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“For many . . . significant upward mobility remains a doubtful prospect, while substantial downward mobility is a real possibility.”

Obstacles to Social Mobility in India— And the Way Forward

ANIRUDH KRISHNA

How to extend equality of opportunity across a vast and growing population is one of the most important problems facing India today. The ideal of equality of opportunity—the normative belief that equally hardworking and talented individuals should be able to rise as high as their abilities can take them, no matter if they are rich or poor, men or women, rural or urban—lies at the heart of the study of social mobility.

**Social Mobility
Today**

Eighth in a series

While it is intuitively clear and morally appealing, equality of opportunity is complex, multidimensional, and hard to measure directly. Measures of social mobility have been developed to explore different facets of the opportunity question. These measures look at increments, either during a person's life or between a child and a parent, in terms of income (economic mobility), schooling (educational mobility), or work status (occupational mobility). If most parents are illiterate, for instance, and their children are high school-educated, this is a situation of high educational mobility.

Triangulating these findings by looking at economic, educational, and occupational mobility helps illuminate the underlying structure of opportunity. If economic mobility is very high among the richest 10 percent of the country and very low among the poorest 10 percent, it can be inferred that the best opportunities are being hoarded by the richest people. This is a clear sign of rising inequality.

ANIRUDH KRISHNA is a professor of public policy at Duke University. His latest book is *The Broken Ladder: The Paradox and Potential of India's One Billion* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Conversely, if individuals from the bottom 10 percent are rising to positions as high as those attained by the top 10 percent, one can infer that the country has succeeded in moving toward equalizing opportunity. A great deal can be deduced about the state of social justice and inequality by exploring a country's patterns of mobility.

Studies show that societies vary considerably in the extent to which they offer equal opportunity and social mobility. There is greater fluidity in Scandinavians' relative income positions, and greater rigidity and stratification in the United States and Britain. Social mobility research in developing countries is in the early stages, but researchers have found that stratification and rigidity are even higher among them. A combination of a high economic growth rate and a low rate of economic mobility has led to rapidly widening inequality in many developing countries—and the emergence of societies that are home to some of the world's richest people and at the same time many of the world's poorest.

An examination of social mobility in India can help illuminate some of these larger trends in developing societies. Great wealth has been amassed by some in India, especially since the country opened its doors to the global economy beginning in the late 1980s. Meanwhile, a surge in school enrollment, beginning in the mid-1960s and accelerating over the next three decades, has transformed the country. The illiterate Indian peasant is fast becoming a caricature of the past. More than 95 percent of children in India today are formally educated.

But high educational mobility in India has been accompanied by stubbornly low economic and

occupational mobility. Stark poverty has been reduced—the share of India's population below the World Bank's lower poverty line of \$1.90 per day declined from nearly 40 percent in 2004 to 21 percent by 2011. However, a majority of the population—more than 60 percent in 2011—still falls short of the higher poverty line of \$3.20 per day that the World Bank applies to lower-middle-income countries.

Meanwhile, the rich have been doing much better. The share of India's national wealth held by the top one percent increased from 40 percent in 2010 to nearly 60 percent in 2016. Because the rich were growing richer faster than the poor were moving out of poverty, inequality rose. (The same trends have occurred in China, Indonesia, South Africa, and many other populous developing countries that have also experienced a combination of high growth rates, high educational mobility, and low income mobility.)

Employment in India has not increased nearly as fast as the demand for jobs from a growing population. Informal-sector work—no one's idea of a dream job—is the norm for young people. The numbers of construction laborers, deliverymen, truck loaders, maids and nannies, street vendors, shop assistants, and so forth have increased many times over in recent years. More than 90 percent of all new jobs are in the informal sector, and usually come with no written contract, no job security, and rarely any health care or retirement benefits. Prospects for advancement are limited and uncertain. Most informal workers remain at or close to the level at which they were recruited.

Improving the prospects for economic mobility in India and other developing countries is crucial for leveling the playing field, stemming rising inequality, and quelling the discontent of a growing number of educated but poorly employed young people. The first step to finding solutions is to examine the factors that act as obstacles or accelerators for mobility.

MEASURING MOBILITY

Researchers in the West have constructed decades-long panel data sets that compare the incomes of fathers (at the time when they were in their peak earning years) with the incomes of their sons when they reach the same age. Commenced 25 or more years ago in the United States and Western

Europe, these accumulations of data for measuring income mobility have only recently started yielding results. Researchers have also compared mothers and daughters, though less often because of how the data were initially collected.

Such long-period data sets are not yet available for developing countries. The work of data collection has barely begun in some countries, where fathers' incomes are just now being calculated. Until their sons reach the same age, not much can be discerned about social mobility in these countries using the conventional methods of measurement.

Nonconventional methods have been developed to help fill in the gaps, yielding important insights about different aspects of social mobility. Shorter-period data sets, compiled in India, South Africa, and other developing countries, are used to compare the incomes of present-day sons with those of "synthetic fathers" generated statistically using advanced econometric methods. Source-destination studies have provided useful insights about patterns of individual advancement: Where do

young people from a particular community typically end up? Which communities are well represented in the higher-paid occupational streams, such as the entering classes at medical and engineering schools (and which other communities are

underrepresented)?

Outlier analysis—learning from the examples of exceptional individuals—has also helped provide a better understanding of key stumbling blocks and ways in which they can be overcome or avoided. Examining the approaches of nongovernmental organizations that actively promote social mobility has clarified the extent to which interventions of different types are helpful. Researchers have also used surnames as a means of tracing father-son mobility patterns across generations.

This ongoing research has generated a great deal of useful information about social mobility in India. Studies have found rapid advances in educational achievement across the board. Girls' education has surged. Large intergenerational improvements in educational attainment have also been made by scheduled castes (formerly known as untouchables), and to a lesser extent by scheduled tribes (roughly speaking, India's aborigines). The share of functionally literate individuals in the 11–15 age group in rural India is three times the corresponding share among people 60 and older.

*The quality of
education is going
from bad to worse.*

But economic mobility remains low. The apple falls close to the tree: the sons and daughters of agricultural laborers hardly ever become surgeons or flight engineers.

GLASS CEILINGS

Economic and occupational mobility are especially low among some subgroups of India's population. Caste remains an important arbiter of people's chances for upward mobility. Among scheduled castes and tribes, the chance that a manual laborer's son will himself become a manual laborer is 50 percent higher than among upper-caste Hindus. The probability of a downward intergenerational slide, from professional father to manual laborer son, is five times higher for scheduled castes and tribes than for upper-caste individuals.

Religion is also a major factor in social mobility in India. Muslims, who comprise nearly 14 percent of the population, account for less than 6 percent of college students. Muslims and members of scheduled castes are overrepresented in slums and underrepresented in the professions.

Location is another important determinant of the prospects for social mobility. Residents of rural areas—two-thirds of the Indian population—experience much less upward mobility than urban dwellers. Rural students comprise less than 10 percent of entering classes at engineering colleges, management schools, and other gateway educational institutions.

Inhabitants of urban slums similarly live beneath a low glass ceiling. Young people follow their parents and neighbors into low-paying positions because those are the only options that are clearly visible to them. They know little or nothing about opportunities for better careers.

For women, gender is another factor that limits mobility, though the trend is a little more encouraging. The ratio of women in higher education has improved. The share of female students in engineering colleges increased from 2 percent in the 1960s to more than 35 percent in the early 2000s, and has kept rising since. Yet women are still a minority on corporate boards, in Parliament, and in public life in general.

The biggest beneficiaries of India's remarkable economic growth story have been the children of its urban professional classes. The sons, and increasingly the daughters, of salaried and self-employed professionals are disproportionately represented among the upward bound in India today. For many others—a majority of the population,

including most rural residents and many members of lower castes and women—significant upward mobility remains a doubtful prospect, while substantial downward mobility is a real possibility.

There is no single explanation for these outcomes. An array of factors has contributed to the patterns of social mobility observed in India.

One set of factors has to do with the continued social discrimination that is faced by lower-caste people, a problem that persists even though untouchability has been outlawed. Women, similarly, remain disadvantaged on account of long-standing attitudes and beliefs that are slow to change.

A second set of factors has to do with the fact that the supply of good jobs has not grown even as the working-age population has doubled. A third concerns the poor quality of education and health care available to many Indians. A fourth stems from what analysts have termed “neighborhood effects.” A despairing attitude permeates neighborhoods from which no one has risen to a high position. Low achievement in these communities feeds into low aspirations, a cycle that keeps repeating itself.

Over the years, successive Indian governments have implemented a series of policies designed to address the first three sets of factors. They have persisted with (and expanded) an affirmative-action policy for members of lower castes and other disadvantaged groups to counteract the effects of social discrimination. In the case of Muslims, however, disadvantage seems to have heightened under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power with a huge majority in 2014. (The next general election is to be held in April and May 2019.)

