eurozone members as part of rescue packages coordinated by the ‘Troika’ of the Fund, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission. Because of the crisis the Fund was back in business; talk of its creeping irrelevance was forgotten, for the moment.

And yet larger questions about the Fund’s role in a changing global order remain unanswered. Can the Fund continue to gradually pivot by degrees towards granting China and other rising economic powers a larger say in its governance and decision-making? Can these reforms in representation and procedure take place without corresponding shifts in the Fund’s organisational culture, policy paradigm, and everyday practices? At what point will the fact that the US on its own can stall the Fund’s formal attempts to adapt to a changing global order, as it has effectively done by not yet ratifying flagship governance reforms agreed in 2010, shift the calculation in favour of creating new global institutions rather than reforming existing ones? Perhaps this point has already passed. Many would argue that China’s initiative to establish an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as well as the New Development Bank set up through the BRICS Summit process between Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa means that the writing is already on the wall for both of the Bretton Woods Institutions. There are at least three reasons why this view might be wrong.

First, the legacy of the past plays a critical role in shaping the evolution of global economic governance. Large and powerful international organisations are ‘sticky’: they are hard to reform, but they may be even harder to abolish or replace. The fact that rising economic powers are pushing for greater ‘voice’ within the Fund and the Bank suggests they will remain important vehicles for international policy coordination, crisis management, and multilateral cooperation. Indeed, unless they are faced with a general consensus that they have failed in some unredeemable fashion on a catastrophic scale, such as the failure by the League of Nations to prevent growing international aggression during the 1930s, there is a strong status quo bias in favour in reforming international organisations rather than designing new ones from scratch. In large part, this is because of the heightened uncertainty that would be created by negotiations over new forms of global economic governance. Uncertainty is generally bad for business on Wall Street, Downing Street, and also ‘Main Street’.

Second, both the Fund and the Bank remain extremely useful institutions for powerful governments and other transnational actors who have a strong interest in the continuation of their global roles. For example, while the hegemonic leadership of the United States is in serious decline, the US remains an extremely powerful influence in the world and US policymakers have a strong interest in maintaining the multilateral system of international governance the country played such an important role in constructing after World War Two. At the precise moment when the future of the Fund may have been in the greatest jeopardy in the years since the Asian financial crisis, and against the backdrop of renewed calls for ‘a new Bretton Woods’, the London Group of Twenty Leaders’ Summit in April 2009 chose to triple the Fund’s lending resources and to reinforce the Fund’s centrality as an international crisis manager (albeit one that coordinates, cajoles, and persuades rather than leads).

Consider a brief counterfactual scenario. Imagine if European policymakers had the foresight to create a cashed-up European Stability Mechanism before the crisis, during the economic good times of the 2000s. The smart money would still be on the Fund’s assistance being called upon when the crisis hit because of its potential to serve as an external commitment mechanism and as a rule-based arbiter between disputing parties. The Fund would still have been necessary to give political cover to European bureaucrats, not to mention German and French politicians, who wanted an institutional shield to hide behind when they were accused of playing politics with the future of the Euro by promoting European austerity rather than solidarity and bringing Greece to its knees.
Third, on a more theoretical note: interests don’t trump values, values shape and inform interests. So long as the governments of European and North American countries continue to share broadly similar economic values and preferences about how the structure of global economic governance should be organised, and to what purposes it should be directed, there will continue to be a strong coalition of interests in support of both of the Bretton Woods Institutions. Questions such as who pays the bill for global economic governance and how the costs and benefits are distributed across different countries and regions are fundamental, and are becoming more urgent as the economic clout of new major powers increases. But these material pressures may not prove to be decisive if countries’ longstanding values orient governments towards prioritising other goals, such as protecting the principle of an open multilateral economic system, the promotion of free markets as engines of growth and prosperity, and the assumption, however myopic, that liberal capitalism can breed liberal democracy.

For these three main reasons – the alignment in values between most Western governments and the Bretton Woods Institutions, the roles the institutions play in larger power structures, and the status quo bias towards reform rather than abolition – the Bretton Woods Institutions are likely to not only endure but to continue to play major roles in global economic governance for the foreseeable future. To have some ‘skin in the game’, a concrete prediction is called for in a commentary that assesses changes in the global order. The great science fiction author Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) once wrote in an essay entitled ‘A Few Rules for Predicting the Future’ that her books were based on looking at the problems that were being neglected now and imagining the world in 30 years’ time, when these problems had developed into disasters. She also wrote in the same essay that you should always ‘count on the surprises’. In 2044 when the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank would be facing their centenary, the global economy will no doubt look very different to the one we have today, just as the global economy in 2015 looks starkly different to that of 1986 (when Japan’s economic strength was predicted to soon overtake that of the USA).

My prediction is that the Fund and the Bank will look very different by 2044 but they will continue to exist and to play important roles shaping global economic governance. So is it to be Bretton Woods forever? Certainly not. Major war on the same scale as the World Wars of the twentieth century, or a repeat of the 1930s Great Depression or another Global Financial Crisis, especially if such tragic events occurred in close proximity to each other, would probably spell the end of the Bretton Woods legacy. A new Cold War may produce a similar effect. Indeed, economic challenges may very well have transformed into environmental disasters by the middle of the century, consigning the contemporary roles of the Fund and the Bank to the dustbin of history. Those would not be changes for the better, but we can always count on the surprises.

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**How the World Bank is Still Bankrolling Tyranny**

by James Bovard

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were founded in 1944, a time when much of the western world was in ruins. In the following years, aid from the Bank and the IMF helped numerous European nations begin to return to normalcy. In that early period, the Bank and the Fund did a fairly effective job of serving a limited function at a time when international capital markets were still in their relative infancy.

The IMF aimed to shore up currencies and help nations with temporary balance-of-payment problems. During the 1950s, when many nations experienced a severe of U.S. dollars, IMF relief sometimes smoothed temporary crises. But in subsequent decades, global capital markets and fluctuating currency exchange rates should have made the IMF a relic. Instead, the IMF remains a heavyweight player.
From the World Bank’s creation until the late 1960s, the Bank was a relatively conservative institution that primarily funded infrastructure and other basics. In 1968, former Pentagon chief Robert McNamara became Bank President and dedicated the Bank to continually rising loan levels. Between 1968 and 1981, when McNamara resigned, the Bank loan levels increased twelve fold, from $883 million to $12 billion, and have continued soaring since McNamara’s time.

The World Bank is helping Third World governments cripple their economies, maul their environments, and oppress their people. Though the Bank was started with the highest ideals 70 years ago, the Bank now consistently does more harm than good for the world’s poorest. The Bank now exists largely to maximize the transfer of resources to Third World governments. And, by doing this, the Bank has greatly increased political and bureaucratic control over the lives of the poorest of the poor.

The World Bank has a long and dismal record of getting involved in human rights atrocities. Despite the Bank’s moral self-righteousness, the Bank often shows little or no concern for the welfare of poor citizens. When McNamara took over and began boosting lending in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bank’s standards for its loan nosedived. McNamara's favorite foreign leader was Julius Nyerere, ruler of Tanzania. Tanzania has received more Bank aid per capita than any other country. And the Bank's unconditional support of the dictatorial regime of Julius Nyerere is a major cause of Tanzanian people's current misery.

In the early 1970s, with Bank aid and advice, Nyerere implemented his ujamaa, or villagization program. Nyerere sent the Tanzanian army to drive the peasants off their land, burn down their huts, load them onto trucks, and take them where government thought they should live - where they were ordered to build themselves new homes "in neat rows staked out for them by government officials." Nyerere wanted to curb the people’s individualistic and capitalistic tendencies and make them easier to control. He even outlawed people sleeping in their own gardens at night - which meant monkeys were free to help themselves. In many cases, the new government villages were far away from the farmers’ lands, so the farmers imply quit tilling the land.

The Bank helped finance brutal policies of the government of Vietnam in the late 1970s that contributed to tens of thousands of boat people dying in the South China Sea. After North Vietnam invaded and conquered South Vietnam, there was widespread dissent in the south against the new government’s forced collectivization policy. In August 1978, the Bank loaned $60 million to the government of Vietnam - even after widely circulated reports in the West of massive concentration camps and brutal repression. The Bank announced the loan would finance "an irrigation project that will boost rice production." But, a confidential Bank report admitted, "The main effort to deal with the employment problem (in the south) consists of the creation of New Economic Zones - agricultural settlements that are intended to resettle 4 or 5 million people by the end of 1980."

The Bank loaned the government of Indonesia over $600 million to remove - sometimes forcibly several million people from the densely populated island of Java and resettle them on comparatively barren islands in Indonesia. Despite widespread reports of violence, the Bank continues lauding the project as "the largest voluntary migration" in recent history. The Indonesian government simultaneously resettled Javanese on the island of East Timor - which the army seized in 1975. The army's butcheries and forced starvation policies killed an estimated 150,000 of the island's 600,000 inhabitants.

The World Bank provided massive assistance to the Ethiopian Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam. In the midst of the 1984-85 famine, when starvation reportedly threatened 7 million Ethiopians, the government launched a massive "resettlement" program to deport hundreds of thousands of people in the north of the country and forcibly move them to the south. According to Doctors Without Borders, a French medical assistance group, the resettlement program may have killed more people than the famine itself. The Economist cited Ethiopia in 1986 for the worst human rights record in the world. Yet, the Bank kept open its money-spigots for the oppressive regime. Bank commitments to Ethiopia in 1985 equaled roughly 16% of the government's budget. A May, 1987 $39 million handout went for "Ministry of Agriculture institutional development", among other things, even though the Agriculture Ministry was heavily involved in the brutal villagization program (The Bank continues to finance violent, oppressive resettlement programs in Ethiopia, as evinced by the 2012 Human Rights Report, “Waiting Here for Death: Displacement and ‘Villagization’ in Ethiopia’s Gambella Region”).

Throughout India, South America, and elsewhere, the Bank has created thousands of "development refugees," as
Environmental Defense Fund attorney Bruce Rich called them. In India, at a Bank-financed project at Singrauli, "200,000 to 300,000 of the rural poor have been subject to forced relocation twice, three times, in some cases four or five times in 25 years, each time with little or no compensation. Their livelihood was the land, which has now been totally destroyed and resembles scenes out of the lower circles of Dante’s Inferno," Rich testified in 1987 to a U.S. congressional committee. The same violations of the rights of citizens forcibly resettled often occurred in Brazil.

The World Bank provided over $10 billion to East European communist governments between 1960 and 1989. World Bank president Barber Conable defended the Bank's efforts to help communist countries, declaring in 1988, "The World Bank has been instrumental in encouraging [communist governments] to decentralize and liberalize their economies and introduce market incentives..." But, a confidential major review by the Bank's Europe, North Africa, and Middle East Division in November 1986, examined Bank loans to Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia and concluded, "The major problem has been the unwillingness of these countries to allow Bank involvement in policy issues. Projects have been prepared to meet Five-Year Plan objections which could not be questioned or analyzed by the Bank." World Bank money simply went gone to finance the already-established priorities of the communist governments.

In its support of the East Bloc, the Bank openly embraced some of the most dictatorial policies seen in Europe since the fall of Hitler. A 1979 World Bank report, the "Importance of Centralized Economic Control," praised the Romanian regime for pursuing "policies to make better use of the population as a factor of production" by "stimulating an increase in birth rates."

And how did the Romanian government do this? By prohibiting distribution of contraceptives and banning abortions. Because the plan called for higher birth rates, every female forfeited the right to control her body or life. Romanian president Nicolae Ceausescu proclaimed in 1985: "The fetus is the socialist property of the whole society... Those who refuse to have children are deserters." The government forced all women between the age of 18 and 40 to have a monthly gynecological exam to assure that no one robbed the State by having a secret abortion.

Has the World Bank’s human rights record improved since then? Not according to the September 2015 report of the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. That report concluded: "the existing approach taken by the Bank to human rights is incoherent, counterproductive and unsustainable. For most purposes, the World Bank is a human rights-free zone. In its operational policies, in particular, it treats human rights more like an infectious disease than universal values and obligations. The biggest single obstacle to moving towards an appropriate approach is the anachronistic and inconsistent interpretation of the “political prohibition” contained in its Articles of Agreement.”

Despite a profusion of human rights rhetoric in recent years, the Special Rapporteur derided the actual practice of the World Bank:

(a) Pay lip service to human rights in official settings, as long as there are no consequences;  (b) Acknowledge the theoretical significance of human rights in studies and analyses of issues in relation to which they are incontestably relevant;
(c) Ensure that, as a general rule, the Bank does not engage with any aspect of human rights in its actual operations and lending; and
(d) Be prepared to make exceptions when political imperatives require it, even if that involves a high degree of inconsistency.

The Bank actively blindfolds itself to avoid seeing atrocities in nations ruled by governments that it is bankrolling. The Special Rapporteur noted, “By refusing to take account of any information emanating from human rights sources, the Bank places itself in an artificial bubble, which excludes information that could greatly enrich its understanding of the situations and contexts in which it works.... It is striking that the Bank regularly consults religious leaders, such as the faith-based and religious leaders’ round table it held in 2015, but has no comparable meetings with human rights experts.” Presumably, the religious leaders have more political pull than human rights lawyers.

The U.N. report declared that the World Bank “now stands almost alone, along with the International Monetary Fund, in insisting that human rights are matters of politics which it must, as a matter of legal principle, avoid, rather than being an integral part of the international legal order.” The Bank justifies this position by insisting that it cannot involve “itself in the partisan politics or ideological disputes that affect its member countries” by improper methods such as “favoring political factions, parties or candidates in elections” or “endorsing or mandating a particular form of government, political bloc or political ideology.”

But this is the core absurdity behind which the Bank hides. Any time an international organization provides massive capital to a regime, it bolsters the power of the established rulers. For politicians, money is power. The government
can use the money to buy influence, buy off opponents, or otherwise quell discontent. After the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, the Pentagon coined a term that perfectly captures the effect of foreign aid: “Money as a Weapon System.” The fact that some World Bank loans may be put to productive uses does not change the reality that the cash infusion enables rulers to shore up or extend their sway.

This is especially unfortunate since so many nations are ruled by kleptocracies - governments of thieves. There is a heavy overlap between the lists of the world’s most corrupt nations compiled by Transparency International and the list of World Bank aid recipients.

The World Bank has long been aware that it is financing despots who tyrannize their people but the Bank’s own incentives have made it incorrigible. As a 1992 World Bank report admitted, the Bank is driven “to push money out the door.” If the Bank admitted how many of its borrowers were repressive or hopelessly inept, its loan levels would collapse. And the Bank’s sinecures are far too comfortable for its employees to permit that to happen.

Has the Bank helped the Third World? Some countries have benefited but most of the long-term aid recipients have only ended up with heavy debt loads, swollen public sectors, and overvalued exchange rates. Instead of spurring reform, most aid in the past has simply allowed governments to perpetuate their mistakes. If the Bank has not straightened out Third World economic policies after disbursing over a hundred billion dollars in aid, what chance is there that more Bank lending will correct the problems in the future?

A 1993 World Bank report noted that foreign investment was sharply increasing in the Third world. But, the report warned that many foreign governments have reputations that are too shady to win investors’ confidence: "The risks of doing business are much increased in countries where the rules of the game are unclear or where the state does not ensure that private contracts are enforced and where the judiciary system does not function well... Inadequate administration of justice, deficient property rights, frequent political interference in private business, corruption and excessive red tape are among the most serious obstacles to private investment." If foreign governments are too untrustworthy for investors to risk their capital, then how likely is it that the same governments are trustworthy enough to productively use handouts they receive from the World Bank? The only thing that the Bank can do now that private lenders cannot or will not do is provide money on easy terms to uncreditworthy borrowers. Giving countries money that is badly used is worse than not giving them any money at all. Empowering corrupt and inept politicians to rule over their people has nothing to do with real development.

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China and the International Financial System: The Case of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
by Dr. Kerry Brown

As the economy of the People’s Republic of China has grown in recent years, supplanting that of Japan in 2010 to become the world’s second largest, so has evidence mounted of its key political and economic decision makers feeling that it needs a role on the global financial system in terms of governance and setting parameters and rules more commensurate with its new economic prominence. These were accentuated by the impact of the Global Financial Crisis from 2008, and the subsequent Eurozone crisis. They have culminated in China initiating in 2014, for the first time, its own multilateral financial institution, despite criticism and opposition, at least initially, from the US. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) might seem to mark a highly symbolic moment therefore, one in which China in deed as well as word bids adieu to the post-World War Two Bretton Woods international agreement. The AIIB allows the world a little more insight into the question of whether, in the context of its economic prominence now and its divergent interests with the US-centred consensus till now, it will remain a rule breaker or a rules keeper.

Context
Few would dispute that China has been a beneficiary of a global, rules based trade and finance system, and that this in no small part is due to the Bretton Woods structure. China engaged with the World Bank from the 1980s, during the early era of its reform. It negotiated for fourteen years in
order to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001. It also contributed significantly to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the global economic crisis over 2008 (see below for details of this). It has been willing to engage with each of these entities, and on the whole each has brought it benefits. The World Bank was involved in many of China’s initial infrastructure projects and with the Opening Up the West policy from 1999. Entry to the WTO saw an explosion of productivity in the Chinese economy, and despite initial misgivings, was evidently an event which China managed to gain from. Even the IMF has proved to be a source of stability particularly over its role in China’s immediate region, despite the contentiousness of some of its actions.

Despite this, Chinese policy makers, academics and think tanks have increasingly raised concerns over the lack of parity between China’s economic size after several decades of economic liberalisation and GDP growth, and its role in the governance of these entities, and in the global economic system generally. China’s stabilising role over 2008 into 2009 has given it added confidence. It is aware of the importance of its domestic market and the growth potential therein, and while it does not appear to fit the mould of a ‘rules breaker’ because it clearly sees the benefits of having a stable, predictable environment around it as it undergoes complex internal reforms, it does want to have more of a say in how those rules are made and then implemented.

The Case of the International Monetary Fund

The IMF is a particular example of the constellation of issues that China finds objectionable in the current global Bretton Wood order. The IMF left a residue to distrust and resentment over its involvement in the response to the Asian Economic Crisis in 1998. The image of the IMF then director standing imperiously over the Indonesian president while signing a draconian bailout deal had a major impact in the region, and particularly in China for whom control over domestic levers of fiscal decision making is an extension of hard won sovereignty. For a country under a Communist Party holding a monopoly on power which has built a narrative in which it has been saved since the founding of the PRC in 1949 from a history of humiliation and victimhood by outside powers, the idea of a multilateral but largely US dominated (at least in Chinese eyes) entity having real decision making powers within China, or about Chinese issues, is potentially toxic.

The bigger issue with the IMF is that its voting rights give tangible measure to this imbalance in views towards China. At the time of the 2008 crisis, China had a mere 3 per cent of voting rights. In 2010, it was agreed that this would rise to 3.81. But this stood against 16.75 per cent for the US, and 6.23 per cent for Japan. During the 2009 G20 Summit held in London, at which responses to the global economic crisis were discussed, one of the key areas was the involvement of the IMF in any debt relief. China contributed to the fund eventually set up. Even so, the Governor of the Central Bank of China, Zhou Xiaochuan, in a statement issued on the bank’s website in March 2009 just before the G20 summit, argued for a global reserve currency that was not the US Dollar. Expressing dissatisfaction about the current order, he stated that ‘The outbreak of the current crisis and its spillover in the world have confronted us with a long-existing but still unanswered question, i.e., what kind of international reserve currency do we need to secure global financial stability and facilitate world economic growth, which was one of the purposes for establishing the IMF?’ He continued: ‘The crisis again calls for creative reform of the existing international monetary system towards an international reserve currency with a stable value, rule-based issuance and manageable supply, so as to achieve the objective of safeguarding global economic and financial stability.’
Voting rights for the IMF were also reflected in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) where Japan and the US had 13 per cent each, and China just under 6. In this context, the search for more economic space for China naturally included the desire to have a stronger voice and more representation on these bodies. But if already extant entities were unable to cede more space, than Chinese policy makers were able to take an alternative route, and with the size of their economy and the diplomatic cloud it now gives them, create their own.

**The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**

This is precisely what they did when the concept of an AIIB was announced in 2014. This has to be seen within the domestic and international context of the Xi Jinping leadership, in place since 2012. Domestically, this leadership is committed to the delivery of doubling GDP from 2010 to 2020. But it is also concentrating on what have been called by Xi and others in the leadership around him since 2014 the Centennial Goals, the first of which is achievement of middle income status by 2021, and the second the perfecting of Chinese modernity and full developed status by 2049, marking the hundred years of the foundation of the Communist Party and the People’s Republic respectively.

Such grand visionary narratives are part of the tone of the Xi era. They run alongside suitably bold external visions, such as what was initially called the New Silk Road embracing over 65 countries through Central Asia, into South and South East Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and attempting to create a common trading zone largely focussed on China.

To foster sustainable economic development, create wealth and improve infrastructure connectivity in Asia by investing in infrastructure and other productive sectors; and to promote regional cooperation and partnership in addressing development challenges by working in close collaboration with other multilateral and bilateral development institutions.”

As with the ‘One Belt, One Road’, the creation of the AIIB as characterised by a lack of clarity and considerable suspicion, not least by the US which expressed concerns about lack of governance and transparency. These concerns became clearer when the UK in March 2015 announced, unilaterally, that it was applying to join the organisation. Reports in the Financial Times spoke of US officials declaring Britain, a key ally, was kowtowing to China and in a process of constant accommodation. Despite this, plenty of others, including the influential commentator Martin Wolf, saw that the benefits of UK membership of this body were strong, and it was better to be on the inside helping it develop and grow, rather than sitting powerlessly outside and having no real voice.

By the middle of 2015, the bank had 57 founding members, among them Germany, Australia (who had initially refused to join in 2014, but then relented and signed up a year later), India, Indonesia, countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and Latin America. Strikingly, there was no representation from Africa. While South Korea was a member, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) despite applying, was not. Nor was Taiwan, who had also applied to join. The US and Japan did not apply to join in the first place.

Such a huge collection of countries was a striking testament to the pulling power of China and the keenness to engage in its economy. Even so, with a start up capital of USD200 billion, the impact of the bank was not likely to be significant beyond its symbolic importance, at least in the initial stages. Its focus on infrastructure was sensible enough, in view of the immense needs in the region over the coming years as economies like China’s but also Indonesia, India, and others looked to either develop or upgrade major infrastructure facilities. In the Bank’s formal Articles of Agreement, its purpose was uncontroversial enough:

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Such a huge collection of countries was a striking testament to the pulling power of China and the keenness to engage in its economy. Even so, with a start up capital of USD200 billion, the impact of the bank was not likely to be significant beyond its symbolic importance, at least in the initial stages. Its focus on infrastructure was sensible enough, in view of the immense needs in the region over the coming years as economies like China’s but also Indonesia, India, and others looked to either develop or upgrade major infrastructure facilities. In the Bank’s formal Articles of Agreement, its purpose was uncontroversial enough:

“Such grand visionary narratives are part of the tone of the Xi era. They run alongside suitably bold external visions, such as what was initially called the New Silk Road embracing over 65 countries through Central Asia, into South and South East Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and attempting to create a common trading zone largely focussed on China.”

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to go to the fitness center as an institution, which means to makes sure that we have no redundant positions.’ Such a comment has to be seen as a sideswipe at the often bureaucratic impression given by the IMF.

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IIB and China’s Challenges.
Despite the drama and excitement of the AIIB marking a moment when China now stakes more space for itself in the international global financial system, many questions remain. The AIIB as of November 2015 has yet to make any loans. And while China has the bulk of the voting rights, it has to work for the first time in a leadership role with 56 other very different, diverse and often discordant partners. For the first time, too, it is not able to take up the comfortable position of a critic, sitting in a subordinate position and speaking from the sidelines, but has to stand out in front, exposing its position in key issues much more than before. For a country that has historically been loath to do this on international issues, be they diplomatic or economic, this will bring important challenges.

There is no doubt that in terms of knowledge of how to develop an economy, build infrastructure, and plan major projects, China has much to offer. Its government has allowed the space for many hundreds of millions of Chinese to economically flourish in the last few decades. China also has the capital, through its large foreign currency reserves, to contribute to the development of its own region, Finally, it has the self interest, as it is contributing to markets and economies that will be destinations for its exports, or sources for its resources and commodities.

Even so, the Chinese state-centred development model has many unique aspects, not least its high level of centralisation. Chinese state enterprises with their strong links to the ruling Communist Party, in terms of size and political support, are markedly different as economic actors than enterprises elsewhere in Asia, where government controls even over state enterprises are less rigid. For this reason, it is likely that the AIIB will be a two way learning process, rather than an example of China being able to operate by edict. Its own behaviour is likely to be modified by some of the frustrations and challenges of trying to operate in partnership with other economies in a way it has never been in a position to do so before.

A New Chinese World Order?
If we return to the question of whether China is a rule breaker or a rule keeper, a status quo power in terms of the global economic system, or a destabiliser, we get an inevitably more complex answer. China certainly continues to buy into the predictability and the benefits that global rules bring. Its economy in terms of trade flows is very open. In terms of capital flows, it is likely to become more open as the years pass, and will therefore continue to need the predictability and stability that entities associated with the post Bretton Woods system bring. But it will also increasingly want to stake out its own legitimate space, as the AIIB shows. It will want more of a role for its own currency, and more space ceded to it in particular by the US to be a more unilateral actor.

Under this scenario, again as the AIIB shows, the world is likely to see a more hybrid future. Co dependency means that it will never be in China’s interests to subvert the global order too rudely, at least as long as it faces the huge challenges of its own internal rebalancing and development. But in specific areas, it will want to see a greater role for itself, and more strategic space. The issue in this context therefore for other countries is not how to close that space down for China, but how to use it in ways that can influence China, and develop a new kind of relationship with it which is more balanced and sustainable. That is the story that is unfolding at the moment.

Dr. KERRY BROWN is a professor of Chinese studies and the Director of the Lau China Institute at King’s College London. He was previously head of the Asia programme at Chatham House, and was head of the Europe China Research and Advice Network (ECRAN) from 2011-2014.
The recent terror attacks in Paris have, tragically, once again reinforced the importance of preventive measures to counter terrorism. Omar Ismaïl Mostefai, one of the attackers, was flagged as at risk of radicalisation in 2010 by French authorities. However, no attempts were made to engage him in a de-radicalisation programme. He travelled to Syria in autumn 2013 and returned to France without any known attempt of intervention by the relevant social services or the police.

In contrast to France, Britain has a complex set of mechanisms in place to identify and engage with individuals at risk of radicalisation. Since the London bombings in 2005, Britain has become a global pioneer of counter-extremism initiatives. It has developed a counter-extremism strategy called Prevent and implemented a comprehensive set of preventative measures, from awareness-raising campaigns and training to the multi-agency referral programme Channel. As expected with entering previously unchartered territory, the strategy has been controversial. It has been accused of stigmatising Muslim communities as well as funding the very Islamist organisations it should counteract.

In October 2015 the most recent counter-extremism strategy was published by the Home Office. It does not demonstrate a major departure from the aims outlined in the 2011 Prevent Review, but it does introduce a set of new regulations to enforce the latter more rigorously, for example through the new Statutory Prevent Duty.

The new counter-extremism strategy is focusing on the right areas: extremist ideologies, the role of the online sphere, the importance of educational institutions and non-violent extremists. However, the implementation of the strategy is unclear, partially inefficient, and even counter-productive.

**Tackling the ideology**

Over the past years, the government has increasingly and rightly acknowledged the importance of countering extremist ideologies. Whether it is right-wing Nazism or Islamist extremism, their respective ideologies play a key role in recruiting and retaining their followers. Social and political grievances such as discrimination, lack of belonging, and uneven opportunities often set the preconditions for radicalisation. They can make individuals susceptible to exploitation by extremist groups. However, extremist ideology is often the main vehicle used by recruiters, taking the radicalisation process to the next level. Ideologies frame the individual’s grievances in a distinctive way, attributing a specific meaning to events to create a persuasive narrative, most prominently an ‘Us vs. Them’ mind-set. The persuasive power of extremist ideologies is evident in Da’esh’s propaganda. Its targeted ideology, which combines narratives of brutality, war and utopianism with a sense of victimhood and belonging, has convinced thousands of Europeans to join the group.

“The government’s work to counter extremist ideologies has been focused on restrictive measures: banning hate preachers and extremist groups while taking down extremist material online.”

The government’s work to counter extremist ideologies has been focused on restrictive measures: banning hate preachers and extremist groups while taking down extremist material online.

However, banning certain extremist groups has proven to be inefficient, as the example of Al-Muhajiroun demonstrates. The group was banned in 2010 but circumvented the law by adopting pseudonyms like Islam4UK and continues to exist, making the government’s actions appear weak.

Online, the sheer volume of extremist content is overwhelming social media platforms and the police. While the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit removes around 46,000 items of extremist content online annually, it is not enough to counter the sheer scale of online extremist activity. Additionally, extremists are not discouraged if their material is deleted. Having one’s content and profiles taken down from websites is regarded as an achievement, providing further motivation for dissemination.

Instead of attempting to remove or ban content, targeted counter-narrative campaigns can challenge extremist ideologies and reduce their appeal to the target audience. The counter-narrative initiative ‘Abdullah X’ is one example. It challenges the ideology of Islamist groups such
as Da’esh by directly responding to and questioning their barbaric actions, ideological justifications and divisive narratives. It uses different platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and comics to reach young people at risk of radicalisation, exposing them to different views and arguments.

The new counter-extremism strategy recognises the importance of contesting the online space by empowering civil society to challenge extremism online and to develop an alternative narrative. However, it does not provide sufficient details on how it plans to achieve this. The government needs to facilitate effective models that bring together civil society networks of ‘credible voices’ and connect them with private companies – social media, tech, digital marketing. The strategy needs to focus on more innovative funding models that allow civil society organisations to plan over a longer period of time, enabling them to create more effective counter narrative operations, instead of providing short-term funding. Moreover, while government funding is important, overt government support often undermines the credibility of campaigns due to the suspicion of the government, especially among the prime target audience: teenagers and young adults. For such initiatives to be effective it is crucial to have a credible messenger who is respected and trusted by the target audience. Government support should therefore be used only to indirectly facilitate counter-narrative initiatives, such as through capacity building measures for credible messengers.

**Responding to extremism**

Schools and universities have always been central to the UK’s counter-extremism approach, but a new statutory duty on schools and other public services has dramatically shifted the landscape of counter-extremism in the education sector.

The new statutory Prevent duty came into effect in July 2015. It requires schools, universities, prisons, NHS trusts, and local authorities “to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”, and to refer cases of concern to the relevant authorities.

Clearly, universities and schools have a duty of care and should be aware of potential signs of radicalisation in the same way they should be aware of signs relating to mental health issues, sexual abuse, or drugs. However, identifying and responding to signs of extremism involves many aspects, not least comprehensive knowledge about political, sociological, and theological issues. Such skills are not attainable through a few online guidance documents and hour-long Prevent Awareness training sessions. The limitations of the government’s training are evident by the number of premature referrals. Only 20% of individuals referred to the Channel programme are assessed as being at risk of radicalisation. This situation has been aggravated by the statutory Prevent duty.

Between June and August alone 796 individuals – of which 40% were under 18 – were referred to Channel. This is a noticeable increase, considering that 2,000 individuals in total were referred to the programme between April 2012 and December 2014. Some examples of this, which critics of Prevent are quick to point to, include a Muslim boy who was recently referred because he held pro-Palestinian views, advocating for the boycott of Israeli products and sanctions. Another case concerned a Muslim boy who was referred to Channel because he asked how a bomb was built after a class on nuclear fission. Whether these were in fact overreactions, of course, depend on an analysis of the specific cases. But overzealous reporting – particularly by teachers – in this space risks causing grievances for the individual involved as well as harming community relations if certain groups are stigmatised. Furthermore, teachers have reported that new governmental regulations have made pupils more cautious about what they say in class for fear of being referred, damaging student-teacher relations and stifling the children’s education.

**Taking on non-violent extremists**

As part of its counter-ideology campaign, the government has also been determined to counter non-violent extremists since the 2010 election. After the engagement with and funding of non-violent extremists, who held very questionable views and had links to violent extremist groups, this was a welcome change. However, the government’s recent rhetoric on British values and its focus on entryism leave too much room for interpretation, endangering freedom of speech.

To counter non-violent extremism, the strategy defines extremism as the “vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values”. While the definition refers to concepts like democracy and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths, the government has failed to consult the public on what they regard as British values. The vague and subjective character of the definition also risks the criminalisation of dissent and stigmatisation of certain communities.