The Modi government launched a “Make in India” program that seeks to encourage entrepreneurs to create jobs in advanced manufacturing sectors. It has poured money into a universal health-insurance program, and has promised to boost public and private investment in education. A vastly expanded vocational training program is equipping school dropouts and other disadvantaged youth with skills that can help them gain access to better job opportunities. BJP candidates hail these programs in their campaign speeches as sincere efforts made on behalf of the country's tens of millions of struggling youth.

While such measures help address the situation to some extent, they have fallen short for a number of reasons. Important factors, especially neighborhood effects, have not been addressed in these

policy formulations. Overly hasty implementation has reduced the benefits of other measures.

RESERVATIONS AGITATION

India's most prominent social mobility initiative, known as the reservation policy—because it reserves a certain percentage of places in government departments and higher-education institutions for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and others with a “backward caste” designation—has become a perennial arena for political bargaining. Reservations for scheduled castes and tribes are written into the Constitution of India, which took effect in 1950. The policy was expanded to cover other “backward” groups much later, beginning in the late 1980s.

Legislation enacted since then has allowed state governments to confer the “backward caste” designation on an ever-lengthening list of groups, making them eligible to compete for reserved positions. Every so often, another group agitates to be added to the list. The success of one group sets off a round of agitation by another. Railroads and highways are blocked, and counter-agitations and other shenanigans ensue until the demanded accommodations are approved at high political levels. In January 2019, the Modi administration introduced yet another extension to the reservation policy, setting aside a further 10 percent of university admissions and government positions for economically weaker sections of upper castes.

Critics of the reservation policy allege that a dominant share of the reserved positions has been captured generation after generation by a “creamy layer” of the richer and more advantaged members of eligible castes and tribes. Poorer members of the same groups, they claim, have received hardly any benefit from the reservations.

Those who defend the current policy admit that there might be some truth in this critique, but they note that the policy has also done a lot of good, providing opportunities to many who would otherwise have been denied them for no reason other than their caste. Since no hard numbers are publicly available to show the percentage of reserved positions actually captured by the creamy layer, they argue that it would be rash to issue any blanket repudiation of the reservation policy. They caution against throwing the baby out with the bathwater, preferring to reform rather than abandon the current policy.

Reforms to address some of these shortcomings have been proposed. But what's often forgotten in

the heat of the debate is that no matter how it may be defined and demarcated or how well it is targeted, a policy of reservations is not and never will be a complete solution to the problem of low social mobility. Since a variety of factors—in addition to social discrimination—contribute to the problem, an assortment of measures is necessary for attacking the root causes of stalled mobility.

SKILLS SHORTAGE

The second set of factors also must be addressed: far more good-quality employment opportunities are needed in order for more people to get good jobs. While there has been a huge increase in poorly paid positions in the informal sector, the number of well-paid positions has increased by only a little.

The number of construction workers more than doubled from 1993 to 2005, a period of high-speed growth (with labor-market data available for both the starting and the ending year)—from a little over five million to more than thirteen million. The numbers of shop assistants rose from five million to ten million over the same period, as did the number of professional drivers. In contrast, the ranks of systems analysts and computer programmers—formal jobs within the rapidly growing information technology sector—increased by only a relative pittance: from 30,000 positions in 1993 to 160,000 in 2005. For every new programmer, 80 new construction workers were added.

The Modi government's response—the Make in India policy—is intended to give a boost to the manufacturing sector, which has lagged behind the country's rapidly growing services sector. New Delhi has made it easier for foreign investment to flow into advanced manufacturing, allowing 100-percent foreign ownership of firms in this sector, and state governments have offered additional incentives. But while this policy may help increase foreign and domestic investment, it is unlikely to make a big dent in India's employment problem. That is because the technology of manufacturing has changed greatly.

In generations past, when the West industrialized, millions of people leaving farms were absorbed by the rapidly expanding manufacturing sector and put to work on assembly lines. Since then, however, technological advances such as robotics have drastically reduced the need for assembly-line workers. Because of this dwindling need for labor—a trend that will only accelerate with further technological change—India will not be able to absorb as many of

its people into the workforce as China did when it invested in its manufacturing sector a few decades earlier.

Today's manufacturing plants, even in developing countries that have cheap labor, are equipment-intensive and tend to employ high-skilled technicians and engineers. They do not need many people who have only a high-school degree or lower level of education. That makes things difficult for the vast majority of young workers in India. Not enough of them are adequately prepared for good jobs in the modern economy. Relatively few young people—only one in four on average, falling to one in eight among women from scheduled tribes—pursue education beyond high school to the college level.

To address this situation, the Modi government added another prong to its employment strategy: a skills-building mission. Launched in 2015, this policy aims to quickly train millions of young people, most of whom have just a few years of schooling, in skill sets that the marketplace requires. Hundreds of thousands of young people have been trained for a few months in plumbing, auto mechanics, pipe fitting, and other trades. There is little evidence, however, that skills taught by these programs have translated into better livelihoods.

The skills-building mission has encountered numerous problems in implementation. According to an evaluation report commissioned by the government, the programs “are spread across more than 18 ministries and departments without any robust coordination and monitoring mechanism.” Furthermore, “[T]here is multiplicity in assessment and certification systems . . . and inconsistent outcomes,” as well as lack of knowledge among employers about the new skills, a shortage of trainers, and “poorly designed apprenticeship programs devoid of industry linkages.”

The mission, in short, was poorly conceived and expanded too quickly. It did not include a mechanism that would allow those running the program to learn from the mistakes that inevitably occur in the course of policy implementation.

LET DOWN BY SCHOOLS AND HEALTH CARE

A third set of factors that needs to be addressed in order to reduce obstacles to social mobility concerns education and health care.

*Caste remains an important
arbiter of people's chances
for upward mobility.*

The prospects of many people in India are blighted early on by low-quality schooling. Every year, the Annual Status of Education Report, compiled after nearly half a million students undergo testing, shines a light on the hoax that is perpetrated in the name of public education in India. Two sets of statistics are illustrative. In 2012, 46 percent of students in the fifth grade could not read even at a second-grade level. This proportion rose to 50 percent by 2018.

But that wasn't all. Over the same period, the share of third-grade students who could not solve simple subtraction problems increased from 64 to 72 percent. The quality of education is going from bad to worse, and not much is being done to remedy the situation. Parents who are themselves mostly illiterate, because there were hardly any schools in their childhood years, are sending millions of their children to school—resulting in high educational mobility—but most of these students are learning very little.

Similarly, health care remains a problem for many Indians. It is hard to find professional care close to hand that is affordable and effective. As a result, many families are ruined financially on account of illnesses and injuries. Public-health experts estimate that between 3.5 and 6.6 percent of rural households, and between 2.5 and 5 percent of urban households, averaging to 5 percent of the country's total population, are pulled below the poverty line each year by medical expenses that they cannot afford. Downward mobility is a stark possibility for many in India.

The government has responded with a universal health-insurance scheme launched toward the end of 2018. When it is fully implemented, which is expected to take as little as a year, it will be the largest health-insurance program in any country. Insurance is, however, only one component of effective health care. It doesn't help much in situations where getting quality health care requires traveling a great distance and negotiating on scary and unfamiliar terrain while on the lookout for sharks and shysters. Improvements in health-care provision and regulation are required in addition to the government's insurance initiative.

TESTING SOLUTIONS

What should be done? The existing combination of policies—affirmative action, a focus on

manufacturing and skills development, improvements in health care and education—will go some distance toward promoting social mobility, but other measures are also necessary.

Two sets of actions will make it more likely that construction workers' children, if they are capable and hardworking, can realistically aspire to become airline pilots and software engineers. First, the means must be found to make continuous improvements in the quality of education and health care. Second, direct investments should be made in programs to promote social mobility.

The first task is widely recognized as necessary. But no one knows exactly how India should go about improving its education or health-care systems. Other countries have greatly improved their educational systems—Finland and South Korea, for instance—but it isn't clear whether another country's method would work well for India. We don't even know if it makes sense to look for a single-best solution—or if instead, given India's size and complexity, the design of its social programs needs to be more locally and regionally variable.

Resolving practical questions of program design and policy implementation is critical for achieving improvements in health care and education—and these questions cannot be resolved in advance. It will require trying out candidate solutions in practice, through a learning-process model of program development.

Using this approach, potential solutions—for instance, the Finnish or the South Korean model of education, or other promising homegrown programs—would be implemented in the first stage in a few pilot locations in particular neighborhoods. A candidate program that works well in a pilot location would then be expanded in the next stage after suitable adaptations, and tried out in a larger number of jurisdictions in cities or counties. If a prospective solution proves its worth, it would then be extended to successively higher jurisdictions such as districts or states.