The language of shared values was introduced by the 2009 version of Prevent and the 2011 Prevent Review. They linked extremism to identity, arguing that “terrorism is caused by a failure to fully belong in British society”. However, the explanation of terrorism through identity is problematic because it “makes everyone who shares the ‘failed’ identity a potential threat”. The impact of this rhetoric has been
evident in the stigmatisation of Muslim communities as prone to radicalisation and terrorism by politicians, the media and the British public, with attacks of anti-Muslim hatred on the rise. This risks causing further grievances among already alienated British Muslims, which continue to be primarily treated as a suspect community instead of a vital partner in the fight against extremism.

The government has used its definition of extremism to ban dangerous extremist groups in Britain and prevent hate preachers from entering the country. However, with the increasing pressure on schools and other educational establishments to promote British values and counter extremism, the risk of infringing on freedom of speech remains worryingly high in light of such a broad definition. This is evidenced by the government’s proposed ‘crackdown’ on entryism.

The Trojan Horse Scandal

Since the Trojan Horse scandal in schools in Birmingham and the revelation that British universities have hosted radical speakers at over 70 events in 2014, the government is determined to monitor schools and universities to prevent them from being taken advantage of by extremists.

It is important to ensure that extremist speakers do not go unchallenged in public institutions, and that school governors do not abuse their position of influence to disseminate intolerant views and practices. Nevertheless, the Trojan Horse scandal has been exaggerated, triggering an overreaction to prevent entryism, overburdening teachers and infringing upon freedom of speech.

The Trojan Horse scandal exposed the attempt of Islamist groups to install governors at certain schools in Birmingham to promote a narrow faith-based ideology. Despite the accuracy of these allegations, the investigation which followed was highly controversial. Investigated schools previously rated as “outstanding” were ranked as “failing” within a year. Peter Clarke, the former national head of counter-terrorism, was appointed to head the investigation, sending a fatal message to communities in Birmingham and beyond. While the media reported on an Islamist plot to take over British schools, Clarke’s report did not find any evidence of extremism in the investigated schools. Additionally, the House of Commons Education Select Committee concluded in its report that the incident was more concerned with school governance and communication than extremism.

Nevertheless, recent measures to counter entryism in schools and universities are profoundly influenced by this ‘high profile’ case, affecting institutions nationally. Following the incident, Ofsted inspectors are now assessing schools on how well they promote British values, and appointments and profiles of school governors will be closely monitored in the future. Clarke’s report is extensively referenced and cited in the new counter-extremism strategy, and is used to justify a comprehensive review of safeguarding mechanisms in place at public institutions to prevent the risk of entryism. This review will likely trigger more regulations and guidelines for the already overwhelmed teaching and support staff.

Next to the statutory Prevent duty affecting universities, the Higher Education Funding Council was appointed to monitor how well universities counter extremism and student bodies like the NUS are advised to avoid “providing a platform for extremist speakers”. However, such measures are counter-productive.

Challenging extremists’ ideology publicly is an opportunity to encourage critical thinking and demonstrate to students and pupils the flawed and distorted nature of their narrative. Banning such speakers pushes their extremist views to the private sphere where they go unchallenged on YouTube and other platforms. We need to rigorously maintain freedom of speech and generate an environment where extremist ideologies are challenged through open debate.

Dialogue and debate to defeat extremism

Extremism cannot be solved in the short-term by compelling society through regulations to counter it. We need to empower society with the right tools so that it recognises extremism for the social ill it is, and thus is willing to counter it of its own volition. Civil society initiatives like Extreme Dialogue or Mothers for Life are a great example of the potential that lies within our society. The counter-extremism strategy needs to recognise this to counter extremism holistically and effectively.

Extremism needs to become as unacceptable as racism and homophobia. This will not be reached through more restrictive legislation. It requires a shift in social attitudes.

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Why the EU Needs a New Global Strategy to Speed Up and Empower Early Action

by Professor Christoph Meyer

When looking back to the European Union’s first ever security strategy of 2003, a sense of nostalgia is inevitable. Then, Javier Solana, the EU’s first High Representative was articulating and implementing a vision of Europe as a global power despite divisions over Iraq, backed up by key member states, including Britain. The first and largely successful EU military missions had just been launched in Macedonia and Congo to signal the emergence of an autonomous European Security and Defence Policy. The EU had played an essential role in the stabilisation and transformation of Central and Eastern Europe and was hoping to repeat its greatest foreign policy success in its wider neighbourhood. The Convention on the Future of Europe articulated an ambitious vision for strengthening the EU, including a European Foreign Minister – all of this against the background of a growing economy and rising demand from Asia.

Today, the EU’s current High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, makes the case for the EU to adopt a new global strategy by 2016 to adjust to a substantially changed environment; the “arc of instability” in its neighbourhood, the increasing assertive and indeed aggressive Russia, the challenge of migration and refugee flows, the grievous human rights violations on its doorstep and the threat of home-grown but foreign inspired jihadist terrorism to name but a few challenges. The long-term picture looks hardly better with Europe’s relative decline vis-à-vis China, India and other rising powers, growing migration pressure arising from population growth in Africa, and expanding vulnerabilities of Europe’s open and interconnected societies to attacks from technologically empowered non-state actors.

Strategies, as Lawrence Freedmann argues, are loved by those far too weak or marginalised to reach their goals in the near-term and who therefore have to chart intermediate steps to bridge the gap between the reality and the utopian future they hope to achieve. The EU fears rather the decline or loss of its power in world affairs, but its strategy needs to avoid sounding defensive in the face of new threats and defeatist vis-à-vis tales of its forecast decline. But how can it convincingly promise a better future at a time of stagnating economic performance, a simmering Eurozone crisis and growing populist and EUphobe movements in many member states?

The first task of the new EU strategy must be to effectively make the argument for acting together given the scale of the problems, whether through common institutions and instruments or through EU coordinated or supported coalitions of the willing. It needs to persuade the sceptics that early and vigorous action in foreign affairs, through the EU, is the key to avoiding the much larger costs and risks affecting its citizens down the line.

This case has never been as compelling as it is now when the consequences of war, sectarian violence, mass atrocities, political oppression and economic deprivation in the EU’s neighbourhood are visible for all citizens to see, at their borders and in their towns and villages. While many citizens have opened hearts, homes and wallets for refugees, concerns over being overwhelmed have become politically toxic in many countries, whilst national leaders argue in Brussels over quota systems and strengthening external borders, neither of which is likely to solve the problem. The solution can only be advanced through a more forward-looking and vigorous foreign policy that addresses the “push” factors of flight and migration. While a strategy is not and should not be a tool for crisis management, it should persuade citizens that the EU can make a difference when it matters. Like no other actor, it has the tools to do so as it has demonstrated with its actions against piracy at the Horn of Africa, which combined a naval mission with a strategy to address the political, economic and social causes of the burgeoning “trade”. Over the years, the EU has become better at acting more quickly in the face of crises, reducing the lead time for spending and the deployment of key instruments. Yet, it has not succeeded in tackling some of the key obstacles to rapid preventive actions to be taken before a crisis develops and has oftentimes failed to grasp opportunities to avert crises. This problem is not unique to the EU, but also afflicts most states.

Acting early requires accurate forecasting techniques that are by their very nature burdened by uncertainty. The Arab Spring has caught most professional observers off guard, and so have the actions of Russia in Ukraine – some strategic surprises are inevitable, but our understanding of the driving forces of conflict and mass atrocities have improved substantially as has our understanding of common analytical errors such as cognitive biases. Moreover, the EU can and should learn from forecasts that are by their nature more reliable, relating to environmental and demographic changes as well as other mega-trends such as the global expansion of education and information. The EU therefore needs to equip itself with the ability to...
Dialogue by KCL Politics Society ————————————————————-

monitor key indicators of rapid change, measure risks across various domains and spot long-term threats and opportunities early. For this it would be helpful to expand its intelligence capacities, improving the sharing of information among member states, but also productively utilise different analytical judgements of national experts in a dialectic mechanism which would free EU judgement from the prevailing of convenient wisdoms. There is much to learn, positively as well as negatively, from the vast US intelligence community.

Secondly, the EU needs to overcome some of the political impediments to acting early. Despite EU documents emphasising prevention as a “hallmark” of EU foreign policy, often the member states only engage with problems once they have become media headlines. In Brussels, coordination between and within EU bodies takes too long and the foreign affairs bureaucracy is organised too hierarchically, slowing down reaction to shorter-term warning in particular. While the EU is reasonably well equipped to address problems that mature in 3 years plus, it lacks the ability to mobilise quickly enough in the short-medium term where developments on the ground usually outpace the system’s ability to respond. Here the EU needs to rethink whether the “comprehensive approach” does not get in the way of early action and whether empowering parts of the EU to act early in an imperfect way, is not preferable to acting too late. Could more authority and resources be given to EU heads of delegation, field missions or special representatives to tackle emerging problems early? What forms of flexible decision-making involving some but not all member states can be found to facilitate early action supported by the Council? Apart from the formation of “core groups” of active and willing member states, one could envisage a mixture of core and rotating members of a European Security Council that would be empowered to take certain kinds of actions.

Finally, the best knowledge and decision-making apparatus will fail without instruments that can be deployed quickly and effectively. This implies ring-fencing critical human and material resources for effective action rather than throwing everything at the current crisis of the day and thus overcommitting oneself. The EU will need a Swiss army knife approach to resources, prioritising those instruments and infrastructures that have multiple uses such as satellites and strategic airlift, rather than those that serve only one single purpose. Finally, when it comes to the increasingly expensive military hardware to address future threats, the EU will need to make a choice whether it wants to buy off-the-shelf from US firms, or whether it gets serious on defence procurement cooperation to maintain an autonomous and competitive production capacity.

Early action is a key area of EU foreign policy which begs for attention. This is where strategic thinking can and needs to focus minds.

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A Voyage to Srebrenica – Remembering the Genocide

by Sehr Saira Nawaz

Occurring in the Western Balkans during the wake of the disbandment of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Bosnia-Herzegovina’s struggle for independence is often a forgotten juncture in history. Between 1992 and 1995, many Bosniaks were caught in the precarious cycle of a rampant ethnic cleansing campaign, and the ongoing siege of the capital city, Sarajevo.

In March 2015, I embarked on a visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina to learn more about this often overlooked armed conflict. I joined a youth delegation with the British Charity Remembering Srebrenica, which comprised of students from all over the UK with a common interest in gaining an insight not only into the war, but also to hear the stories of the locals who were forced to endure the horrors of this conflict.
On the first day, I met with all the delegates at Heathrow airport in London, as we introduced ourselves to one another and shared the mutual feeling of not knowing what to expect on this journey. There are no direct flights from Heathrow to Sarajevo, so we had a connecting flight in Croatia, which I was perplexed by, given that Bosnia is in Europe and only a few hours away from London. Upon arrival in Sarajevo, we met our guide who would be with us throughout our stay, Resad Trbonja. He is part of the Remembering Srebrenica team, and also lived through, and fought during the war. He told us his story and his own narration of the events that unfolded during the conflict. Resad reminded us how the demographics of Bosnia are threefold; Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs, and Christian Croats. Despite this diverse ethnic makeup, Resad insisted that there was harmony and assimilation between these groups, and that therefore many Bosnian Muslims had never even thought that armed conflict was a remote possibility. In hindsight, many Bosnian Muslims believe that they were naive to think this, as almost overnight, their former neighbours and any sense of pre-existing solidarity was shattered in the wake of the war in 1992.

The same evening, we visited an exhibition displaying the work of artist and photographer, Tarik Samarah. The phrase ‘a picture says a thousand words’ rang true as we all silently observed the powerful images that were on display, demonstrating the pain, hardship, and suffering that the victims endured. Next, we watched a documentary, a homemade movie detailing one man’s journey through this testing period. It revealed months of living in a desolate environment, bombarded by artillery, and the creation of a de facto incessant war zone for the years to come. One feature which I found particularly inspirational, was the resilience of the children in the video, who managed to continue smiling and embraced hope – a sentiment that was necessary for survival.

Moreover, on our second day, we visited the Sarajevo Tunnel. This tunnel was built during the war by Bosnian forces, which linked the capital city (which was completely isolated and cut off from the rest of the country by Serbian forces), with other territories in Bosnia, and was a fundamental component in delivering humanitarian aid and preventing Bosnian Muslims from starvation during the conflict. We crawled inside the tunnel, a narrow and claustrophobic passage, which men had used to deliver these supplies. One can only imagine the difficulties this involved. Nevertheless, it marked solidarity between the fellow Bosnians, who worked together to construct this tunnel, which acted as a haven and gave a sense of hope during the war. From viewing the tunnel in its physical form, as well as hearing various accounts from those that used the tunnel, recreated a frighteningly realistic vision of this war, as I began to develop a much deeper and personal understanding of the suffering endured during this conflict.

After this, we were given a few hours of free time to explore the beautiful city of Sarajevo. Wondering through the cobblestone streets, with the aroma of Bosnian coffee, and vendors selling Ottoman style antiques, gave us the opportunity to explore the cultural life and history of Bosnia. It was refreshing to observe the traditional customs and way of life, reminding us that Bosnia is, before anything else, a community of people, which should be recognized for its beautiful culture, not only as a warzone and place of genocide.

“Another eye opening moment of the trip was the visit to Srebrenica – the arena that witnessed the horrific genocide and ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims… I felt the desolation and the hopelessness in the air as we walked from the memorial center, to the warehouse where the UN soldiers had abandoned the Muslim community.”

Another eye opening moment of the trip was the visit to Srebrenica – the arena that witnessed the horrific genocide and ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims. It was a systematic campaign which aimed to carry out the extermination of Bosnian men and young boys. The women were not left unaffected by this conflict; they were forced to suffer repeated rape and sexual abuse, humiliating them, and stripping these women of any sense of dignity and self-worth. I felt the desolation and the hopelessness in the air as we walked from the memorial center, to the warehouse where the UN soldiers had abandoned the Muslim community, at a time of desperation for succor by the international community.

We also had the opportunity to meet the Mothers of Srebrenica – the valiant survivors of this brutal conflict, who refuse to be silenced, and who form part of the witnesses who arrive at the memorial center to meet each delegation. One of the mothers had an angelic appearance, and for me, she instantly embodied a maternal figure, as she resembled my grandmother. The emotion and intensity of being in an environment where 20 years prior, these Bosnian men and women were dehumanized and slaughtered by barbarians, as well as the presence of this survivor, brought me to tears before she even started.
speaking. She had lost 42 members of her extended family, including her husband and two sons. The most callous aspect of this genocide that I struggled with, was the fact that those who had carried it out, did not stop at the act of extermination, as they saw fit to dig up and disperse the remains of those they cowardly murdered to avoid detection by the world, and by this very action prolonged the pain of the family members left behind. It was staggeringly difficult to listen to stories from family members who had been deprived from burying their loved ones for, in some cases, twenty years, denying their ability to find any closure.

Upon returning to Sarajevo, I noticed a recurring theme among the Bosnians that we met, including those from human rights organisations, from legal professions, and survivors of the war; the resilience and mercy that many Bosnian victims expressed, rarely showing any sign of vengeance or spitefulness regarding the 1995 cataclysm. This was truly humbling and inspiring, and I think it is fair to say that I speak on the whole group’s behalf when I say that it is a lesson that we will cherish, and that we hope to emulate such virtues in our everyday lives.

I hope to continue to raise awareness about this often forgotten genocide in the UK, and internationally if possible, as the lessons of Srebrenica must never be forgotten. It is important to promulgate this message, to prevent the possibility of future ethnically-based violence and conflicts, and to demonstrate that it is fundamentally inhumane to perpetuate violence against a group of individuals, based on their colour, race, or religion. I hope that by sharing my journey, I will inspire others to speak out against these horrors, and together, we can live in societies that are accepting of all cultures, ethnicities, and religions, where a plurality of individuals can coexist.