The Philippines adopted such a process for developing its impressive canal irrigation network. China used a similar learning-process approach for developing a new rural health-care system. It took China 20 years to get it right, trying out different promising ideas on a small scale, weeding out badly performing ones, and adapting and

scaling up the better performers, before a menu of battle-tested options had been developed that could, with confidence, be recommended to every province.

Similar processes of program and institutional development, beginning small and acquiring experience through staged implementation from the grassroots on up, are recommended more widely by international development experts. A grassroots-up national process of policy innovation will help make the desired quality improvements in India. One way to counter the shorter-term motivations that electoral imperatives create for political parties would be to develop citizens' charters for setting goals and measuring the performance of candidates and parties.

In parallel with quality improvements in health care and education, direct actions to increase social mobility are also necessary. Neighborhood effects result in multiple barriers to social mobility, including a lack of role models, a shortage of in-

formation about alternative career paths, and the resulting inability to aspire to high positions. These effects need to be tackled separately.

The utility of actions that address these barriers directly has been demonstrated by a new group of

nonprofit organizations that recently emerged in India. I have identified more than 50 such organizations, most of which have been set up in just the past eight to ten years. Each of these organizations works on a small scale with disadvantaged children in urban slums or rural villages, and each has pioneered a different model of action.

One group of organizations intensively prepares disadvantaged youth—rural Indians, slum dwellers, poorer girls—for the entrance examinations at higher-ranked educational institutions, especially engineering colleges. Others focus on building self-esteem, raising motivation, and providing information about a more eclectic range of careers. A third set of organizations pursues similar goals using a mentorship model. A fourth is helping young people from slums set up business enterprises, while a fifth helps by building linkages with colleges and employers.

At present, an annual total of about 125,000 young people are being assisted by these mobility-promoting organizations. Their efforts should be

The biggest beneficiaries of India's remarkable economic growth story have been the children of its urban professional classes.

expanded, since many more need the same kinds of support.

A program of sequential scaling up would help extend the pioneering work carried out by these groups. Undertaking careful evaluations of their processes and outcomes will help them through the learning process that is necessary for setting up the next generation of mobility-promoting enterprises. In stages, more and more young people whose mobility prospects have been dimmed on account of caste, gender, or rural residence will get help.

Accompanying such endeavors, top-down changes in policy are also necessary, including progressively formalizing the conditions of work in the informal sector. Measures to upgrade these jobs with written contracts (with specified though not permanent tenures), rights against arbitrary dismissal, and a gradual extension of social security benefits, including pensions and health care, will help raise the quality of employment, reduce downward mobility, and bolster prospects for upward mobility. With more effective and affordable health care, people will not be so fearful of falling into poverty—and that will make it easier for them to be entrepreneurial.

VAST POTENTIAL

A change in perspective is necessary as well. Rather than viewing them as welfare measures, we should see programs that promote social mobility for what they actually are: a necessary part of promoting economic growth.

India has recently achieved many successes. It has high educational mobility, and the number of

first-generation college students is rapidly increasing. The economy has modernized rapidly. A number of Indians now rank among the world's richest people.

But India's achievements are tiny compared with its vast human potential. India wins fewer Olympic medals per capita than any other country. By the numbers of research papers published, patent applications filed, and new businesses registered per capita, it ranks alongside much poorer and smaller countries.

It's not that talent is lacking in India. It is because their horizons for personal advancement are restricted that so many Indians cannot make more substantial contributions. Only a very small number are able to rise above the limitations that stand in the way of their potential to become star athletes and successful businesspeople and scientists.

Unleashing this vast potential will require enabling more Indians to climb diverse ladders of opportunity. Building these ladders is as important as any other aspect of building a stronger economy.

For too long, development experts have been ruled by the belief that a country's gross national product must grow first, while poorer people's problems can be addressed later. It's time to consider an alternative model of action: flip things around and begin at the grassroots. Engender greater social mobility by addressing the factors that limit poorer people's ability to pull themselves upward. As more and more individuals rise higher, the country's GNP will rise in turn. Investing in social mobility will be good for both growth and social justice. ■

“Few big countries . . . have had their fortunes so profoundly shaped by a weak position in the global system.”

Made in Bangladesh: Homegrown Development in a Global Economy

NAOMI HOSSAIN

In less than half a century of national independence, Bangladesh has transformed itself from an agrarian backwater and a byword for disaster and deprivation into one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. It has made good use of its global connections in the form of aid, trade, and migration, achieving rapid progress on human development and women’s empowerment. GDP per capita has increased more than fourfold since independence, and Bangladeshis live longer and healthier lives. Yet the challenges of meeting the needs of 170 million people, densely packed into a small territory with few natural resources, remain daunting.

Millions are still locked in poverty, and the old problem of hunger has been compounded by modern forms of malnutrition such as obesity. Exploitation of export manufacturing workers sometimes ends in disasters like the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse, which killed 1,138 garment workers and jeopardized the future of the apparel sector. Climate change unleashes ever more powerful cyclones as well as slow-onset crises like water salination as sea levels rise around the low-lying south.

State institutions, businesses, and the country’s internationally renowned nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civic groups must navigate a political setting that has long been characterized by corruption, weak rule of law, and personalistic governance. The party that led the national liberation struggle, the Awami League, is increasingly dominant and intolerant of opposition.

Despite these significant challenges, as it nears its half-century milestone Bangladesh is all but

unrecognizable as the “basket case” it was described as by then-US national security adviser Henry Kissinger in 1971, its year of independence. Indeed, Bangladesh is something of a canary in the globalization coal mine, and the world has much to learn from its experiences.

In key respects—its opening up to global export markets in garments and migrant labor, its exposure to climate change effects, and its early but rapidly declining dependence on international aid—it has been a sometimes reluctant pioneer, a “test case for development,” as one World Bank country representative wrote. How Bangladesh overcame the unenviable distinction of being one of the world’s poorest large countries, and ended up being singled out as an example of pro-poor development success and a new “tiger economy,” is a remarkable tale of policy innovation and political commitment. There are lessons to be learned about what has succeeded in making Bangladesh a more prosperous country, and what has not.

Bangladesh’s homegrown efforts at national development reflect what it means for any country to be exposed to globalization on unfavorable terms. Few big countries—by population, Bangladesh is the eighth-largest nation in the world—have had their fortunes so profoundly shaped by a weak position in the global system.

The country’s political history can be summarized as a struggle by the mostly Bengali and Muslim population of the Bengal Delta to survive and thrive despite its vulnerability to global market volatility and natural disasters. This struggle culminated in a national liberation movement to secure the protections denied by foreign rulers. Since then, the national project has both embraced the opportunities of globalization and fortified the population against serious threats in the form of food crises, natural disasters, and chronic poverty.

NAOMI HOSSAIN is a research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, and the author of *The Aid Lab: Understanding Bangladesh’s Unexpected Success* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Bangladesh is by no means the only developing country to have experienced what the political economist Karl Polanyi called a “double movement” of global market integration alongside a pushback from political parties and civil society demanding greater social protection from those markets. But it was one of the poorest countries to have done so.

Initial conditions in 1971 were so unpromising that Bangladesh looked set for long-term aid dependence. Its devastated postwar economy had suffered decades of underdevelopment; millions were displaced and most of the population impoverished and hungry; the civil administration was weak and the political elite corrupt and fractious. Aid donors soon displayed signs of fatigue and unwillingness to support the new regime. What changed after the darkest days of the mid-1970s, and why Bangladesh was able to pick up the pace of progress and develop in a surprisingly inclusive manner, deserves to be better known.

Some history helps show why Bangladesh offered an early warning about the costs of globalization. It has long appeared to be a traditional, closed, and agrarian society, yet it was open for business through trade, migration, and experiments with international aid soon after its birth. For over a century before independence, it was embedded—on mainly adverse terms—in global circuits of commodities and capital, as a hinterland to British India’s onetime capital and industrial center, Calcutta.

British imperial trade imperatives pushed the peasants of Bengal, which had been a rich and flourishing economy of agriculture and fine textiles under the Mughal Empire, into debt and dependence on the volatile international jute market. The Raj presided over major Bengal famines in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, in each of which millions died. Twice, millions of the region’s people were casualties of power shifts on the world stage, first following the criminally inept withdrawal of British rule from South Asia in the 1947 Partition, and then again in 1971, when Cold War geopolitics permitted Pakistan to unleash a genocidal attack on its breakaway eastern province.

Subjection to global forces over which they have little control is thus an old story for the people of

the Bengal Delta. This long history of adverse incorporation into the global system helps explain why Bangladesh started life as the poster child for Third World misery—and why its ultimately successful push for national liberation allowed it to steer a more prosperous path through the risks and opportunities of globalization.

DISASTER POLITICS

One of the best ways of assessing Bangladesh’s transformation is to note what no longer happens: since the mid-1970s, its citizens’ chances of dying in a natural disaster or suffering from starvation have rapidly diminished. This may not sound like a great achievement; most people in developed countries enjoy such fundamental security without even noticing (though climate change may alter that). But the people of the Bay of Bengal endured a series of crises of subsistence and survival in the early 1970s that were of such magnitude and severity that they could not be written off as “natural” disasters beyond the scope of public intervention.

Many people know that Bangladesh won its independence in a devastating war that left millions dead or displaced. Fewer know that the war was immediately preceded and fol-

lowed by catastrophes that killed up to 2 million more Bangladeshis. These events turned the lack of basic protection into a political matter, signaling the need for a sovereign state to take action on fundamental matters of life and death, and shaping its foundational policies on disaster management and food security.

First came the 1970 Bhola cyclone, which struck the southern coast of what was then East Pakistan just weeks before Pakistan’s first democratic elections. The cyclone packed immense force, unleashing a 20-foot tidal wave that swept away up to half a million people as well as livestock, trees, and buildings. It still ranks among the most destructive natural disasters in world history.

The cyclone drew international attention and a massive humanitarian response. But the (West) Pakistani regime was callous and negligent toward what it openly viewed as a routine disaster in a politically and economically unimportant backwater. The failures of the Pakistani response quickly became central to the election campaign, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s East Pakistan Awami League

Elites agreed on the need to turn the country’s only wealth—its vast human resources—into economic growth.

scored a stunning victory that should by rights have made him prime minister of Pakistan. The Pakistani army responded with a genocidal attack on the Bengalis in March 1971, triggering the liberation war. Pakistan was defeated within 13 days, after India entered the war.

Upon coming to power as prime minister in independent Bangladesh in 1972, Sheikh Mujib started a national cyclone-preparedness program, now one of the longest-running and largest initiatives of its kind anywhere. Bangladesh has faced a series of devastating tropical storms—those in 1991, 2007, and 2009 came close to Bhola in their ferocity. But an increasingly robust capacity for early warning and action has sharply reduced the death tolls; the storms to which the region is so exposed no longer wreak the vast human and economic destruction they once did. Similar progress has been made in the management of excess flooding, to which this low-lying delta is also prone.

The second major disaster of the independence era was the famine of 1974, which taught the new Bangladeshi elite comparable lessons about food security. Global commodity price movements, colonial agricultural and land policies, and natural disasters had all played their part in major famines in the region's past. The 1974 famine had a complex set of causes common to post-conflict settings.

Excess flooding was particularly severe, and led to the collapse of agricultural wages for millions of the landless poor. Public finances were too weak for the technically bankrupt government to import grain, since international commodity prices had spiked with the OPEC oil embargo. The domestic price of rice also spiked, probably due to speculative hoarding and smuggling. The United States withheld access to international food aid, citing a US law banning aid to countries that traded with communist states (Bangladesh had sold \$5 million worth of jute sacks to Cuba). By the time US food aid finally arrived, the worst of the famine was over.

The Bangladeshi government in any case lacked the administrative capacity and know-how to deliver effective relief to its starving people, and proved unwilling or unable to divert what food aid it did have from rations for the politically important urban middle classes to the starving rural poor. Some aid was offered in soup kitchens, but this neither nourished the hungry adequately nor protected them against disease. An estimated 1.5 million people (2 percent of the population at the

time) perished from disease and other effects of starvation in 1974 and early 1975.

The effects of the famine and the associated economic and political crisis were profound and lasting. Against a backdrop of leftist opposition, political divisions, and popular discontent over inflation, law and order, and corruption, the once-heroic nationalist democrat Sheikh Mujib amended the constitution to create a single-party state in 1975. Within a year, he was assassinated alongside his family. A series of coups and political murders followed, preparing the ground for military rule that lasted until 1990.

Food security topped the national policy agenda then and remains a high priority nearly half a century later. There have been no famines in Bangladesh since 1974. Every potential food crisis has been more or less successfully managed thanks to grain reserves used to stabilize prices, more open trade, food transfers and other social protections for the poorest, and agricultural policies designed to boost productivity and national food security. Several of the country's well-regarded NGOs were also founded in response to these disasters, which touched the national community as a whole and bound it in agreement that such tragedies were intolerable in a sovereign nation—that they could and should be prevented.

Over time and across party divides, ruling elites have agreed on the need to honor this minimal social contract (if nothing else). They recognize that failure to do so could threaten their political legitimacy and very survival. Meeting these commitments required strengthening the government's capacity to monitor and respond to potential disasters, being more receptive to Western aid, and creating space for non-state actors.

Elites also learned that the political payoffs from protecting the population were rarely earned in the short term, but easily squandered by careless handling of a disaster. Protection demanded long-term planning, investment in state capacity, and sustained commitment by successive governments. The results have been vital but invisible. Bangladesh's improved ability to respond to potential crises has enabled its citizens to go about their lives with far less experience of disasters and hunger than their parents or grandparents.

MAKINGS OF A MIRACLE

A more visible achievement can be seen in Bangladesh's unexpectedly rapid human development. This has been enabled in part by greater economic

and social stability since the 1970s, and also by a pluralist approach to bringing health and education within reach of the rural masses.

“Have you heard about the miracle that has happened in Bangladesh over the last 30 years?” asked the late Swedish statistician Hans Rosling in one of his popular teaching videos. The “miracle” was that this impoverished country had managed to bring its population growth under control so rapidly. That is one of several examples of unexpected social transformation.

Against the odds in a poor, patriarchal, Muslim-majority society, women and girls have won more rights and taken an increasingly prominent part in public life. Women are more visible in politics, administration, and civil society than in the past. There has been rapid progress toward gender parity in key education and employment indicators, though women still bear the burden of reproductive work, limiting their employment options.

Elites agreed on the need to turn the country’s only wealth—its vast human resources—into economic growth. This meant transforming the population to equip it for competition in the global system—a project that entailed a key role for mothers and demanded that they receive the necessary services, from health care to education and social protection.

The headline indicators of Bangladesh’s development have been its robust economic growth, averaging over 5 percent for two decades, and its visible transformation from an agrarian to an increasingly modern industrial and export-oriented economy. Other countries have experienced faster growth and more thorough structural transformations. But as a 2013 special issue of the British medical journal *The Lancet* noted, Bangladesh has emerged as a “positive deviant” by improving on a range of human development indicators faster than its per capita income and poverty levels would predict, and at a lower cost. This points to a purposive and concerted effort to lift the population out of poverty.

The task of rolling out mass public services has been mammoth. Bangladesh made rapid progress on enrolling children in school in the 1990s and 2000s, achieving gender parity at the primary and lower secondary levels. Immunization and other basic public-health provisions have reached more or less full coverage. Millions of rural women

have been recruited into small enterprises and the cash economy through the country’s Nobel Peace Prize–winning microfinance programs, giving them business experience and additional funds to help them manage their households.

Fertility control was the primary goal of aid policy in the early decades. High birth and infant mortality rates amid famine and poverty cast Bangladesh as a Malthusian nightmare. The overriding objective was to reduce the number of babies being born. Medical ethics were often cast aside as Bangladeshi women were experimented on with contraceptive technologies like Norplant, deemed too risky to be tried on American women.

The number of babies born per mother dropped from 7 in the 1970s to 2 by the 2000s, reflecting latent demand for reproductive control. A national program recruited community health workers to reach poor rural women with contraception and family-planning advice, bringing together government agencies, donors, and NGOs in one of several such partnerships. Infant and child mortality

declined sharply: the under-five mortality rate (per 1,000) was 223 in 1971, but by 2011 it had fallen to 47, and the life chances of Bangladesh’s children continue to improve.

Progress has also been made on immunization and common childhood diseases. A simple at-home oral rehydration treatment pioneered by the NGO BRAC has prevented millions of avoidable infant deaths from diarrheal diseases at home and abroad. Interventions to tackle micronutrient malnutrition, improve water and sanitation access, livelihoods, and food security, and deliver a range of reproductive and basic health services have all contributed to better living standards. The people of Bangladesh now can expect to live longer and healthier lives, and to see their children survive and have a decent chance to thrive.

Inventive NGOs like BRAC (known as the world’s largest) and microfinance institutions such as the Grameen Bank have justly received international acclaim for their work. In addition to its oral rehydration therapy, BRAC’s successful models include the DOTS tuberculosis treatment, non-formal primary education for poor rural girls, and “graduation” programs designed to permanently lift the extremely poor out of poverty. The Grameen Bank developed a rural banking system with a wide array of financial and related services for poor wom-

*Bangladesh has seen the
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improve for both genders.*

en. Both BRAC and Grameen Bank have spun off a range of for-profit and nonprofit companies and initiatives, including the country's largest mobile phone service provider, GrameenPhone, and its biggest provider of mobile money services, BKash, which is part of the BRAC group.