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**Economic Sanctions on Russia: Fostering Change in Foreign Policy or Encouraging State Capitalism?**

Since writing the time of publication, this contributor has been requested to have their work anonymised (15/11/2017)

In response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and its military support for the separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Ukraine conflict, the EU, the US and several other countries imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation, which are currently bound to last until at least mid-June 2016. They include

- diplomatic measures such as the ousting of Russia from the G8 group, asset freezes and visa bans, a ban on economic transactions with Crimea and Sevastopol and the so-called “economic sanctions”.
- Economic sanctions target the financial, energy and defence sectors of the Russian economy by restricting access to Western finance for five major state-owned banks, three defence enterprises and the state-controlled energy companies Rosneft, Transneft and Gazprom Neft. They also comprise an embargo on the import and export of arms, a prohibition on exports of dual use goods and technology to Russian users and an embargo on the export of products and services for deep water and Arctic oil exploration and shale oil projects.[1] By putting pressure on the Russian economy, the EU policy makers hope to make the country use its influence over the breakaway region of Novorossiya to seek a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine crisis according to the provisions of the Minsk ceasefire agreement.
At present, the Russian economy is in a recession. Since late 2014, the rouble has experienced a sharp devaluation and inflation has risen to the double-digits. According to the OECD, Russia’s real GDP is expected to contract by 3.1% in 2015.[2] Capital flight is increasing and the decline in foreign trade is dramatic, with the total foreign trade turnover in the second quarter of 2015 amounting to only about two-thirds of the respective figure in 2014.[3] Although the deleterious effect of economic sanctions tends to be downplayed by Russian policy makers, they have undoubtedly contributed to the current economic downturn by reducing international finance opportunities and affecting investor confidence.

However, no consensus on their exact impact exists, as it is difficult to separate from the consequences of the fall in oil prices, the Russian counter-sanctions banning the import of a range of foodstuffs and domestic structural obstacles to growth, such as a poor business climate characterised by insecurity of property rights, excessive red tape and limits to competition. Besides, thus far, sanctions have not led to any major change in Russia’s policy in the Ukraine conflict. Instead, they have nourished anti-Western sentiments. Opponents also highlight the damage inflicted by economic sanctions and counter-sanctions on European businesses.

“A truly viable system of European security must be inclusive of Russia. Important common concerns unite the EU and Russia. They include the mutual interest in preventing a large-scale military conflict on the European territory and maintaining the Eurasian energy relations.”

With most of the debate focusing either on short-term trade losses or on the role of economic sanctions as a policy tool in a geopolitical conflict, an aspect that often remains unaddressed is how their imposition interacts with the political-economic structures of the Russian capitalism. Beyond the much discussed dependence on oil and gas, two aspects distinguish the Russian political economy from its Western counterparts. First, the state occupies a far greater role in the economy, with many analysts regarding Russia as an instance of state capitalism. The degree of state ownership is high in sectors considered strategic and among the largest enterprises. In seven of the top ten companies on the Expert 400 ranking of leading Russian enterprises the state is the majority shareholder.[4] Moreover, the government influences corporate decision-making by placing officials on boards of directors and using informal networks and the exercise of pressure. Second, the Russian state and the system of state-business relations feature patrimonial characteristics, being guided by the logic of loyalty to the leaders and informal arrangements. The ruling elites are not subject to any democratic or judicial control. A clear division between political and economic power is lacking, and corruption is widespread. Although some economic liberals are present in the Kremlin corridors of power, the dominant political clan is the so-called siloviki (i.e., individuals with a background in security and military structures), distrustful of Western values and known for their preference for statism and control.

So far, next to the intensification of relations with China and the search for business opportunities in the emerging markets, the imposition of economic sanctions has reinforced the statist faction among the elites and fostered a further expansion of the role of the state in the economy. State-led import substitution policies and protectionism are being promoted as the main line of domestic economic policy. A series of decrees with import substitution plans for 20 industries including oil and gas equipment, metallurgy, pharmaceuticals and food processing was issued in spring 2015. Co-ordinated by the federal government, their implementation tools amongst others include subsidies and preferential treatment of domestic products or prohibition of imports in state procurement.

In the context of a state headed by a network of elites unaccountable to democratic or judiciary control and prone to patrimonial tendencies, a further expansion of the role of the state in the economy is likely to be associated with even higher levels of corruption and nepotism. Without a system of checks and balances and in a state-controlled media environment, the government is able to pursue policies which, instead of benefiting the general population, favour special and often private interest groups. By creating scarcity, import restrictions drive up consumer prices. Given the relative backwardness of the domestic industry, the absence of foreign competition can easily result in a lower quality of products, not to mention the increasing technology gap. Moreover, one can expect a further slowdown in liberal economic reforms, such as the improvement of regulation provisions and improvements in corporate governance and competition environment, more likely to be found on the agenda of states seeking closer co-operation with countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Far beyond the direct consequences of sanctions, these developments have the potential to drive a further wedge between the EU and Russia in the longer run. A drifting apart in economic terms is likely to go hand in hand with a further surge in mutual distrust and heightened security concerns as well as continuing rearmament.
A truly viable system of European security must however be inclusive of Russia. Important common concerns unite the EU and Russia. They include the mutual interest in preventing a large-scale military conflict on the European territory and maintaining the Eurasian energy relations.

Another key common interest is the contention of radical Islamist terrorism, despite the different positions currently taken in the conflict in Syria. Russia is also tied to Europe by its history. It is generally acknowledged that its rapprochement to Europe, initiated in the end of the 17th century by Peter the Great, brought about progress and modernisation. Russians agree with many European values, even though this tends to be forgotten over the authoritarian tendencies of the current regime.

For the international diplomacy practice this implies the necessity of a focus on dialogue emphasising long-term common interests and efforts to come to an understanding despite all current differences, instead of applying punitive measures. More willingness to compromise now could be to both sides of great service in the future.

The end of the beginning: the death of ‘bipartidismo’ in Spain

by Alicia Rojo Santos

The party system in Spain is changing. It seems that, finally, new parties are having a role in a traditionally two-party system that is, bit by bit, crumbling down. This has been a necessary change—something that had to happen sooner or later, especially with the ever-increasing corruption scandals and lack of efficiency of the two main parties. However, one needs to look beyond and ask as well about the difficulties and challenges that this new model will bring about.

In 1975, Spain began its transition to democracy, leaving behind Francisco Franco’s dictatorship. For many, this marked the start of a new and fairer system that would—at last—give the Spanish citizens a voice. For the first time in 36 years, people would have the opportunity of deciding who was to rule on their behalf. For the first time, in 1977, elections were held, and were won by the centre-right coalition—later to become a party; the Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD). For the first in decades, Spain found in the UCD’s leader, Adolfo Suárez a democratically elected president.

However, 1982 marked another milestone in Spanish politics, as the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) gained power. This was the beginning of the bipartisan system (el bipartidismo) leaving voters with little choice over who was to rule. PSOE won four consecutive general elections, but was defeated by the People’s Party, a centre-right to right-wing party in 1996. Since then, and up until recently, general elections became a simple competition between PP and PSOE, with both of them winning 75-80% of the votes in total [1]. It seemed that this pattern would repeat itself forever. However, things are changing; for better or for worse. Against the Duverger Law - the idea that proportional representation systems tend to result in a multiparty system - [2] Spain has always proven to be an enduring exception; indeed, governmental power’s only alternations were between the PP and the PSOE.

Since the construction bubble burst and the crisis erupted in 2008, however, significant political consequences have unfolded. Indignation, resentment towards the political elites and a desire for change culminated in 2011 with the Indignados movement; but impacts went beyond social movements and popular mobilization. The rise of the new populist party Podemos, founded in 2014 and influenced by the Indignados, and its subsequent popularity was a surprise for many. Only 100 days after its creation, it received around 8% of the votes in the European elections—more than double than what the long-established far-left party
Izquierda Unida had gotten in the previous EP elections [3]. Similarly, the massive growth of the centre-right party Ciudadanos has been a central theme during the past year. Traditional voters of both the PP and the PSOE and, more importantly, younger generations, are moving away from the bipartisan model and seem to have unanimously decided that a more diverse party system taking into account new and fresher voices has to be implemented.

There is something clear in all of this: change was needed. After the constant corruption scandals and inefficient measures linked both to the PP and the PSOE, it has become obvious that a new model needs to be established in Spain. Radicalism has risen as mainstream parties up until now have proven to be slow, inconsistent with their promises and not accountable to the Spanish population. The PP and the PSOE have been constantly criticized in the last few years, on the grounds of what they have turned into: two catch-all parties with not-so-different policies striving to steal each other's voters. The shadow of change has been lurking on the inefficient party system, and the Spaniards finally raised their voice.

However, what is this change going to bring? We are just experiencing the beginning of a massive transformation that has never taken place in the country. The institutionalized Spanish party system has undergone transformation, as proven by the last Municipal and European Elections. The upcoming general elections will (very possibly) bring about coalitions, compromise, and terminate the bipartidismo era, leaving the two melancholic parties only with the remembrance of those days in which they used to win with an absolute majority. Whilst a modification of the stagnant party system was desired, is Spain ready for this overwhelming transformation? Will it ensure a democratic regeneration?

The answer is no. Compromise is something we have seen in the recent past in previous elections (even though not in general elections). In such a divided and spiteful political arena, it is not hard to believe that stasis could become a new trend in Spanish politics. Making coalitions could be a long and tedious process that could slow down decision-making and policy implementation. However, this is not the main concern. As the last municipal elections proved, the utopian idea of coalition-making has led to lies and misunderstandings. Spain has seen Podemos stating and restating that they would never coalesce with the PSOE, and this happened, as well as the other way round. Spain has seen political deals that have arisen not to favor the citizen, but rather to favor greedy politicians pushed by the desire to ensure a seat for themselves [4].

If an absolute change of a party system cannot ensure a better and more democratic country, as Sánchez [5] suggests, then what can ensure it? Is there any hope for Spain? Whilst one should not be overly pessimistic, this article seeks to point out one of the main deficiencies of Spanish politics: the politicians themselves. Spain needs to make sure that the new generation of leaders will be able to manage the country in a honest and accountable way, which has been rarely seen so far. The Spanish population wants reliable politicians that will work for the citizens they represent and not simply for their own self-interest. It is definitely something hard to achieve, but we hope that this change, just as the end of the bipartidismo, can see the light of day.

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Guatemala: Transformation Against the Odds?
by Alina Rocha Menocal

Corruption in Guatemala is deeply entrenched. Historically, the dominant elites have viewed the state as a source of personal enrichment and advancement. From the 1950s onwards, during the country’s longstanding military rule, the alliance and collusion of the army with the dominant classes assured the concentration of power within very few hands. This facilitated the creation of exclusive networks of access and privilege to key resources, including land and labour, and generated a widespread culture of impunity. Over time, corruption became the means to guarantee the recreation of a system built on clientelism and patronage, and to preserve the privileged position of the elites.

The highly exclusionary nature of the Guatemalan socio-economic and political system also helped to give rise to more than 30 years of bloody internal conflict. In the 1980s, Guatemala embarked on a remarkably participatory and inclusive process to find a negotiated settlement to the armed insurgency. The ensuing Peace Accords, which were signed in 1996, are exemplary in terms of their ambition, scope, and vision to transform Guatemala into a more democratic, egalitarian, and representative country. Yet, two decades on, the agreements seem to have left underlying power structures largely untouched. With the transition from violent conflict to peace and from military rule to democracy in the 1990s, the army in particular preserved much of its power by transitioning into organised crime and infiltrating electoral politics. These clandestine security structures that originated during the war and have since morphed into criminal mafias – “hidden powers”, as they have come to be known – operate in parallel to Guatemala’s formal institutional framework, and they have amassed enormous access and influence through their connections within and outside the state. As José Rubén Zamora, a prominent Guatemalan journalist, has put it, democracy in Guatemala has been little more than a kleptocracy, “co-govern[ed] with criminal mafias, ... capos..., state contractors and providers and some traditional private sector interests”.

This makes what happened in Guatemala on 3 September 2015 nothing short of extraordinary: President Otto Pérez Molina resigned in the midst of far-reaching accusations of corruption and demands for accountability, and has been indicted on charges of customs fraud, racketeering and bribery. This turn of events would have seemed utterly unimaginable given who Pérez Molina is: as a high ranking army general during the country’s military regime, who ran its murky intelligence apparatus in the 1990s, he is the very embodiment of Guatemala’s entrenched political establishment and privileged elites, and he was supposed to be untouchable.

So what made Pérez Molina’s downfall possible, and what does it mean for prospects of more substantive transformation in Guatemala?

Two factors in particular played a central role in this story of “transformation against long odds”: a mass protest movement against corruption and an ongoing, longer-term investigative and prosecution body backed by the United Nations on organised crime and its links to elected politicians and the state. In effect, this experience in Guatemala is a fascinating example of how an internationally supported anti-corruption initiative has been able to harness internal pressures for reform and open up spaces for change that, given Guatemala’s underlying power structure and dynamics, would have proven very difficult to create otherwise.

It was an investigation by this special commission, the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), into a multimillion-dollar customs scam implicating powerful figures at the highest levels of government that unleashed weeks and months of unprecedented social mobilisation from April 2015 to hold the government to account. Outrage at evidence, including wiretaps, placing President Pérez Molina at the head of a parallel criminal structure that consisted of other high ranking politicians, former military officers, prominent businessmen and customs agents, brought together an unusual constellation of actors from across the country into the streets of Guatemala City to demand an end to impunity. Students, teachers, young professionals, union workers, peasants, middle class and indigenous peoples, all together in scenes that the country had rarely witnessed before. Eventually both the Catholic Church and the powerful Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture, and Finance (Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras -- CACIF) also took the side of the protesters to demand change.

Established in 2007, the CICIG was the product of a complex and drawn-out process of negotiation between the Government of Guatemala, the Procuraduría General de Derechos Humanos, civil society organisations, and the United Nations, with crucial political and economic support from the international community. Through the Commission, Guatemala effectively outsourced part of its corrupt judicial system to an internationally sponsored body
– “You can’t influence us,” the Colombian prosecutor who heads the CICIG has said, “We aren’t linked to the business class, or military, or judges or lawmakers. That gives us enormous freedom.” The Commission, which has no precedent within the UN, has been described as “one of the most unusual gambits in the annals of corruption fighting”. It thus constitutes a rare, political astute and bold step on the part of the international community to try to combat impunity and tackle “hidden powers” and the structures and linkages that sustain them more explicitly and directly.

Through its work with domestic actors, the Commission has slowly emboldened Guatemala’s own prosecutors to tackle impunity and hold the ruling elites to account. The CICIG also found an unlikely ally in Thelma Aldana, the current Public Prosecutor. According to different experts, Pérez Molina appointed her in May 2014 with the implicit agreement that “she would not rock the status quo”. Instead, she has been a strong supporter of the Commission’s work, and she called on both the Supreme Court and Congress to strip Pérez Otto of his immunity so that he could face prosecution for accusations against him. Unlike the President, Aldana was also publicly committed to seeing the CICIG’s mandate renewed. The CICIG today is one of the most trusted institutions in Guatemala, and has served as a source of inspiration and action.

And so it is that, through a combination of “people’s power” and a politically smart, internationally supported initiative to combat corruption, history has been made in Guatemala. Something fundamental – the idea that ruling elites can use and abuse power as they always have – has become unhinged, and the country may never be the same. Yet, while there is room for excitement about the possibilities for Guatemala’s future, we should not get carried away. History has taught us that it is much easier to get rid of undesired rulers than it is to build a political system that is inclusive, representative and accountable. In the latest presidential elections, Guatemalans voted for the ultimate political outsider by a long margin. Jimmy Morales is a former TV comedian with no experience in government. Now is the time to get serious – and the road ahead remains steep.

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In January 2016, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are universal, that is applicable to low, middle and high-income countries alike. They also constitute a much more complex agenda than the MDGs, seeking explicitly to integrate poverty alleviation with economic, social and environmental issues, and were the result of an exceptionally, by UN standards, inclusive process.

With the content of the SDGs now agreed, attention is rightly turning to implementing this agenda. With 17 goals and 169 targets, what has been gained in comprehensiveness has been lost in brevity compared to the MDGs, which poses some real challenges for the practical application of these goals and targets. How are countries going to prioritise implementation and resource allocation for different targets and integrate them to their existing plans and policies? Where are financial resources going to come from? Equally important, how are governments planning to monitor progress and make this information publicly available and comparable at regional and global levels?

In this article we focus our attention on how Colombia in particular is approaching SDG implementation. Colombia has not only been very engaged during the formulation of the SDG agenda – together with Guatemala the country put forward a proposal for Sustainable Development Goals, which was highly influential at the beginning of the negotiations – but was also the first country to make plans to align its own national development objectives with them. As early as February 2015, that is even before the final content of the goals was agreed in the UN General Assembly, the Colombian government decided to create an Inter-Agency Commission to follow-up on the implementation of the SDGs. This shows a clear commitment to the implementation of this agenda from
Colombia early on.

Of course the work of this newly created Commission does not start with a clean slate. Colombia has a National Development Plan (NDP) that sets out the Government’s priorities every 4 years. The most recent one, “Todos por un nuevo país”, was drafted in 2014 and runs to 2018 and actually constitutes the basis for SDG implementation.