Governmental and NGO programs have been able to scale up partly because of the nation's population density and ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Viewed from the outside, NGOs have sometimes overshadowed the role of the state. But within Bangladesh it is clear that successive governments have played major roles, and not only by granting private initiative the space in which to operate. Some of the most effective solutions to health, education, hunger, and other problems have harnessed public and private efforts. This is part of the wider elite consensus about the imperative to protect and transform the population.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (who was born in East Bengal in British India), has said that Bangladesh's achievements can be explained in part by a lack of adherence to ideology and an experimental pragmatism in public policy. Governments have been ready to try anything that might work. Policy makers in contemporary Bangladesh aim to show the world that homegrown solutions can succeed.

Over time the state has expanded its outreach to the population, and it now provides many services that people need and want. Of course, not all of its programs have proved equally successful. In some cases they have been of poor quality, designed to reach many but not necessarily well. The past decade of Awami League rule under Sheikh Hasina has brought a new generation of experiments with digital means of reaching the people, including biometric data, smart cards, and mobile money. But there are concerns that these tech initiatives may not be entirely benign, and could be used for surveillance.

GLOBAL WAGE LABOR

If this fairly rosy picture of pro-poor progress does not fit in with common knowledge of Bangladesh, that is largely due to the first part of Polanyi's double movement—the global economic forces against which the impulse to protection responded. The excesses of globalization have once again made Bangladesh synonymous with misery,

this time in the “dark Satanic mills” of Rana Plaza-style factories. Wages are low and labor rights are weak. But while there can be no doubt that Bangladeshis have rapidly entered global labor markets on unfavorable terms because that was the best option they had, most nonetheless have benefited from doing so.

Two foreign exchange-earning sectors predominate: ready-made garment production at the low end of the value chain, accounting for some 83 percent of export earnings in 2018; and low-wage labor migration, mainly to the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Remittances from overseas workers through formal channels alone accounted for over 5 percent of the country's GDP, or \$15 billion, in 2018. Together these sectors have provided crucial sources of employment and income for a large younger generation whose improving health and education levels fitted them for recruitment into global labor markets, with both positive and adverse effects.

Starting in the 1980s, the garment sector helped transform gender relations in Bangladesh, drawing the “nimble fingers” and supposedly docile bodies of poor, young, rural girls and women into wage labor in global production networks. As the economist Naila Kabeer and the late development expert Simeen Mahmud have shown, this

changed the relative valuation of girls and boys in a patriarchal and mainly Muslim society—which helps explain why Bangladesh has seen the life chances of its children improve for both genders. The “son preference” that killed so many infant girls in China and India has disappeared as women's relative status has improved.

Women garment workers have clearly valued the autonomy and identity they gain through paid employment. But the jobs are physically tough, low-paid, and dangerous, as the Tazreen fire and the Rana Plaza collapse revealed. Workers remain at the mercy of global market conditions for fast fashion.

The rising level of labor militancy since Rana Plaza shows that women garment workers increasingly have the consciousness and the means to mobilize for their common interests. They draw on their connections with international trade unions and labor rights advocates when needed, and are aware of their own power to disrupt or facilitate production. This is a kind of women's empower-

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ment that aid donors have been slow to support; most prefer programs that integrate women into markets over efforts to strengthen their bargaining position.

While global export manufacturing has the Cinderellas of the modern female precariat, migrant labor has chiefly drawn in millions of young men who travel abroad for low-wage work, enjoying few rights and protections because of their weak position in the global system. They are attracted by construction and domestic and retail service contracts in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia—and the opportunity to send remittances home. But often they are cheated of the down payments required to secure jobs, or pushed into insecure and unsafe labor. Many return home having lost everything and earned nothing but the experience of gross injustice and exposure to Salafist versions of Islam.

These violations of its people's rights abroad have sorely tested Bangladesh's diplomatic capacities and economic clout. Since the country continues to depend on this vital source of foreign exchange and employment, it has been chronically constrained in its ability to demand better protections for its citizens overseas.

CLOSING SPACES

For observers unaware of the foundational politics of crisis and disaster in Bangladesh's national liberation era, the country poses a paradox: how, with its notoriously fractious and violent politics and venal elites, has it managed to achieve such inclusive development? The answer is that the elites' interest in their own success and survival led them to forge a consensus to better protect the population. The consensus held together whether the government was elected or not, and shaped the centrism and relative openness of both major parties during the period of multiparty democracy that began in the 1990s.

The “double movement”—toward greater economic growth and integration in global markets, and toward stronger protection of the population from those forces—has, if anything, speeded up in the past ten years under the Awami League government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, one of the surviving daughters of Sheikh Mujib. The Awami League took power in 2009 with an unprecedented popular mandate after a two-year military-backed caretaker regime overstayed its welcome, having presided over a massive spike in the price of rice.

As the country benefited from the global economic rebound after the 2008 financial crisis, annual growth rates hovered at an impressive 6–7 percent range. Poverty rates have dropped substantially. The coverage and quality of public services, particularly infrastructure and energy, appear to have improved.

The Awami League decade, however, has also been a time of closing democratic space. The opposition Bangladesh National Party and critics of the regime have been silenced or criminalized. Some have been imprisoned or disappeared. The crackdown on purportedly criminal behavior has been justified in part by a series of Islamist terrorist attacks on secular and foreign targets in Bangladesh, culminating in a July 2016 massacre at the Holey Artisan Bakery café in Dhaka's upmarket Gulshan area that left 20 hostages dead, mostly foreigners. Terrorist suspects were rounded up and killed without restraint.

The comparatively moderate Jamaat-e-Islami, the main Islamist political party, has been disabled by the execution of five of its top leaders who were convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal, a Bangladesh court set up to finally try the alleged war criminals of 1971. Jamaat is visibly in disarray at the start of 2019, and there are fears that the absence of a moderate Muslim political movement may push some toward extremism. A growing number of voices and organizations are pushing for more radical Islamist influence in public policy, with some effect—restrictions on madrassas have been loosened and the minimum marriage age for girls has been reduced in recent years.

A broader concern is the effect of shrinking civic space as the media, think tanks, civil society groups, and NGOs face tighter regulations and threats against outspoken dissenters, targeting the political opposition as well as secularists and human rights defenders. Bangladesh has benefited from openness that keeps market information flowing, enables learning about what works to foster development across different sectors, and ensures a rough kind of accountability, often through public naming and shaming. Whether the country can maintain its distinctively inclusive model of development under less liberal conditions remains to be seen.

After what was widely seen as a thoroughly rigged election in December 2018, there is little optimism about the prospects for participatory democracy in Bangladesh. The Awami League holds increasingly unchecked power over party poli-

tics and institutions of the state and civil society. What the political scientist Mirza Hassan terms a “dominant political system” has made it possible to address problems that require long-term planning and action. But it has also deafened the state to emerging issues. There have been mass protests over road safety, civil service recruitment, and minimum wages in the past year alone.

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT?

Bangladesh increasingly promotes its own development successes and takes a leading role in regional and global policy discussions on climate change and migration. There is a national ambition to replace the old “basket case” image with that of *Shonar Bangla* or Golden Bengal, in the words of the national anthem—a song written by yet another of this land’s Nobel Prize-winning sons, Rabindranath Tagore. In a marked reversal of its earlier role as a recipient of aid, the country now sends well-regarded peacekeeping troops (including many women officers) abroad to protect others as part of United Nations operations.

For the first time in its independent history, Bangladesh has taken a position of some importance in geopolitics by extending its protection to over 700,000 Rohingya refugees fleeing genocide in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, adding to the approximately 300,000 Rohingya who were already in Bangladesh after previous ethnic-cleansing campaigns against this mainly Muslim ethnic group. Despite a long-standing resistance to accepting refugees seen in Myanmar as “illegal Bengalis,” the government of Bangladesh took them in and set in motion a vast effort to provide shelter and sustenance to this traumatized population in what

were once the forests of Cox’s Bazaar in the border area on the southeast coast. The relief effort has involved complex global cooperation, and the government has won praise for its generosity and capacity to coordinate the delivery of vital aid.

In the precarious twenty-first century, with its contagious financial crises and complex climate change effects, Bangladesh faces new challenges and will need to renegotiate its social contract to better protect its citizens. Its institutions do an effective job of protecting them from natural disasters and food crises. It is taking rapid strides toward a modern social security system intended to provide protection from the volatility inherent in globalization. Yet the government has proved less able to protect Bangladeshis from the precarity of wages and working conditions in local and global labor markets.

Will Bangladesh continue to improve the lives of its citizens at an impressive pace in the future? The lessons of the past suggest that the gains made so far have depended on a pluralist political culture in which citizens can articulate discontent and dissent. This is how untenable policies are changed over time, and how public policy responds to mass needs.

Can the dominant party system protect citizens against the worst effects of being at the bottom of the global economic system? As Bangladesh moves toward its half-century mark in 2021, the direction of change will start to become clearer. For now, the rest of the world should see in Bangladesh a witness to the human effects of untamed globalization, and learn what it takes for a country with little but its sovereignty to push back and succeed against the odds it faced at its difficult birth. ■

“Sri Lanka’s ethnoreligious divisions are bound to continue as long as the likes of Rajapaksa dominate the island’s political scene.”

Sri Lanka’s Post–Civil War Problems

NEIL DEVOTTA AND SUMIT GANGULY

It has been a decade since the Sri Lankan military defeated the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a guerrilla movement that over thirty countries branded a terrorist group. Sri Lanka’s civil war began in 1983 and finally ended in May 2009 after an all-out government offensive against the rebels’ last stronghold on the northeast coast. Over 100,000 Sri Lankans died in the war, tens of thousands more were displaced from their homes, and both sides were accused of severe human rights violations.

Many believed that the civil war’s long-awaited end augured a new era of stability and prosperity. Instead, the island has endured political crises, halting progress toward ethnoreligious reconciliation, and controversies over relations with India, China, and to a lesser degree the United States.

These issues coalesced during a constitutional imbroglio in late 2018, when President Maithripala Sirisena fired Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and replaced him with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who had been ousted by voters less than four years earlier amid allegations of corruption and authoritarianism. The Supreme Court eventually invalidated Rajapaksa’s appointment, but the constitutional crisis it created highlights the island’s fractured postwar politics.

ELUSIVE UNITY

Sirisena and Rajapaksa had spent over 40 years together in the center-left Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), and Sirisena was serving as health minister in Rajapaksa’s cabinet when he was recruited to become the candidate of an opposition coalition and challenge Rajapaksa in the January 2015 election. Most of the ruling party’s voters favored Rajapaksa, while supporters of the center-right United

National Party (UNP), headed by Wickremesinghe, mainly voted for Sirisena. The Tamil and Muslim minorities, who typically back the UNP candidate in presidential elections (while supporting minority parties in parliamentary elections), also voted in huge numbers for Sirisena and contributed to his unexpected victory.

Under Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka had become an increasingly illiberal democracy that was veering toward authoritarianism. Rajapaksa and his family members sidelined ministers and overturned their decisions. His government abducted, killed, and disappeared journalists and political opponents. Security personnel and SLFP goons ran roughshod with impunity over a self-censoring media, a besieged civil society, and a frightened populace. Given the large number of grasping relatives holding high office, including three of the president’s brothers who served as speaker of Parliament, secretary of defense, and minister of economic development, Rajapaksa’s regime resembled a family enterprise, and was rumored to have pilfered billions of dollars from state coffers.

After that experience, the national unity government Sirisena and Wickremesinghe put in place was welcomed with high expectations. Its most significant reform was the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, approved by Parliament in April 2015. It reinstated a two-term limit for the president and reduced the presidential term from six years to five; prevented the president from dissolving Parliament until that body had served four and a half years of its term; and barred anyone holding dual nationality from running for office. Overall, the amendment was designed to empower the prime minister and prevent Rajapaksa or his relatives from reclaiming the presidency—since he had served two terms and two of his prominent brothers held US citizenship.

But the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe bonhomie did not last long. One reason was rampant corruption,

NEIL DEVOTTA is a professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University. SUMIT GANGULY is a distinguished professor of political science at Indiana University, Bloomington, and a Current History contributing editor.

call on behalf of the president or attorney general and instruct judges on how to rule in certain cases. The Supreme Court's ruling against Sirisena showed that things had changed. It was the only bright spot to emerge from the constitutional crisis.

By the time he was temporarily deposed, Wickremesinghe had become unpopular among various constituencies for different reasons. People who had campaigned to oust Rajapaksa were upset that the new government had not moved aggressively to charge and prosecute members of his regime for crimes ranging from murder to embezzlement of state funds. The Tamil minority complained that the government was avoiding postwar reconciliation and accountability efforts. The Muslim minority was aghast that pro-Rajapaksa forces were able to provoke anti-Muslim riots with the connivance of politicians and the police.

The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe combo had run on a platform promising *yahapalanaya* (good governance), so there was widespread disillusionment over the persistence of corruption as well as the rising cost of living. The consensus was that while the new government had reintroduced greater freedom, it was otherwise no different from the Rajapaksa regime.

The Tamil National Alliance, which had been vilified as an LTTE proxy during the civil war, operated as the opposition party in Parliament while the SLFP and UNP maintained their national unity government. With its demise, Rajapaksa became the leader of the opposition, despite having created and campaigned for the SLPP in the local council elections. (He argued that he had never joined the new party and remained a member of the SLFP.)

Since independence, most Sinhalese Buddhist leaders have undermined national unity to further their political fortunes. Rajapaksa has epitomized this traditional current, which is now emboldened by the defeat of the LTTE and further embedded in a majoritarian ethos. Whether or not he becomes prime minister following the next parliamentary elections, Sri Lanka's ethno-religious divisions are bound to continue as long as the likes of Rajapaksa dominate the island's political scene.

WAITING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Sri Lanka's Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission, which was formed soon after the civil

war's end, noted in its November 2011 report: "The root cause of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka lies in the failure of successive Governments to address the genuine grievances of the Tamil people." These grievances stemmed from systematic discrimination affecting Tamils' language rights, education, and employment (especially within state sectors). The civil war only aggravated their plight.

Tamils were caught between violent separatists and an unbridled military. The scorched-earth campaign that the military waged to end the war did not adequately distinguish between innocent Tamil civilians and LTTE rebels. Tens of thousands were killed. Allegations of war crimes have been leveled against former government leaders and military personnel, though no one has been prosecuted so far.

Rajapaksa's government disregarded local and international calls to hold perpetrators to account for their actions and instead took measures that further marginalized the Tamils. The regime built more military camps in the predominantly minority northeast, refused to return land seized during the war, and expropriated additional property to build military memorials and Buddhist temples—sometimes in places where no Buddhists lived. The government also instituted surveillance mechanisms to prevent a LTTE recrudescence, in ways that have kept Tamils insecure. For instance, military intelligence uses multiple informants within villages, including rehabilitated LTTE cadres, which increases suspicion and tension among neighbors.

Furthermore, the government encouraged the military to engage in a wide spectrum of commercial activities without regard for how they undermined local livelihoods. The 300,000-strong military did not demobilize following the end of the civil war; Rajapaksa's administration continued enlisting more soldiers as part of a governance strategy rooted in militarization and job creation for Sinhalese Buddhists.

Convinced that he did not need minority support to stay in power, Rajapaksa also colluded with Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists against the country's Muslims, who had steadfastly opposed the LTTE's separatism. Mobs attacked mosques and Muslim-owned shops and homes with impunity. The worst of these incidents occurred in June 2014 in the Muslim enclave of Dharga Town and

*Under Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka
had become an increasingly
illiberal democracy.*

two other towns on the southwest coast, where riots incited by the Buddhist Power Force nationalist group left four people dead and drove 10,000 from their homes.

Rajapaksa's surprise defeat in January 2015 led to expectations that the new government would deal head on with ethnic reconciliation and accountability for war crimes. Its record has been mixed.

Under Sirisena and Wickremesinghe, the government has fostered a less inimical atmosphere for Tamils and accelerated the return of military-occupied lands. It passed a Right to Information Act that civil society groups actively promote among the grassroots; Tamils are beginning to use it to learn the fates of disappeared relatives.

However, the government has failed to repeal the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which allows the security forces to hold suspects incommunicado for 18 months without charges or access to a lawyer. It has been used heavily to target Tamils. Following a July 2017 visit to the island, Ben Emmerson, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights and counterterrorism, referred to the "industrial-scale injustice" perpetrated against Tamils via the PTA. He warned that abuses by the state's "well-oiled torture apparatus" could reignite the ethnic conflict.

These abuses continue to occur even though the government cosponsored a 2015 UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution to promote ethnic reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. The resolution calls for the government to create an Office of Missing Persons, an Office of Reparations, a truth and reconciliation commission, and a hybrid war crimes court comprising local and international prosecutors, judges, and investigators. This last provision is the most controversial, since Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists reject the idea of so-called *ranawiruwo* (war heroes) being held accountable for wartime atrocities.