Analysis of early plans for SDG implementation in Colombia highlight 4 challenges going forward:

First, prioritisation. Colombia’s national development plan currently covers 91 targets out of the 169 SDG targets. How are authorities making decisions about which areas to prioritise? Setting priorities adapted to national contexts cannot be used as a justification for abandoning some of the SDGs, particularly those harder to implement, leading in that way to an “à la carte” implementation menu. At the same time, to be effective governments need to prioritise policy areas in some way; the key is to make that process as transparent as possible and for CSOs to closely monitor the choices made.

Second, another challenge posed by an agenda such as the SDGs, and by many of the objectives set out in Colombia’s national development plan for that matter is that they are cross-sectoral (e.g. dealing with peace and security issues also requires addressing social mobility and inequalities). Institutionally, this requires strong inter-agency coordination. In its institutional make-up, the Commission set up to follow-up SDG implementation has been designed with the coordination of different institutions and cross-sectoral work in mind. It will be interesting to follow-up its work once it is running to assess how successfully this is achieved.

Third, the SDGs include a strong focus on ‘Leaving No One Behind’, meaning that progress on goals and targets should reach groups in society who are marginalised because of their ethnicity, location, gender, among others. While Colombia’s national development plan refers to reducing inequalities between regions and groups, there are no indicators specified to follow up on those commitments. Introducing disaggregation for indicators will be crucial to deliver on this agenda and key pillar of the SDGs. This also highlights the importance of the data agenda and the need to revamp efforts and put plans in place to strengthen data collection that provides granular information on marginalised populations. The utilisation of new data sources and the maximum use of the available administrative records data will be crucial to this end.

Fourth, despite Colombia’s capacity to mobilise resources domestically, access to clean technology and finance for green infrastructure projects is an area that has been identified as lacking sufficient resources. Therefore, discussions on financing of green infrastructure in the coming COP meeting remain highly relevant for the implementation of the SDGs in middle-income countries. In addition, other sources of finance, such as environmentally-related taxes (e.g. the transport fuel tax or the natural resource extraction tax) could be increased and used to finance priority public expenditures as part of the domestic resource mobilisation commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda earlier this year.

Ultimately, the decision by Colombia’s government to embrace and champion the SDGs early on makes the national process of implementation an experience that will be watched closely worldwide and reflects a choice to take a strong international leadership position on this agenda. Only time will tell how these efforts and commitments continue to materialise, and, most importantly, how they contribute to Colombia’s path towards sustainable development.

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Elections in Argentina: Mauricio Macri’s Victory and Daniel Scioli’s Defeat
by Benjamine Laurin

After a surprising second ballot, Mauricio Macri, 56 years old, was elected President of the Republic of Argentina on Sunday, November 22 leading ‘Daniel Scioli by 51.5% to 48.5’. The winning candidate, Macri, is part of the large coalition Propuesta Republicana (PRO), which does not have a concrete national implementation, because it was created from different alliances – such as one with the Radical party, whose head is Ernesto Sanz. The outgoing candidate, Scioli, was representing the party ‘Frente Para la Victoria’ (FPV) which has the support of the former rulers – the Kirchner couple – and is associated to the political practice of Peronism, itself related to a populist movement in the mid-1940s in Argentina.

It was the first time in History that Argentinian citizens went back to the polls during presidential elections. After the first round on Sunday, October 25, the final result was kept in suspense, because this specific election meant the end of ‘kichnerismo’, as the Economist coined it. Indeed, the couple Kirchner governed for twelve consecutive years; Néstor Kirchner ruled from 2003 to 2007 and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner from 2007 to 2015. Therefore, Macri represents “change”, which was the key word of his campaign and of his centre-right coalition named “Cambiemos” meaning “Let’s Change” in Spanish. Indeed, the new president is an opponent of the Peronists, because his stance is radically opposed to them. He was the centre-right mayor of Buenos Aires since 2007 and comes from a distinguished family of entrepreneurs.

“The team Scioli knew from the first round that the chances for them to win were very little because the Argentinian electoral system imposes mandatory and open primary elections. In a pure kischnerist tradition, the daily-newspaper Página/12 claims that Argentina has “One president, two countries” (translated from Spanish “Un president; Dos Países”). This centre-left daily paper is deemed as an unconditional supporter of the politics of the Kirchner due to its very idiosyncratic headlines. However, Macri’s success of 2015 presidential elections cannot be associated as a hard fought victory, because there are more than 700,000 votes dividing the two candidates in a country of 32 million people. This discrepancy can be seen as relative, because more than twelve millions of people voted for both candidates. Scioli’s defeat, though, is still definite. Also, Macri split ‘the […] vote with Sergio Massa, a feisty Peronist who left FPV and [was] third in the polls’. Indeed, the latter was the candidate of the Unidad para una Nueva Alternativa, which is the centrist coalition, Peronist but anti-kirchnerist. Nicolás del Caño, who is the candidate of Frente de Izquierda – Workers’ Left Front in English – on the left of Scioli on the political spectrum had given the instructions to return a blank ballot.

Furthermore, Macri’s success can be connected to the lack of affection from the Argentinean society for Scioli. Although he was a popular candidate, Scioli’s position on the right of the kirchnerist movement and the fact that he entered politics in the era of Carlos Menem – who was the Peronist neoliberal President in Argentina from 1989 to 2000 – gives reasons to the low adhesion to militant sectors of the left of kirchnérism during the 2015 presidential campaign.

In fact, Macri has seduced his audience, by taking unexpected positions close to the ones of the ruling power, such as the question of state control on strategic sectors – that is to say the case of air company Aerolíneas Argentinas and the oil business YPF. Therefore, his political theme of “change” is not synonymous with “rupture” with the couple Kirchner. In 2001, Argentina was traumatized by an economic rupture, which had an exceptional monetary dimension. Indeed, the creation of parallel currencies and the pressure on the bank system directly affected the Argentinean population. Therefore, some aspect of the kirchnerist legacy cannot be contested, because this specific era can still be associated to the country’s recovery. Nevertheless, Macri did mention a break with the economic protectionist policies of the couple Kirchner.

There are still pending issues now: Is Macrism actually the new era Argentina has entered without settling political scores? Will the couple Kirchner still have a role in the political arena? Macri will have to face many challenges in order to seduce a broader part of his society and to achieve his economic, social and diplomatic affairs objectives.

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There are a number of recent examples of domestic violence-related mass shootings in the United States that have not received as much media attention. In August 2015, David Ray Conley shot and killed six children and two adults inside a Houston, Texas home. Among those killed were Conley’s ex-girlfriend, Valerie Jackson, and 13-year-old son. In November 2015, Gawain Rushane Wilson shot and killed three people during a domestic dispute in Jacksonville, Florida, including his 5-month old twin daughters, critically injured their mother, and then turned the gun on himself. Just three days later in Alabama, Donnie Lee Abernathy broke into the home where his ex-girlfriend was staying, fatally shot three other women and injured a man, all of whom were also living at the house, before kidnapping his ex-girlfriend. The kidnapped woman, also the mother of Abernathy’s child, sustained minor injuries after he crashed his vehicle during a police chase.

Women in the United States face a significantly higher risk of gun violence than their peers in other countries; Women in the United States are 11 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than are women in other high-income countries. Many of these murders occur in the context of intimate partner violence. From 2001 through 2012, 6,410 women were murdered in the United States by an intimate partner using a gun, more than the total number of U.S. troops killed in action during the entirety of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined. Of all women murdered by intimate partners in the United States during this period, 55 percent were killed with a gun. When domestic abusers and stalkers have access to firearms, what starts as a domestic dispute can easily morph into a multiple fatality incident in what is supposed to be the safest place there is—one’s own home. Limiting access to guns by dangerous domestic abusers is therefore critical to preventing homicides of women, and a comprehensive approach to addressing this problem consists of four elements. First, strong laws must be enacted that prohibit all domestic abusers and stalkers from being able to buy and possess guns. While current federal law prohibits individuals convicted of felony and misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence and those subject to permanent domestic violence restraining orders from gun possession, many potentially dangerous domestic abusers remain free to buy a gun because the law does not apply to individuals convicted of misdemeanor-level stalking, those subject to temporary restraining orders, or abusers who are in non-cohabitating dating relationships—a gap in the law sometimes referred to as the “boyfriend loophole.”

Second, state and local law enforcement agencies need to adopt policies to ensure that the records of all prohibited domestic abusers and stalkers are flagged and provided to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System—the federal system used to conduct background checks for gun sales.

Third, federal law must be strengthened to require a background check for all gun sales. Under current federal law, licensed gun dealers are required to perform background checks to ensure that the prospective buyer is legally authorized to buy or possess a gun. However, unlicensed individuals—often referred to as “private sellers”—are not required to conduct background checks before selling a gun. This gap in the law allows dangerous unauthorized individuals, including domestic abusers, to have easy access to guns.

Finally, there must be policies and procedures in place to ensure that domestic abusers are required to surrender any guns already in their possession once they become prohibited. Ensuring surrender of firearms from domestic abusers is particularly important because the risk of violence often increases in the immediate aftermath of a victim seeking help from the criminal justice system.
Houston, Texas. Jacksonville, Florida. Cherokee County, Alabama. These sites of mass shootings are not as widely recognized as those of their more public counterparts, but the consequences of the tragedy that occurred there are no less devastating. Prohibiting all convicted abusers and stalkers from gun possession, providing accurate and complete records to NICS, requiring a background check for all gun sales, and disarming abusers once they become prohibited are common sense policy solutions that could be potentially life-saving for victims of domestic violence.

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From Souring Relations to Improving Them: Syria in the US-Russia Standoff
By Barbara Armstrong

Prior to the Paris attacks, the media was abuzz with accounts detailing how Russian involvement in Syria “soured relations” between the United States and the Russian Federation, as if the Ukraine predicament had not been enough. Following the attacks on the French capital, Obama and Putin came to an agreement on a Syrian-led political transition to end the crisis. In the context of the Paris attacks, the domestic situation in the US, and Ukraine, it is not clear what this agreement actually means – though there is hope it bodes good developments.

With American-Russian relations at an all-time low since the end of the Cold War due to the tense situation in Crimea and Donbas, Russian involvement in Syria threatened to further accelerate the downward spiral. The head of the US Air Force announced earlier this year that Russia was the biggest threat to national security, even before Russia got involved in the pro-Assad coalition. Then, when this happened without any warning from Moscow of its deployment of forces, relationships only worsened. The impasse was plainly evident in all interactions between the two nations throughout September and October, with Putin taking chance after chance to publicly criticize the U.S., such as at the UN 70th anniversary conference when he said the current US-imposed state of affairs could no longer be tolerated. The American side mirrored the tensions, from material blows like continuing sanctions against Russia to media-intensified symbolism such as Obama’s choice to save Putin for last when clinking glasses with world leaders.

Then came the November attacks in Paris and the narrative changed. The Western powers suddenly displayed a new interest in collaboration with Russia, as illustrated in the stark differences between Putin’s roles at this versus last year’s G20 summits. The 2014 conference in Australia saw Putin as a pariah, with Obama cautioning that he was internationally isolated. This November in Turkey, Putin was at the center of crucial sideline negotiations, agreeing with Obama that a ceasefire meeting between Assad and the opposition would take place by January 1, 2016. This unexpected agreement and sudden invitation back into international circles begets obvious questions of its true significance and whether noteworthy collaboration will actually take place.
On the one hand, there is cause for optimism. The stakes have been raised for the U.S., Russia, and Europe, renewing their interests in moving towards a solution in the Middle East. From the EU refugee crisis to the downed Russian airliner to the American House of Representatives blocking a program for Syrian refugees being allowed into the US, domestic incentives remain high on all sides for progress against ISIS to be made. These factors suggest it is in everyone’s interests for the agreement on a Syrian political transition to have long-term effects, as all sides are currently entrenched in a mutually damaging, dangerous stalemate.

French President Hollande and former president Sarkozy called for a single coalition to eradicate ISIS after the Paris attacks. A Russian presidential aide sees Hollande’s post-attack visits to Washington and Moscow as a sign there will be such a broad anti-ISIS coalition including both countries. These pleas for collaboration mean that the US may have to accept that Assad will de facto remain in power, at least for some time. If Assad-related differences are temporarily set aside and the destruction of ISIS becomes the primary overarching goal for all sides, actual cooperation may happen and change may occur.

Moreover, there is currently little to indicate that the agreement promises more than rhetoric. A US coalition spokesman said, after the agreement was made, that the US is not collaborating with Russia militarily and does not plan to do so. The blame game continues, as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov compared US strikes against ISIS to a cat trying to eat a fish without getting its paws wet. In response, the American side responded with public criticism of Russian strategy as antiquated. With statements like these still being made after the agreement, it seems unlikely that the G20 consensus means real collaboration at present. Similarly, just because Putin and Obama had an animated sideline talk at the summit and Putin was no longer the subject of Obama’s verbal condemnation does not mean that much has actually been altered. Ukraine-related sanctions remain in place. Additionally, the level of mistrust between the United States and Russia remains high, a factor that has hampered significant collaboration between the two in the Middle East for over a decade.

The meaning of Russian involvement in Syria has shifted from being an additional bone of contention with the United States to appearing as a viable area for cooperation.

“If Assad-related differences are temporarily set aside and the destruction of ISIS becomes the primary overarching goal for all sides, actual cooperation may happen and change may occur.”

Despite the huzzah surrounding this collaboration potential, rash conclusions about real change should be made with caution. A Russian presidential spokesman is quoted as having said, regarding the sideline meeting at the G20, that it is “absolutely unrealistic to expect that a 20-minute meeting could be called ‘groundbreaking’ in bilateral relations.” Although the West may have to accept Assad as Syrian leader temporarily, the self-proclaimed interests of the two parties continue to vary in the long term. The United States is focused on combating the Islamic State while Russia remains adamant about allowing a Syrian-led transition, effectively doublespeak for keeping Assad in power. Although defeating ISIS is an overlapping aim for both parties, it is questionable whether this goal will overtake Russia’s vow to keep Assad as the head of the Syrian state, even with the ISIS-attributed downing of the Russian plane.

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Image source: http://previous.presse.tv/photo/20130618/amin20130618171442650.jpg
The Canadian Election: A Three Party Story
By Sam Skubala

As the dust settled on the 20th October, Canada woke up a different country. Gone was the Prime Minister of nine years, Stephen Harper, replaced by the fresh-faced leader of the Liberals (LP), Justin Trudeau. Trudeau, son of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, brought the LP to a majority, after the party had fallen to just 34 seats in 2011. However, its victory was not as clear as it seemed, being a combination of anti-Harper sentiment amongst the electorate, the collapse of the New Democratic Party (NDP) as well as the actual successes of the LP themselves.

Since 2006, Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party had governed Canada. Whilst never hugely popular or well liked, the Tory leader was able to lead his party to three successive electoral victories in 2006, 2008, and then again in 2011, exploiting a divided opposition. However, whilst his policies remained popular with his base, they alienated large segments of the population, both on the left and in the centre. One of the most divisive, in fact, came late during Harper's tenure - the C-51 Bill, which dispersed a larger amount of citizens' personal information among a greater number of government departments. Interestingly, Trudeau and the Liberals supported the bill, although they did not take a long-term electoral hit from doing so. The Harper government's policies on science and the environment also raised eyebrows, such as the infamous 'muzzling' of scientists, which prevented them from readily engaging with the media and alienated many non-Conservative voters in the process. Furthermore, the Tories' commitment to austerity measures proved to be unpopular with floating voters, further intensifying the desire for Harper's defeat. It was policies like these that antagonised large swathes of the electorate, with dissatisfied Canadians looking for a party to replace his government - tying in with the second significant cause of the LP's victory, the collapse of the NDP.

The NDP collapsed for a number of reasons, with one of the most important being tactical voting. Voters affected by anti-Harper sentiment required a party strong enough to defeat the Conservatives, and found two options - Trudeau's Liberals, and the NDP, under Thomas Mulcair. So why was it the Liberals who emerged, as opposed to the NDP?

The NDP lost the tactical-voting race with the Liberals for a variety of reasons. One possibility was that the weaknesses of Mulcair as a leader were exposed during the campaign - despite his well-known fiery nature, he was unable to harness this into a passion that could ignite the voter base. That said, the true cause of the NDP's defeat stems mainly from policy, as opposed to its leadership.