Rajapaksa and fellow Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists portray any investigation with foreign input as a violation of national sovereignty. Indeed, they oppose the entire transitional justice process as much as they oppose the constitutional reform agenda the current government promoted simultaneously. They believe that any form of devolution for predominantly Tamil areas and a weakened

presidential system will undermine the extant unitary state structure and inspire separatism.

Consequently, the government has made little progress on constitutional reform; and as for transitional justice, it has managed only to establish the Office of Missing Persons and get parliamentary approval to set up the Office of Reparations. Just 102 of the legislature's 225 members voted on the latter (with 59 in favor and 43 against). These two mechanisms were considered the low-hanging fruit of the transitional justice process. The time it has taken to institute them suggests how difficult it will be to set up the truth commission and the hybrid court. The government has failed to move proactively; it has only reacted in the face of international pressure, usually just before UNHRC meetings in Geneva.

In March 2017, the UNHRC granted Sri Lanka a two-year extension to implement the October 2015 resolution, and it appears that another extension will be forthcoming. Sirisena, however, now argues that Sri Lanka should withdraw as a cosponsor of the resolution. The United States had played a leading role in pushing for the resolution, but supporters of Sirisena's stance cite the US withdrawal from the UNHRC in June 2018 to justify their position.

Whatever the outcome, it is highly unlikely that the government will seriously follow through with its promise to ensure accountability for war crimes. The prospect of hybrid courts will surely be shelved should Rajapaksa return to power as prime minister following the next parliamentary elections, which must be held before August 2020.

Most Sri Lankans recognize that both the military and the LTTE committed war crimes. But since the LTTE leadership was wiped out, military personnel are the ones who will be on trial if the accountability process goes the full distance. One of the biggest mistakes committed by the government and military was to assassinate LTTE leaders who had arranged to surrender at the end of the war, in what was dubbed the "White Flag Incident." Completely eradicating the leadership of a separatist or terrorist movement may be an effective way to permanently end a conflict, but the transitional justice process could have been portrayed as evenhanded had the massacre been avoided.

High voter turnout among Tamils helped defeat Rajapaksa in 2015—and despite being somewhat

China's spreading tentacles in Sri Lanka's south are causing India to consolidate its presence.

more secure, many Tamils, especially in Northern Province, are frustrated with the slow pace of demilitarization and the lack of accountability for war crimes. Some Tamil politicians have even publicly bemoaned the demise of the LTTE and called for its revival. Although they are not part of the core Tamil leadership, such radicals provide fodder to those who want to further consolidate Sinhalese Buddhist supremacy and ethnocracy.

High voter turnout among Muslims also contributed to Rajapaksa's defeat, but anti-Muslim riots that took place in March 2018 have dampened their support for the present government—even though this time around the authorities arrested a number of suspects, unlike the indifferent response to the 2014 attack on Dharga Town. The civil war masked long-standing anti-Muslim sentiment in Sri Lanka, which the pro-Rajapaksa forces now seek to manipulate. Nationalists thrive when they can pit the nation against a threatening enemy. With the Tamils broken and cowed, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists now appear ready to use the Muslims as their new ethnic foe. This could well lead to the rise of extremist Islamist movements.

The decade since the civil war ended ought to have allowed these enmities to subside. Buddhist leaders could have avoided inflaming ethno-nationalist passions. Most instead continue working to arouse such sentiments, encouraging majoritarianism for political gain.

CHINESE WHITE ELEPHANTS

Over the past decade, Sino-Indian competition has intensified in much of South Asia. The geo-strategic implications of China's widening involvement in Sri Lanka have also concerned the United States and its allies.

When India, the United States, and much of the West declined to sell Sri Lanka offensive weapons during the latter part of the civil war, China and some other countries, like Pakistan and Ukraine, stepped into the breach. China was the most willing to provide arms on credit. With little compunction about the use of disproportionate force, it turned out to be a dependable supplier. When coupled with the Sri Lankan military's no-holds-barred strategy, Chinese weaponry, including fighter jets and long-range artillery, may have put an end to the civil war. It may also have been used in war crimes.

China and Sri Lanka have enjoyed cordial relations for decades, since the Communist Party came to power in Beijing, but China's support in

the latter stages of the Sri Lankan conflict led to special ties with the Rajapaksa regime. Those ties were further strengthened when China proved willing to defend Sri Lanka at international forums where Western states put pressure on the regime for its alleged human rights violations.

After the war, the Rajapaksa regime appeared to see development as a substitute for reconciliation and accountability. It went on an infrastructure-building spree throughout the country, including the predominantly Tamil north. A nationalist narrative that legitimated Sinhalese Buddhist supremacy accompanied the push for economic growth. Yet it gave the Chinese an opening to play a major role, for which Sri Lanka has paid a heavy price.

While some of China's infrastructure projects have benefited the island, others proved to be costly white elephants that forced Sri Lanka into a debt trap. On many occasions, Chinese state corporations enticed the Rajapaksa regime into accepting non-concessional loans from Chinese state-owned banks to fund unsolicited projects using Chinese expertise, materials, and labor. These opaque transactions enabled politicians to pocket massive commissions.

The overpriced projects left Sri Lanka owing China around \$8 billion, or around 10 percent of the island's total debt. That is close to what Sri Lanka owes Japan and India, but what rankles many is how Chinese loans have been used to fund questionable projects that generate little income. The situation has fueled accusations that China seeks to entice strategically located countries (others include Djibouti and the Maldives) into debt traps that it then leverages to seize control of key infrastructure.

Three Chinese projects in Sri Lanka have drawn the world's attention. The first is the Hambantota Port, located in Rajapaksa's hometown, which his government first asked India to consider building. The Indians calculated that the project would cost around \$850 million but would not be economically viable for either country. When they turned down the request, Rajapaksa approached China, which built it for around \$1.3 billion. Unable to service the debt on the port, the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government worked out a debt-for-equity swap that resulted in the port being leased to the Chinese for 99 years.

The second Chinese project that has caused concern, especially for India and the United States, is the Colombo Port City Complex, which is being

built on reclaimed land and stems from an unsolicited bid. China Harbor Engineering Company is investing around \$1.4 billion and in return will be given 116 hectares on a 99-year lease (with Sri Lanka controlling the other livable 52 hectares).

Certain provisions in the agreement were designed in ways that compromised the island's territorial integrity. For instance, China was slated to acquire 20 hectares as freehold land, and there were rumors that the Chinese who settled in the Port City would have access to a court system beyond standard Sri Lankan jurisdiction. The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government persuaded China to drop the freehold provision, but the massive project continues to arouse suspicion—partly because it is not clear how Sri Lanka will come up with the money to develop its portion, and also because some believe China will use it as a base to spy on Indian and Western military activities. India clearly views the Port City as a threat to its regional preponderance and asked the Rajapaksa government to halt it, to no avail.

The third Chinese-built project that has drawn scrutiny is the Mattala Rajapaksa Airport, near Hambantota. It is widely known as “the world's emptiest airport” since hardly any planes fly there. Unable to pay back its loan, the Sri Lankan government seems set to give India a 70-percent stake in the airport as part of a joint venture. New Delhi does not expect to make a profit from this; it merely seeks a vantage point from which to monitor what takes place at the Hambantota Port.

Wickremesinghe appears intent on balancing against China's presence in Sri Lanka by accommodating India's concerns. Consequently, India now controls a large stake in the oil depot at Trincomalee, a highly strategic location because of its natural harbor. Sri Lanka also looks ready to allow India to develop the Jaffna Peninsula's Kankesanthurai harbor into a commercial port. Wickremesinghe and many in the UNP are willing to let the Indians have a stake in developing Colombo's East Container Terminal, offsetting the South Terminal run by China Merchant Holdings International, though Sirisena and others oppose the move.

It appears that China's spreading tentacles in Sri Lanka's south are causing India to consolidate its presence, especially in the northeast. This may be welcomed by Tamils, but a larger Indian footprint will inevitably raise Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist hackles.

When the October constitutional crisis erupted, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first world leader to congratulate Rajapaksa on his appointment as prime minister, even though it is clear that India would prefer to work with Wickremesinghe. The Chinese ambassador was the first diplomat to meet with Rajapaksa, and subsequently also visited Wickremesinghe. Rajapaksa had visited India to meet with Modi in September 2018, and in February 2019 he visited India again, as leader of the opposition, to deliver a lecture.

India knows that it will have to work with a Prime Minister Rajapaksa, so it too appears to be recalibrating the relationship. Given the investments India and China have made on the island, Sri Lanka will have no choice but to strike a balance between the two Asian giants.

DYNASTY REDUX?