A salient issue where the party found itself outflanked by the Liberals - and interestingly, to the left - was regarding Mulcair's pledge to maintain a 'Balanced Budget', which would entail further austerity spending. This matched the Conservative Party stance, whilst Trudeau had promised 'small' budget deficits - a policy position that proved to be more popular amongst voters. The NDP also struggled on regional issues, particularly in its 'home' ridings in Quebec, where its liberal approach to key social issues saw it lose votes not just to the Liberals (who had similar, if quieter views) but also to the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois. The more conservative social views of the latter two matched those of the electorate. The combination of these national and regional factors led to a decline in the NDP's poll numbers - declines that, once observed by voters with anti-Harper sentiment, worsened as NDP support haemorrhaged to the Liberals, who came to appear to be the best anti-Harper option. It was thus the case that a party, which had polled 30.3 percent on September 26th, tumbled to just 19.7 percent of the vote at the election.

This is not to take away credit from Trudeau and his party, however. Even with a disliked Prime Minister like Stephen Harper, and a collapsing NDP, the Liberals still did many things that allowed them to claim victory. Unlike the NDP, the LP refused to commit to a 'balanced
59 percent of whites are imprisoned at six times the rate of over issues of race. Few dispute the numbers: African rice, and Sandra Bland have helped set off passionate Matter (BLM) activists have managed to successfully politicians, and powerful special interests, Black Lives interrupts - literally interrupt - the political conversation Democratic candidates, to various degrees of sufficiency, affirmed that black lives matter, or do all lives matter? The three major Democratic candidates, to various degrees of sufficiency, affirmed that black lives matter before turning to discussions of criminal justice reform and economic justice for minorities. Jim Webb, Senator from Virginia and former Secretary of the Navy, replied that “all lives matter.” He withdrew from the presidential race one week later. In the modern world of media conglomerates, career politicians, and powerful special interests, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists have managed to successfully interrupt – literally interrupt - the political conversation in the United States. The highly publicized deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and Sandra Bland have helped set off passionate reactions and exposed deep divides in the United States over issues of race. Few dispute the numbers: African Americans are imprisoned at six times the rate of whites, the high school graduation rate of black men is 59 percent, and African Americans are 2.5 times as likely as whites to experience the use of force in encounters with the police. Yet there are powerful disagreements between some on what should be done, and the disagreement over the rhetoric employed by BLM activists is vitriolic. Among Republicans, there is little more than disdain and, occasionally, thinly veiled animosity towards the movement. Donald Trump calls its message “absolutely disgusting”, and a BLM activist was recently beaten to the ground by Trump’s supporters while trying to disrupt one of his rallies. On a Fox talk show the next day, Trump said, “maybe he should have been roughed up.” Ben Carson, the sole African American from either party seeking to replace President Obama, has called the movement “sickening.” Most of the Republican field sees BLM activists as divisive trouble-makers, but while these presidential hopefuls continue inciting xenophobia among white people who feel they are losing control of their country, BLM activists, who have collectively rejected the endorsement of the Democratic Party, have been criticizing the Democratic candidates as well, forcing them to adapt. After O’Malley and Sanders were interrupted and
eventually forced offstage by BLM activists at the Netroots Nation earlier this spring, both candidates have begun to rhetorically align themselves with the BLM movement, who are beginning to represent a new left in American politics. Sanders said that he wished he had been allowed to speak, but the next day his campaign added a section called “racial justice” to the issues list on its website, and this section now reads like a modern racial justice manifesto. He has also incorporated racial justice rhetoric into his stump speeches, and last week, when he delivered his long-awaited speech explaining his philosophy of democratic socialism, he said something remarkable: “I don’t believe in special treatment for the top one percent, but I do believe in equal treatment for African Americans who are right to proclaim the moral principle that Black Lives Matter.” Fighting the power of the one percent has been at the core of Sanders’ message from the beginning, and tying the BLM agenda into that message, in fact figuring them as his natural allies in this struggle, is a powerful testament to these activists’ impact. Martin O’Malley has had to evolve from a similarly rough start. When he was interrupted he attempted to engage with the activists, and in the process he used the common response to the movement’s manifesto, “all lives matter.” A few weeks later, he apologized to activists, and his campaign was the first to release a comprehensive plan for criminal justice reform.

It must be said that through these measures these two candidates are working hard to court black voters, a key demographic in the Democratic primary. Seventy-eight days from the South Carolina primary, Hillary Clinton is leading with 80 percent among black voters to Sanders’ 15 percent and O’Malley’s 2 percent.³ This is in no small part due to her husband’s popularity among black voters, as well as her early support from popular figures like Beyoncé and the rappers Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent, which boosted her visibility among black voters even more. Perhaps because of this seeming security, Clinton has largely neglected to take up the rhetoric of the BLM movement, declining to use it in her stump speeches and, when confronted by activists, voicing scepticism for the effectiveness of their tactics and advising them to work on specific policy objectives instead. Yet it has been months since BLM activists launched Campaign Zero, an initiative to end police violence through specific policy measures, and Clinton has adopted less of its proposals than either of the other candidates.

This begs the question of whether the impact of these activists is merely rhetorical, or if they are affecting substantive thinking around policy at all. Sanders has led the way on policy initiatives, adopting every point from Campaign Zero except for the removal of certain provisions in union police force contracts. O’Malley’s platform is now nearly as strong. But on the policies – typically her strong suit - Clinton seems to be far behind. She has not yet said anything publicly about civil asset forfeiture, she has not called for greater community oversight or independent prosecution of police killings, and she has not yet proposed a way to limit officers’ use of force. It could be that she is so certain of her support among black voters that she sees no need to take more radical positions on these issues that might hurt her in the general election, but this is unlikely to be the whole explanation given that at risk is the demographic that lost her the primary in 2008. In fact, she has not been silent on criminal justice reform at all: she has spoken out for demilitarization and for mandatory body cameras on all police, and she has advocated for an end to mass incarceration alongside Sanders and O’Malley. It is impossible to know if these issues would have been a part of her agenda without BLM in the picture. What we do know is that Clinton is deliberate: she will not jump in first on a new proposition but she does respond to pressure, and BLM activists may be applying exactly the kind of pressure that can drive this consummate politician further left.

In terms of policy, BLM activists have seriously affected the Democratic candidates who are desperately in need of the votes they think BLM and its supporters can deliver, while their impact on the front runner has been more gradual. But in fairness, part of what the activists want to achieve is discursive. They want to start discussions about race and get people thinking in more nuanced, sympathetic ways. They hope to attack white supremacy in the attitude of America as well as the policy. And they have. They asked Clinton to reflect on her involvement with legislation her husband supported that escalated the War on Drugs. They got Sanders to remember, during a nationally televised presidential debate, the story of a black woman who died under suspicious circumstances after three days in police custody. Not bad for a movement that began as a hashtag.

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Image source: http://d.ibtimes.co.uk/en/full/1411457/ferguson-protest-oakland.jpg
http://41.media.tumblr.com/
Explaining (Seemingly) Forgotten Policies in the PRC
By Dr. Daniel Hammond

Introduction

At the risk of making sweeping generalisations, when most people think of politics in the People's Republic of China (PRC) it is the machinations at the apex of the system dominated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that grab the most attention. As with any state, however, the act of government goes beyond simply the maintenance of power within the dominant organisation. It also has to focus on the day-to-day running of things and the achievement of particular objectives. In China the maintenance of social stability has been one such goal. This has resulted in a significant amount of change in how, for example, social security, welfare and assistance have been managed. I want to address why significant reforms in social assistance during the 1990s and 2000s appear to be drifting. Why has a programme of cash transfers which affects approximately over sixty-seven million people a month seemingly been forgotten? This an interesting question to ask because it provides an opportunity to think about the way the Chinese state works. Before outlining three explanations for why a policy appears to have been forgotten, the article will first introduce the minimum livelihood guarantee system (MLG or dibao).

Background to dibao

The MLG was a response to the emergence of new forms of poverty in urban China during the 1990s. Traditionally, state support for the poor required individuals to fall into one of three categories, the sanwu. As reforms to China's state-owned sector began to accelerate in the wake of Deng Xiaoping's southern tour of 1992, local governments began to address the emergence of urban poor who fell outside of the traditional categories. The MLG was one such policy response implemented initially in the city of Shanghai in June 1993. Soon after this, other cities in China began to experiment with their own MLG systems, alongside the support of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA). Ultimately the programme was implemented nationally in 1997 and by late 1999 all of China's cities had implemented a MLG system. The Chinese countryside had its own nationwide MLG system implemented in 2007.

The MLG marked a significant departure in how the Chinese state dealt with the problem of poverty. Rather than focusing on particular categories the MLG is a means tested system where a household's income is guaranteed to a minimum level. It proved an effective mechanism for the Chinese state in ensuring that those who fell to the wayside during reform of China's state owned enterprises, did not experience too catastrophic a fall in living standards. Ultimately the programme has become one of the many policy tools the Chinese state uses to ensure social stability.

While the urban and rural MLG programmes affect 67.7 million people per month there has been a sense that the programme is less significant. This is apparent in both the amount of material being generated by the relevant state organs regarding the programme, as well as the challenge from other scholars about the ongoing relevance of the system as an area of research. What might explain why this happened?

Three Explanations

There are three different explanations that address the question of why the MLG has been forgotten. The first is that the policy has done its job and therefore does not require any more attention. It is notable that numbers receiving the MLG have held steady over a number of years with spending increasing to fund the rising cost of living. If it is assumed that the MLG was in part designed and implemented as a social stability mechanism to capture particular households, especially those who lost jobs as a consequence of SOE reform, then this explanation makes sense. The SOE crunch has been ridden out with the help of the MLG and the programme remains in place to provide for those still in need. This doesn't tell the whole story though because recently published research and interviews conducted in China both indicate that makeup of dibao recipients has changed to include new groups such as single parents.
A second explanation would be that some form of ministry level impasse regarding new developments is holding up the decision-making process. This is a familiar problem for any researcher who has worked on China and studied the complex relationships which make up the central and local government, popularised as fragmented authoritarianism. Any real change in the way things are currently run will require an infusion of resources. The MCA cannot force this as it is not a resource generator and in many cases the local government cannot because local finances are under such pressure. Any increase in social assistance provision would require cooperation from other ministries, especially the Ministry of Finance. This is not a new issue but without a driving need to change provisions the MoF is unlikely to agree to new spending.

This is why the third explanation is potentially significant - that the MLG lacks the required support from the very top of the political system to champion changes in policy. In contrast to the 1990s with Minister of Civil Affairs Duoji Cairang and Premier Li Peng, or the early 2000s with Premier Zhu Rongji, there isn't anyone in the current Politburo Standing Committee or the MCA who supports the MLG as a priority. This does not mean that the MLG has fallen off the agenda completely but rather it is now a part of the general discussion and not a specific point of focus. For example, in a recently published MCA response to the Fifth Plenum, social assistance is part of, for want of a better phrase, the ‘background noise’ – it is referred to in passing within a long list of commitments.

**Conclusions**

As is the case when seeking an explanation to policy developments in a complex political environment, the reality is probably a combination of factors which contribute to the sense of inertia regarding the MLG. In the 1990s and 2000s the MLG demonstrated the Chinese state’s capacity to generate policy initiatives at the local level and the importance of officials in leading positions when considering national implementation. Moving into the 2010s the MLG has become less of a priority to the Chinese state and to those who watch China. This drift is rooted in the same features of the Chinese policy process that at one point supported the emergence of the programme. In addition, the problems Chinese leaders wanted the MLG to help solve have now passed. Ultimately, this shows that it is quite easy for programmes to drift in the Chinese system even when this has consequences for many millions of people.

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**Rolling Out The Red Carpet**

By Clemence Le Liepvre

The Chinese President’s visit to the United Kingdom last month - the first one in ten years - has put back to the forefront the debate over China’s re-emergence and the so-called “China threat”. Although Beijing has been using the rhetoric of “peaceful development”, Xi Jinping has demonstrated a new assertiveness in Chinese foreign policy and in international relations since his ascension to power in 2012. Qualified by Jian Zhang as “Peaceful Rise 2.0”, this more proactive role of China on the international scene can be seen in Xi’s “New Silk Road” initiative, meant to improve connectivity between China and Europe. It is hard to ignore the historical reference of the initiative to the Silk Road that already existed when China was a key trade power between China and Europe, before isolation and the subsequent European encroachment. In its ascension on the international stage, China has not neglected to make sure that European countries recognise China’s empowerment; in what could be seen as an act of revenge after its “century of humiliation”.

Back in the nineteenth-century, when Europeans sought to establish diplomatic relations and expand trade with China, they were not greeted with open arms. At the time, China existed in its own hierarchical Sino-centric system, enjoying a “mandate of heaven” and maintaining tributary relations with neighbours. This cultural clash with European countries who had by then created their own system of equal sovereign states, was therefore unavoidable given the arrogance and determination of both parties. One of the recurrent points of frictions between the British envoys and the Chinese court, for instance, was the question of kowtow to the Emperor,
and whether envoys should get down on one or two knees. In the end, it was the Europeans who forced the Middle Kingdom to kneel down through the Opium Wars and implemented subsequent “unequal treaties” that carved up the Empire between foreign powers.

While in Europe the memory of these events is essentially confined to history classes, in China this memory is kept alive within such “China’s Century of National Humiliation” discourse. Following Mao’s famous motto, “use the past to serve the present”, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has developed a Chinese concept of humiliation that has played a very active part in the formation of present Chinese nationalism.

From exploitation by foreigners to isolation, China, then extremely impoverished, progressively opened back to the world in the 1980s under Deng’s Xiaoping’s “reform and opening up”. Beijing’s strategy to reintegrate the international system can be summed up by Deng’s “24-Character Strategy” that has been translated as follows: “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.”

Until now it can be argued that these principles are still relevant to Beijing’s action and rhetoric. China has indeed been perspicacious in its observation of the international system, its rules and norms, and how to use them to its own advantage. Meanwhile, the CCP has actively worked to strengthen its position in a comprehensive manner, developing both its economy and its military, while not forgetting to develop its diplomatic skills and soft power. If Beijing has been more open about its capacities, opacity remains a characteristic of the CCP that is the source of much criticism from the international community. However, Beijing’s position on leadership has progressively evolved to the promotion of the idea of “Great Power Style”. This bears great resemblance to the concept of Benign Hegemony, while being increasingly assertive and proactive. Despite its fear of being perceived as a threat and its subsequent rejection of accusations that it is trying to become a hegemon - for example due to its strict interpretation of the principle of sovereignty in opposition to Washington - China has actively been developing its influence within its periphery and beyond.

In relation to Europe, if one of the European Union’s objectives was to socialise China in the international system and to make it a “responsible stakeholder”, it has succeeded to do so but probably not in the way it hoped. China has indeed sought to gain legitimacy through multilateralism, and has thus been very present in Western-led institutions. In some of these - most notably the International Monetary Fund - it has been asking for a reassessment of its voting power, challenging that of the US and European countries. But the rising power has not limited itself to existing institutions and has also created its own, in a way that can be viewed as China institutionalising its influence in its own back yard. It is interesting to note that the “New Silk Road” initiative has been developed within Beijing’s Greater Neighbourhood Policy, implying that it considers Europe to be included within it. Therefore, to say that China has recreated a Sino-centric system would be extreme. However it is undeniable that China is progressively changing the rules of the game, adding its own, and making sure that Western powers who humiliated China in the past acknowledge its new position of strength.

In a world where the economic might of a country is increasingly determining its global power, the debt crisis has weakened Europe’s standing in the global arena. In relation to Beijing, because of their need of financing, European countries have entered into a competition to secure Chinese investments. For instance, George Osborne openly admitted that Great Britain is looking to replace Germany as China’s leading European trade partner, enabling Beijing to further its strategy of “divide and conquer”. The announcement by the CCP of its buying of seventeen billion dollars’ of French airbus jets during the German’s chancellor visit to China, a few days before Francois Hollande’s visit to Beijing, further exemplifies this tendency of China to play members of the European Union against each other.

Additionally, while the European Union has positioned itself as a normative power, notably promoting human rights, none of its member states seem to be willing to address the issue with Beijing, preferring to focus on business talk. Thus, Xi Jinping was not only received in both houses of the British Parliament, but was also greeted by the British Royal Family. What has been described by many as a British “kotowing” to China might have been productive in economic terms, but it has also showed that England, like its European counterparts, is ready to set aside political concerns when it comes to gaining access to Chinese savings. It is clear that Chinese investments in Europe can yield great benefits for European countries, even if that means giving some leverage to China. Yet EU countries could be in a stronger position vis-à-vis the Chinese Dragon if they coordinate themselves in the future.

About a century and a half ago, European Great Powers were forcing China to open its doors in the hope of making economic gains; today European countries are rolling out the red carpet to China. Welcoming Chinese investments is not a bad thing per se, but European countries should not let themselves be duped by short-term national economic considerations. It is essential that they signal to Beijing that they will not accept financing at any price and that they act in a more coordinated manner, making full use of existing EU institutions.

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South Africa: Future Imperfect
By Professor Jack E. Spence

Even the most casual visitor to South Africa's bookshops cannot fail to notice shelves littered with volumes on the country's existential condition. Their titles are both evocative and often depressing: this includes R. W. Johnson's 'How Long Will South Africa Survive?: the coming crisis'; Julian Brown on 'South Africa's Insurgent Citizens – on dissent and the possibility of politics'; and Greg Mills and Jeffrey Herbst 'How South Africa Works and Must Do Better'. Finally, there is Adam Habib's analysis 'South Africa's Suspended Revolution: hopes and prospects'.

All four offer incisive and well researched commentary on the current malaise; yet, paradoxically, the fact that they can be published at all and are widely discussed in civil society and on social media in particular is testimony to the importance still attached to the constitutional provisions for free speech and open debate. By the same token, despite the manifest shortcomings of the current regime, one fundamental difference between pre- and post-1994 South Africa is that the dissenter does not have to fear the 'knock on the door at midnight'. This is a major gain, qualitatively differentiating South Africa with all the difficulties associated with its apartheid past. Indeed, South Africa, unlike so many of its African counterparts inherited a political structure and process with deep roots in the past, all of which have continued to give the country initial but nonetheless crucial advantages in its struggle to realise the full potential of all its citizens. Thus following six arduous years of constitution making, the government of national unity which emerged could at least draw on a political tradition which, however abusive and exclusive in practice offered both a philosophical and political basis on which to create – not a new state – but rather one which offered a template for future positive development, but at the same time – as we shall see, the threat of future decay.

What constituted this tradition? First, the notion of strong statehood stretching back to the Boer Republics of the nineteenth century and successor regimes in the twentieth. Secondly, a political system based on the principles of parliamentary government and its associated processes – namely, regular elections, opposition legitimacy, and a cabinet government. Thirdly, a judicial system which produced a cadre of lawyers courageously willing to challenge apartheid through the courts. Finally, a noisy and boisterous civil society, which included a lively and critical press, a variety of NGOs, and an impressive record of think-tank activity.

Admittedly, the apartheid state was oppressive; the parliamentary system designed to secure the key interests of the white minority with the bureaucracy, the police, and the military geared to implement and maintain 'separation of the races in all the spheres of living' via draconian legislation forbidding, for example, (shades of Orwell's 1984) sexual relations between white and black. Thus even the most intimate relations between men and women was subject to legislative fiat – perhaps the most telling and draconian example of apartheid at its worst.

How have these various components of the South African political tradition fared under the new political dispensation since 'liberation' from apartheid in the years after 1994?

With regard to the role of the state, one authority describes South Africa as 'a country of protest - and its people are protesters' (Brown, p.16); another, Jane Duncan 'protest is formal politics conducted by informal means' (Mail and Guardian 17 April, 2014). Certainly protest is widespread, much of it angry and bitter at the slow haphazard delivery of social goods – housing; clean water; electrification; schools and health clinics; and transport to those living in urban townships and the rural areas. According to Brown 12,399 'public incidents' occurred in 2012 of which 1,882 were 'said to be violent' (Brown, p. 13).

These protests were very often 'stabilised' by the police using force, the most notorious of which was the confrontation between armed police and striking mine workers at Marikana, a platinum mine near Rustenberg where some 34 strikers were killed.

Some critics have even speculated that sooner rather than later South Africa will experience the equivalent of the Arab Spring, but in the short run at least this seems improbable given that the protests in the main are not seeking regime change, but rather better delivery and living conditions. Nor should we forget the capacity and the willingness of the police and the military to use force when protest becomes violent.

The state, too, has failed to provide major educational reform with the result that many schools have an extremely poor record of achievement, and often lack
competent teachers in key subjects. One constant lament of employers is the lack, for example, of suitably qualified candidates capable of providing the administrative skills for running the economy and staffing the civil service at provincial and local government levels. The latter structures are the sharp end for the provision of social goods such as better schools. Well qualified black graduates are quickly snapped up by private companies keen to demonstrate their commitment to empowering those hitherto denied career advancement.

Moreover an ineffective and poor educational system inevitably means growing unemployment among the ranks of school leavers.

Indeed, the related issues of a grossly inadequate educational system and unemployment running at nearly 40%, together with the clear evidence of increasing corruption at every level of government, are the major areas – to be fair – of media commentary, academic enquiry and public debate. How to change this dire situation and reverse policy failure is a constant theme of the literature pouring out from academic and private publishing firms.

As for parliament, the ruling ANC government has won five successive elections with well over 60% of the votes cast. One crucial reason for this has been the fragmentation of opposition into several parties, the most impressive of which in terms of articulating sustained criticism of government policy is the Democratic Alliance (DA) a party with long liberal roots in the past. It has now been joined by 25 newly elected members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) led by Julius Malema, a radical firebrand one time leader of the ANC Youth League. He claims, by demonstrations both within and outside parliament, to speak on behalf of the dispossessed and accordingly receives immense publicity. The ANC, not surprisingly, has become complacent after 20 years in power; hence the rising tide of corruption and the lack of electoral pressure from within and without parliament. One particular weakness is the fact that MPs are elected according to a list system, rather than having to represent particular constituencies and this means that one major source of public pressure on MPs is unavailable.

How long this particular crisis will endure is difficult to say. Perhaps as the economy declines and a tipping point is reached some grand convention of key actors will meet to negotiate a new dispensation. One further possibility is a coalition of the willing determined to redefine the state’s role and generally find ways and means of improving the capacity to govern effectively. A 'New Deal' of this kind will require inspired and effective leadership on all sides, but this has been sadly lacking during the life of the present administration.

Furthermore, time and space have not permitted any discussion of South Africa’s relations with the outside world.

What one can assert with some confidence is that unlike actors such as Canada, Scandinavian countries and Switzerland – to name the more prominent – South Africa has not succeeded in emulating their success in carving a niche in international politics as mediators and good citizens of the society of states. What is crucial for success in this context is having a 'rectitude base', a reputation for domestic institutional probity earning respect from the outside world. New states have been prominent in fostering liberal causes abroad but it is by no means clear that South Africa can or will have the same impact.

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Dialogue by KCL Politics Society ————————————————————
Blessing or Curse? China's Interest in Africa
By Eva Claire Nelson

China’s ambivalent relations with Africa are notorious, and an important topic of concern for both parties, and the rest of the globe. On the one hand, there is reason to celebrate its massive investments, generous aid, and widespread diplomatic efforts to reach every African country and to expand African production capacities. On the other hand, economists warn of the danger of unstable labour, land, and immigration regulations which leave a wide-open window for Chinese abuses to take place: this can include land-grabs, the exploitation of workers, and environmental damage. The issue at hand is controversial and widely debated, but the most recent election wave across the continent had the potential to change the status quo – though there are more coming up. China has interests in the outcome of each and every one of them.

2015 was the continent’s biggest election year so far, with both some rather successful and some failed elections (Africa Research Institute). From Côte d’Ivoire to Burundi, elections were most often peaceful, though occasionally source of violence and turmoil. But the most surprising, yet important, part of this electoral wave and its mixed consequences, was how involved China was in every single one of them. It would be abusing a speculated assumption to stipulate that China’s interest in African politics is only driven by economic interest, and it is better advised to take a look at the bigger picture. Trade between China and most African countries currently grows by an average of 20 per cent on a year-to-year basis, and Chinese aid is also increasing (World Bank). Unsurprisingly, the Chinese government has a lot at stake when there is a potential switch in power – but not just for trade.

A big game-changer in upcoming African politics is its ever-growing middle class. With better education and better means to politicise, it is likely to become a real threat to non-democratic governments. The more economic development, the more likely the emergence of a new middle class will democratisethe political spectrum; not influenced by Western soft power, but rather aware of its positive consequences. Two years ago, the World Bank argued that the main drive of African economic growth was gradually stronger consumer spending – potentially. Because in reality, numbers are vague and debates about the real percentage of middle class households varies from 18 million to 300 million, depending on estimates and how they are calculated (Adengo). But what is certain is that it is an upward trend, and most importantly a drive for political change, which isn’t good for China. As the political spectrum broadens, there is more room for questioning the abuses caused by Chinese migrants in Africa, and Beijing is aware of that.

In Europe, we are all too used to immigration policies being a founding pillar of many political parties’ agendas. But this phenomenon is now truly internationalised - more and more African elections are now discussing Chinese immigration as a serious topic of disagreement. On the one hand, none can deny that over the past decade, China’s influence in most African countries has been monumental. So much so that it has penetrated, or sometimes even created, most strata of the economy, from the ground up. Consequently, the number of Chinese nationals living in Africa has topped the million mark - and not without consequences (French).

The topic wouldn’t be as abrasive as it is if it weren’t for true fear grounded in the population. Evasive labour laws enable Chinese employers to occasionally abuse local workers and advantage their own. A popular argument given is that governments believe Chinese investments are beneficial for the locals, when they actually just exploit the land and employ Chinese workers - without any local benefits.

More specifically, Mozambique is a new El Dorado for Chinese farmers, who can buy fertile land off from regional chiefs for a low price - running away from China’s rural competition – because of a lack of strict national land laws (Brautigam and Ekman). Consequently, although new investors contribute to markets, the population tends to develop strong animosity for foreign competition, which often employs local workers under unregulated labour conditions.
In Zambia, national elections were pivotal when it came to Chinese immigration. The country, which is one of the richest in copper and other metals, has seen more than 100,000 Chinese immigrants settle down over recent years, both investors and low-skilled workers aspiring to build a firm. Reports from the Collum Coal mine, where Zambian workers killed Chinese supervisors in 2012, point out the lack of sufficient regulation to ensure the wellbeing of local workers for Chinese production, but also of effective communication between both parties (Human Rights Watch). As a consequence of this incident, it comes as no surprise that some Zambian politicians are putting up a fight against abusive work conditions and that Sata, the president from 2011 to 2014, was mainly elected on this agenda.

What is furthermore interesting is that China regularly keeps an eye on the political happenings of discontent countries. Sata’s “abrasive” campaign (Cowell and Gettleman), which won him the 2011 elections, was closely watched by Chinese officials, following an incident where Chinese mine supervisors shot thirteen local workers. Sata’s victory meant tougher regulation for Chinese investors, and shaming on the international scene for any human rights breach. After last July’s elections in Burundi – which saw its incumbent president unconstitutionally re-elected for a third term – violence broke out and the African Union declared a state of crisis in the country. Interestingly, it immediately called upon China’s representative of African affairs to come in to Ethiopia and discuss the situation (African Union). The aim of this recent meeting comes out to be information scanning on the ground, to report back to Chinese investors.

It is worth asking ourselves how to tackle this issue. So far, regional and national concerns have been reported to the African Union - and treated in its Chinese-built headquarters - to no avail. Although respondent, the union is not powerful enough to review every countries’ immigration, labour and land policies. And even if it did, one can doubt of the efficacy of such overarching policies. The economic future is uncertain for many countries, and even though China’s sectorial influence is feared by some, it is more often welcomed as a gift with a rough start. Things could get better from here. Every new day on the continent comes with its new issues, but also better infrastructure and more promising elections. It is in the interest of Zambia to boost its economy with the help of foreign direct investment - but one can wonder whether it should come at the price of avoidable human rights breaches and deaths.

However, many believe the African Union should take a bold stand and urge for better policy reforms – which are urgent, especially as Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic’s elections are around the corner (Salihu, AFP). Just as China easily invests in Africa, but always keeps an eye on local happenings in apprehension, Africa should welcome Eastern benefits, but on its guard. With China on its side, Africa is bound to go far; but only if it keeps the upper hand and sets the rules of the game.

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A world where you don’t have to hide: the spread of LGBTQ rights in Africa

By Alejandro Martín Rodríguez

“They’re disgusting. What sort of people are they? I never knew what they were doing. I’ve been told recently that what they do is terrible. Disgusting.”

This is how the President of Uganda Yoweri Museveni referred to LGBTQs in an interview with CNN last year. In February 2014, he signed an Anti-Homosexuality Act which broadened the criminalisation of same-sex relations in Uganda, which included provisions for Ugandans who engaged in same-sex marriage outside their country and for any kind of organisation that supported the LGBTQ community. This attracted the attention of Western countries, which pressured the African nation to repeal this act with the threat of financial consequences.

After the act was signed, Uganda saw nearly $200 million in aid donations from Europe and North America vanish, with countries like Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark sharply reducing their aid contributions. The U.S. canceled a scheduled military exercise between American and Ugandan armed forces, scuttled plans for an HIV and AIDS research programme at a Ugandan university, and changed the location of a planned $3
million health institute which was expected to be built in the east African nation\(^2\). Uganda saw both its foreign and domestic policy seriously affected by the approval of the discriminatory law, and this arguably lead its Constitutional Court to rule this law invalid in August 2014\(^2\). This ruling was perceived as a tremendous victory by defenders of LGBTQ rights, and it reassured the key role that the international community plays in the protection and spread of human rights around the world.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court of Justice ruled last June that same-sex marriage is a right protected by the constitution, there has been a notable increase of support in favour of those who suffer discrimination due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Many world leaders have spoken out in defence of these rights, noting that, as the UN Secretary General said in 2012, “lives are at stake, and... it is our duty under the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to protect the rights of everyone, everywhere”\(^3\). The African Commission on Human and People's Rights issued last year its first-ever resolution regarding the worrying number of acts of violence and abuse that LGBTQ people face.\(^4\) When President Obama visited Kenya this summer, he gave a speech comparing today's treatment of these people in Kenya to that of African American people in the U.S. before the civil rights movement. “As an African-American”, he said, “I am painfully aware of what happens when people are treated differently under the law.”\(^5\) Appealing to a terrible and humiliating period of their history which began with slavery, President Obama sent a powerful message to African societies by comparing it to the reality faced by LGBTQ citizens throughout the continent today.

These events have ignited hope that things will change in Africa, and this has indeed been materialising during the last months. Kenya and Botswana recently recognised that local organisations advocating causes defended by LGBTQ communities do have a right to freely associate.\(^6\) Last month, Mozambique removed the Portuguese colonial-era laws that criminalised homosexuality\(^7\), and the Zambian High Court dictated that freedom of expression should include advocacy for the rights of homosexuals, after examining the arrest of a Zambian activist who publicly advocated for the protections of LGBTQs under the law\(^8\).

One significant defender of LGBTQ rights in Africa is former student and current fellow of King's College London, Desmond Tutu. The Nobel Peace Prize winner stated in a BBC interview in 2014 that he would not worship a homophobic God, and that he is as passionate about the campaign of LGBTQ rights as he ever was about Apartheid. “I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven”, he said, clearly challenging the current state of affairs in Africa and showing homosexual and transgender citizens all over the continent that their identity is not a sin and that they should fight for the rights that they are continually being deprived of. His native country, South Africa, is the only one in the continent with specific protections against discrimination aimed at LGBTQ citizens, and the only one which fully recognises marriage equality. It even welcomed earlier this year its first openly gay member of Parliament, Zakhele Mbele\(^1\).

There seems to be a growing realisation of the importance of LGBTQ rights in the African continent. This has been due to the continuous fights organised by many local NGOs and the support that many Western countries have shown towards this cause; because of this, homosexual and transgender citizens can believe that a better and brighter future in which they do not have to hide their true self out of fear is near. However, there is still much to do. Homosexuality is illegal in 36 African countries, and homosexuals can face the death penalty in Mauritania, Sudan, Northern Nigeria and Southern Somalia.\(^1\) Even in places where being gay is not illegal, LGBTQ people are continuously persecuted by their society. After all, the words pronounced by President Museveni and that I decided to include at the beginning of this article represent the opinion of 98% of Ugandans, according to a 2013 report from the Pew Research Group. And he is not the only African leader who has referred to the LGBTQ community in such a horrendous manner. For instance, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe once described this community as being “worse than pigs and dogs”, and even threatened to behead them.\(^1\).

It is important that people who, just like our very own Desmond Tutu, believe in the defence of LGBTQ rights, which can be said to be implied if one truly believes in the defence of human rights at all, stand up and speak out for them. The passive attitude that generally characterises the privileged majority has caused enough harm to the unprotected minorities; not just in the case of the LGBTQ community but whenever discrimination towards a minority group is protected by the law. It may be time for this majority to realize that these issues, although they may not affect them directly on an individual level, are detrimental to the humane side of our societies. Only when nobody will ever again have the appalling need to hide who they really are in order to survive will universal human rights be achieved.

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There is growing despair that Israel's forty-six years of occupation of the Palestinian territories are irreversible. Most Israelis and Palestinians, as well as many experts, believe strife and conflict will continue for the foreseeable future. There are ample reasons for pessimism. Israeli governments have been increasingly opposed to a real two-state peace; Palestinians are weak and divided; and the US has been unwilling, for domestic reasons, to use its unique relationship with Israel to break the stalemate. Nevertheless, a bold new US policy could help reverse this tragedy and revive politics that could lead to peace.

Israel's Transformation from Victim to Conqueror

Expressing enlightened Jewish values, the founder of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, envisaged a modern secular state for Jews. Jews would live normally, at peace with the world, and free from anti-Semitism. Before Herzl died in 1904, he warned his colleagues, saying “Don’t do anything stupid when I’m dead.” His chief successors, Chaim Weizman and David Ben Gurion, were shrewd pragmatists. Heeding Herzl's advice, they won support, compromising when necessary, for the Balfour Declaration, the League of Nations’ Palestine Mandate, and again for Israel’s independence in 1948. But as the new state emerged, Ben Gurion faced deep political divisions. His goal of a Jewish democratic state, inscribed in the Declaration of Independence, was challenged by zealous religious and right-wing “revisionist” factions. There was no agreement on a constitution, borders, let alone the definition of Zionism.

Israel's parliamentary system magnified, rather than accommodated, these fractious divisions. The result ever since has been weak unstable coalition governments which have failed to mobilize majorities to support realistic policies, especially on issues of land, peace, and security.

Israel's conquest of territories in 1967, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza strip, was a watershed. Ben Gurion warned that peace was more important than land. But an emboldened messianic Zionist movement and secular rightist allies spearheaded the occupation and settlement of the newly occupied territories.

This fateful policy, which defied Herzl's appeal for prudence, persists today. Liberal Zionism is in eclipse and Israel is run by a far right coalition under Benjamin Netanyahu that mistrusts diplomacy, celebrates force, and champions permanent settlement of the occupied territories as Israel's national project.

By rejecting demands for an end to occupation, settlement and a two-state peace, Israel has forfeited the support it once had as the victim of a tragic history. By rejecting modern norms of human rights and self-determination for Palestinians, its leaders are undermining Israel's goal of peace in a Jewish democratic state. Occupation and political repression have provoked intermittent violent rebellion, all the while eroding democratic norms inside Israel.

The United States: Honest Broker or Enabler?

A unique and elaborate US-Israeli “Alliance” emerged after 1967, but it has failed to moderate Israeli policy. Indeed, it has inadvertently encouraged it. Today Israel receives over $3 billion in annual US military aid. And for many years, the US has protected Israel from challenges in the UN and its affiliates. America's support for Israel's military supremacy has helped persuade Arab and Palestinian leaders to move away from rejection and war. But it has not moved Israel to reverse settlement and occupation and accept a two-state peace. Nor have twenty two years of intermittent US-sponsored negotiations altered these policies. With a few exceptions, the US has leaned toward Israel, failing to serve as an honest broker and to press clear policies of its own. Israeli governments and many Israeli voters, far from becoming more amenable to US interests, have come to regard American support as an entitlement. This has become clearer in the Netanyahu era, as he, and especially his ministers, dismiss American appeals with a sense of impunity.

Israel's chronic resistance to genuine peace with the Palestinians, and more recently, its audacious efforts to undermine the P+5 nuclear agreement with Iran, have laid bare the failure of the US-Israel relationship to protect American interests. The presumed bases for this alliance, shared values and mutual interests, are unravelling, and today Israel is more an adversary than an ally.
Palestinian Weakness and Disunity
As an occupied people, the Palestinians lack the means to oppose Israel effectively. But they have deepened the impasse by erratic diplomacy and unwillingness to heal the split between the Islamist Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. This breach, aided and abetted by Israel and the US, further cripples the Palestinians and denies them a unified voice. The recent spread of terror by young Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank, like violent Palestinian uprisings in the past, hardens the Israeli public, but it is not surprising given Palestinian despair and the long history of rebellion by oppressed people.

Domestic US Politics are not an Ultimate Obstacle
Americans increasingly believe that the US cannot deal effectively with this conflict because of Jewish pressure to maintain the façade of seamless ties with Israel, even as the real relationship erodes. Lobbying by veteran organizations and large campaign donations by their supporters - and to a lesser extent pressure from Christian fundamentalists – has hindered a more balanced US policy. However, the growth of liberal Jewish groups, for example J Street and Americans for Peace Now, reveals a growing rift among Jews. Supporters of “no daylight” between Washington and Jerusalem are increasingly challenged by liberals, who support Israel, but fear its policies endanger it and the United States. Polls show majorities of Americans, including Jews, want a more assertive and balanced US policy to end the conflict.

A new American Policy
The liberal ferment among Jewish liberals, the victory of Obama over fierce lobbying by Israel to kill the Iran nuclear deal, and the disaffection of many Americans with Netanyahu’s arrogant and confrontational policies, almost certainly preclude a return to business as usual. Although new negotiations before the 2016 elections are most unlikely, there are steps the Obama administration could take to recast what is now a dysfunctional relationship. The goal should be to galvanize American, Israeli, and Palestinian public opinion, revive hope for peace, put Israeli leaders on notice that relations with their best friend must be a two-way street, and lay a new foundation for negotiations when this becomes possible. The US should issue its own parameters for a two state peace and ask for their adoption in a UN Security Council resolution. Washington should also recognize the State of Palestine.

Such a bold break with past policy would be welcomed by most Americans, including a majority of American Jews and Christians, the international community and the Palestinians. If pursued fearlessly and skillfully, it could ultimately move Israeli and Palestinian politics toward peace. In the beginning, fierce opposition from the Israeli right and its allies in America will be almost inevitable. However, ultimately, a new American policy would offer Israel a new chance for peace and a Jewish democratic state at peace with the world. It would bring long-awaited justice for Palestinians in a state of their own. And it would vindicate America’s own highest values.

AMBASSADOR (RET.) PHILIP C. WILCOX, JR. is a former American diplomat and ex-President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace.

The Nuclear Deal and Human Rights in Iran: drawback or progress?
By Ariane Moayed

On July 14th 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (also referred to as the Iran nuclear deal) was agreed to in Vienna between the P5+1 on one hand and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the other. The deal, of which the impact transcends the nuclear question, has been portrayed as a diplomatic triumph. Iran, “cut off” from the international community for so long, was now gradually breaking out of the pariah state cast. Indeed, with the nuclear deal reintroducing the country on the international stage and with the lifting of sanctions, numerous countries are now eager to tap into this until recently sealed off market. More than an untapped market, the country has also been increasingly
perceived as a regional power to alleviate the various crises plaguing the Middle East.

Yet, while this international ‘rehabilitation’ is taking place, the question of human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran remains crucial. Indeed, the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the few countries for which a mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights was adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur, Ahmed Shaheed, as well as numerous Amnesty International reports and other civil society organisations, attest of the widespread violation of – to list only a few - the freedom of speech, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the freedom from torture as well as the right to a fair trial.

The Iran nuclear deal might have been a game-changer on the diplomatic international scene. Yet, the question that thus arises concerns the extent to which the diplomatic success witnessed by the Iran nuclear deal can be mimicked on the issue of human rights. In other words, does the lifting of sanctions and subsequent improvement of Iran's economic environment have the potential to improve the state of human rights?

Evidently one cannot fully consider the matter of human rights in the post-deal context, without inevitably contemplating Iran’s complex political landscape and intricate power- constellation.

President Hassan Rouhani, generally perceived as a progressive reformist, is the head of government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet, he does not have full command over Iran's armed forces, foreign policy or even nuclear policy. These are under the control of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, to whom Rouhani ultimately answers. Khamenei is indeed both the highest ranking political and religious authority in the Islamic Republic. Thus, it is often acknowledged that real power resides in the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards - officially under Khamenei's offices. A largely politicized intelligence force, domestically, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is a targeted ‘enemies of the Islamic Revolution’ and also participates in prosecutions and trials. The judiciary is also under the control of the conservatives. Although not deprived of political power, these factions are on the fundamental end of the political spectrum.

Interestingly, although Khamenei has been reiterating his distrust of the US, the nuclear deal would not have been sealed had Rouhani not given his blessing for its pursuit. Moreover, although the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was broadly celebrated by the Iranian people, on the political stage, the fundamentalist factions see it as a ‘win’ for the progressive factions or even as a capitulation to the West.

Since the nuclear deal was struck in July, journalists, artists as well as members of the Baha’i religious minority have been the prime victims of crackdowns by the country’s hard-line judiciary and the intelligence apparatus. It is almost as if by making sure that the nuclear deal will not produce any substantial change on the societal level, the fundamentalist factions were trying to underline their power. Whereas some are anxious to maintain the status quo, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, which usually controls both directly and indirectly a large share of the Iranian economy, is considering the economic opening of the country as a major threat to their power base.

In this tense context, Jason Rezaian, the Washington Post journalist unjustly imprisoned on claims of orchestration of a major espionage operation, “has become the symbol of a full-fledged war between the hardliners and the government of President Rouhani.”

Moreover, as relayed in Ahmed Shaheed’s last report of October 6th 2015, “The authorities allegedly continue to summon, interrogate and arrest Bahá’ís, and close down businesses belonging to adherents of that faith.”

These recent crackdowns testify that, in the short term at least, the nuclear deal is not improving the human rights situation in Iran. As Nasrin Sotoudeh, prominent Iranian Human rights activist said: “Reaching a nuclear agreement cannot automatically improve human rights in Iran.” It is important to note the sanctions against Iran for its human rights abuses are remaining in place.

One cannot predict the long-term effects of the nuclear deal and whether its influence will go beyond the ‘economic emancipation’ effect through the lifting of sanctions. Whether the nuclear deal will prove beneficial beyond the economic realm will depend, at least partly, on Iranian civil society’s efforts at pressuring governments. Using all tools of expression/campaigning – art, media, advocacy and so forth – civil society within and especially outside Iran needs to continue raising awareness on the Human Rights abuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran. That the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is an economic blessing for the Iranian people is undoubtable. Through its reintroduction to the international community, the Islamic Republic of Iran will most probably be facing numerous changes, and as such, the nuclear deal has the potential to be a game changer for the human rights situation in the long-term. Yet, it is up to the international community to remain on its guards and avoid slipping into ‘human rights complaisance’ as it has – to a certain extent with China: a human rights violator and yet a courted, pampered economic player.

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War in Yemen: How the Placard was Trumped by the Gun

By Suha Alwan

On January 23rd, 2011, Yemeni activist and opposition party member Tawakkul Karman was arrested in the middle of the night by the police under President Ali Abdullah Salih's orders. Karman was only one of many who had helped orchestrate some of the anti-Salih protests that raged through the Southern town of Sana’a, protests in continuity with the regional uprisings dubbed the “Arab Spring”. Since, Salih has been deposed and his successor Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi has been forced into exile in Saudi Arabia by the Houthis, who now sit comfortably in the fortified presidential palace in Sana’a.2

Saudi Arabia has entered the scene and currently leads an air offensive, along with a coalition of allies all hostile to the idea of a Yemen governed by Houthis. Since April, the coalition has targeted densely packed settlements while fending off UN enquiries into war crimes. Since March 2011, indiscriminate coalition bombing and Houthi-Islamist clashes have caused over 2,300 casualties. As the death toll continues to rise, the situation is without a doubt a humanitarian catastrophe.

Because the dominant narrative has been focused on looking at the conflict through the lens of a sectarian proxy-war between regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, it has largely ignored the unique identity of the Houthi movement and the motives of the militia. The conflict is undoubtedly developing into a proxy war, but not a sectarian one. To equate the conflict blighting Syria to that in Yemen,3 by citing regional sectarian divisions as the elemental core, is all too simplistic.

The Saudi government did not agonise over Salih, who was a Zaidi, as are the Houthis. Instead, Salih was widely seen as complicit with Saudi ally the US in the much-criticised ‘War on Terror’4, while the Houthi movement remains vehemently critical of both the US and the Saudi monarchy. Current Saudi bombing, allegedly targeting only Houthi fighters, is not a new tactic used against the armed group: Back in 2009, Saudi had launched an aerial campaign against Houthi fighters when they had encroached on Salih’s power.5

Moreover, Iran’s role in the current conflict is not as overt or as sustained as that of the Saudis. Since the conflict between the Houthis and the government began, allegations of Iranian arms supply to the Houthis remain only that and have been repeatedly met with denial claims from both Tehran and Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi,6 the current leader of Yemen.7 Reports of Russian-manufactured missiles being used by the Houthis, thus necessarily implicating Russia in the crisis may turn heads.8 Moreover, the Lebanese resistance organisation Hezbollah might be training Houthi fighters.9 Yet despite these allegations, there is little evidence of anything more than minimal support at the moment from the Iranian government.

Rather than Iranian backing, there is reason to see the support from pro-Salih forces in the Yemeni army as a legitimate explanation for the longevity of the Houthis in this conflict.

Fundamental misunderstandings of the history of factional antagonisms in Yemen have obscured the representation of the current conflict. Yemen is a country with no history of sectarian tensions.

The Houthi movement has an audience among the Northern Yemeni tribal configurations, and they have come into conflict with Salih six times between 2004 and 2010,10 citing political repression as their main grievance. The Houthis identify themselves as being from the ethno-religious Zaidi identity, perceived to be under attack. While Zaidi ritual practices are closer to those of Sunni Muslims, their theology has some crossovers with Shi’a theological currents. Clearly, Houthi mobilisation has never been focused on wider sectarian issues of any sort. Since their coup, they have largely failed to address corruption like they purported to do.

The Hirak al-Ganoubi al-Silmi or Peaceful Southern Movement, a historically non-violent group, constitutes the other significant opposition organisation. In contrast, this movement represent the interests of disaffected Southern Yemenis who are spurred on by what is perceived as subservience to the north’s political and economic wills.11 Effectively, differences between the two regions have not been completely reconciled since the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990 and have even been exacerbated by government policies. The current civil war has prompted even more violent means of struggle among the adherents of the Hirak. Suggesting that resentment over the Houthi form of governance has allowed them to successfully mobilise the youth among southerners, 12 fighters from the Southern Movement violently ceased police checkpoints in the Southern province of Shabwa in January.13
Coalition bombings started after failed attempts at a power-sharing agreement between the Houthis and Hadi. The Houthis are currently fighting their fiercest battles in the city of Ta’iz, where they are facing resistance from an Islamist conglomerate force, including Al-Qaeda fighters in Yemen. Ta’iz – including its civilians – has thus been the sight of the heaviest Saudi bombing. The Extremist Sunni Islamist control over Yemeni territories suggests further that there is power vacuum and the country is facing disintegration. Since the withdrawal of government officials and army forces in April, the port city of Mukalla has been ruled by an Al-Qaeda tribal council.

Since one of the central demands of the 2011 uprising in Yemen was the ending of the ‘state-tribe relationship’, it is ironic, to say the least, that armed tribal elites have capitalised on the instability caused by regime-change to deepen divisions in Yemen. Salih’s laxity when it came to gun-control legislation enabled Yemen the second-most heavily armed country in the world. Furthermore, abysmal unemployment levels, amongst other factors, have put young Yemeni men between a rock and a hard place, making fighting for any one armed group close to inevitable.

It is clear that there are internal divisions and a renewed susceptibility to jihadism-recruitment among the youth. However, international involvement has called into question Yemen’s ability to muster man-power and institutional strength to weather the current storm. The Saudi blockade of all imports including food and medicine is threatening a nationwide famine, and aerial forces have flattened entire neighbourhoods, as well as a Médecins Sans Frontier hospital in Sa’ada. True, the Saudis have agreed to halt their campaign according to UN Resolution 2216, but only on the condition that the Houthis relinquish all territories recently obtained. Until then, the coalition has billions of pounds worth of US-supplied arms at its disposal and, in their own words, the freedom to ‘stabilise’ the country.

The resolution of the current stalemate is solely dependent on the Houthi ‘rebellion’ giving up the ghost.

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