Rajapaksa has groomed his oldest son Namal to become president, but he cannot run for that office until he turns 35 (thanks to another clause in the 19th Amendment), which will not happen until after the next election. While the SLPP has yet to settle on a presidential candidate, Mahinda Rajapaksa is likely to become prime minister following the upcoming parliamentary elections. Since the prime minister's office now enjoys more powers, this will allow him to rebuild the political dynasty that many thought was shattered when Sirisena defeated him in 2015.

What's good for the Rajapaksas and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists bodes ill for the island's minorities and democracy. The transitional justice process has moved all too slowly under the current government, but it will likely be put in abeyance, if not discarded altogether, should the Rajapaksas return to power. In that case, the quest for limited devolution and accommodation of legitimate Tamil grievances will also be thwarted, and anti-Muslim sentiment is likely to be whipped up for political gain.

Comments by Rajapaksa suggest he now realizes that he made a mistake by keeping India at arm's length and cozying up to China during his second term. But Rajapaksa's authoritarian predilections will probably lead him to again draw closer to China, which is eager to promote its authoritarian governance model as part of a post-democratic world order. Unfortunately for Sri Lanka's long-suffering people, the island's immediate future may mimic its recent past. ■

“The Taliban are no longer a shadowy insurgency; they are now a full-fledged parallel political order.”

The Taliban’s War for Legitimacy in Afghanistan

ASHLEY JACKSON AND FLORIAN WEIGAND

More than seventeen years after their fall from power, the Taliban control large swaths of territory in Afghanistan. While they continue to fight the Afghan government and the international forces that support it, they are also the de facto governing authority for many Afghans. The Taliban are no longer a shadowy insurgency; they are now a full-fledged parallel political order. They have increasingly sought local support so as to portray themselves as having more legitimacy to rule than the government they are at war with. With talks now well underway between the Taliban and the United States to secure a drawdown of US forces, it is clear that the movement will be a force in Afghan politics for the foreseeable future.

The emergence of the Taliban in the mid-1990s was the product of a specific moment in Afghan history. The Taliban of today, fighting a US-led occupation and contending with a population that is far more educated and connected with the outside world, is a very different movement than the one that ruled Afghanistan two decades ago.

Afghanistan has been at war since 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded and occupied the country. When Soviet forces withdrew in 1989, the mujahideen—the guerrilla factions that had forced their retreat—turned on one another and plunged the country into civil war. The Taliban were initially a rural uprising of religious students and former fighters disillusioned with the anarchy, rape, and pillage perpetrated by the mujahideen. Their original objectives were to rid their country of abusive commanders and to restore law and order under a pure Islamic government.

After the Taliban seized power in 1996, they became infamous for their harsh treatment of women. Their harboring of al-Qaeda rendered them a pariah state; following al-Qaeda’s September 2001 attacks on the United States, it resulted in the US-led invasion that toppled their regime. Key Taliban figures, including the group’s leader Mullah Omar, attempted to surrender when it became clear that the regime was finished, but were mostly rebuffed by the Americans. Some were arrested and sent to the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; others fled to Pakistan, where they later regrouped as an insurgency. Many minor Taliban members returned to their home villages to lead quiet lives.

Taliban leaders in Pakistan began sending small infiltration teams across the border into southern Afghanistan sometime around 2004, to lay the groundwork for insurgent operations and reforge old alliances. In 2005, Jalaluddin Haqqani’s old mujahideen faction switched sides from the government to the Taliban. This allowed the movement to expand its reach into Haqqani territory in the southeast and gave it greater logistical and operational capacities. Violence rapidly escalated in 2006, when the Taliban orchestrated an average of 12 armed attacks and 4 remotely detonated bombings every day—triple and double the previous year’s rate, respectively.

The situation continued to deteriorate. The temporary US troop surge that began in late 2009, ordered by President Barack Obama in concert with NATO allies, only escalated the conflict. Despite being confronted with this heavy military pressure and the death of Mullah Omar in 2013 (which the group kept secret for more than two years), the Taliban have consistently shown remarkable resilience and the ability to adapt while avoiding fragmentation or disintegration.

ASHLEY JACKSON is a research associate at the Overseas Development Institute. FLORIAN WEIGAND is a fellow in the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

After the drawdown of the US troop surge was completed in 2014, the Taliban expanded and consolidated their reach. Between 2015 and 2018, the number of districts they control or influence doubled, according to the US special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction.

BROAD TENT

Part of the Taliban's strength lies in accommodating a wide range of factions and actors, with diverse interests, under the broader tent of the movement. The Taliban is led by an emir, currently Sheikh Haibatullah Akhundzada. The emir has two deputies: Mullah Omar's son, Mullah Yaqub, and Jalaluddin Haqqani's son, Sirajuddin Haqqani. The emir is advised by a supreme leadership *shura*, or council, comprising key figures from across the movement's ideological and geographic spectrum. While the Taliban include various personality-based factions that at times come into conflict with one another and vie for greater power and resources, acrimonious splits have been exceedingly rare.

Beneath this senior leadership layer is a military commission with regional commands, as well as a dozen or so civilian commissions akin to ministries, covering everything from health and education to finance and media relations. Senior leadership structures are based in Pakistan, primarily in Quetta but also in Peshawar. The division of labor is partly geographic: operations under Quetta's supervision cover the south, southwest, west, and northwest of Afghanistan, while Peshawar has responsibility for the eastern, northeastern, southeastern, and central regions. This is an outgrowth of the Taliban's decentralized regional command *shuras* from the early years of the insurgency; the two centers of gravity endure as power bases, even as the movement has become more coherent as a whole.

Inside Afghanistan, regional- and provincial-level military structures exist alongside civilian ones. A given district will have Taliban officials for military operations, recruitment, and intelligence as well as health directors, tax collectors, judges, education monitors, and officials responsible for negotiating aid access with nongovernmental organizations. While some level of Taliban governance existed as early as 2006 in the form of shadow governors and judges, it was not until nearly a decade later that these ruling structures functioned in any systematic or consistent way. Today, the high-level commissions governing each sector are increasingly effective. There are clear chains of

command from the leadership based in Pakistan down to villages in Afghanistan, and policies that they are able to implement. Of course, there are also regional variations and some degree of local differentiation.

Capacity to govern became a necessity as the Taliban regained territory and influence. Estimates vary, but according to the most reliable figures the Taliban control or have influence over around 60 to 70 percent of Afghanistan. While the major cities remain under government control, the Taliban hold sway over vast areas of the countryside. Estimates of their fighting strength are approximate at best, ranging between 70,000 and 100,000 armed men. These estimates do not include the unknown number of civilian administrators.

The Taliban's safe havens in Pakistan have become less important as they have extended their hold on Afghan territory and expanded their resource base, but Pakistan has nonetheless played a critical—if muddled—role in the post-2001 Taliban's resurrection. Elements associated with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) provided significant financial, logistical, and technical aid to the movement, particularly in the early years of the insurgency. But the relationship is fraught: the ISI detained key Taliban leaders who were engaged in early peace talks with the United States, and has generally sought to exert coercive control over a movement with an independent agenda. The Taliban rank and file are almost uniformly resentful of Pakistan's influence over the group and Afghanistan's internal affairs in general.

Estimates of the Taliban's annual budget range from \$500 million to \$2 billion, but these sums are difficult to trace or verify. The core of Taliban financing is the opium trade. While the Taliban banned poppy cultivation during their reign in the 1990s, they have profited handsomely from it as an insurgency. Despite billions spent by the international community on countering narcotics since 2001, the Afghan poppy crop is the source for 70–90 percent of the world's heroin trade and generates an estimated \$2 billion annually. The Taliban also raise revenue by taxing entities ranging from large telecommunications and construction companies to farmers taking their harvest to market. They even collect on the state electricity company's bills in many areas they control, netting millions annually.

SHADOW GOVERNMENT

In order to construct local legitimacy, the Taliban draw on people's frustrations with the Af-

ghan government and the international forces. Air strikes that kill civilians and invasive night raids into the homes of ordinary people have helped the Taliban promote a strategic narrative that depicts them as liberators fighting against anti-Islamic occupation forces and a puppet regime in Kabul. The United Nations estimates that over 3,000 Afghan civilians have been killed in air strikes since 2009.

The Taliban also benefit from frustration with the rampant corruption that has permeated the government and almost all aspects of daily life in Afghanistan. After 2001, US financial support enriched local commanders, many of whom had been routed by the Taliban in the 1990s. These warlords have diverted money from reconstruction projects and government funds. Today, their wealth, networks, and control over parts of the armed forces and the government allow them to act with impunity. Local militias (*Arbakai*) associated with these figures are widely seen as abusive and extortive. The Taliban found their pathway to success in the 1990s by promoting themselves as a popular movement fighting corrupt warlords who were exploiting ordinary people. This narrative continues to be powerful.

The Taliban's attention to governance supports their narrative of a fight against corrupt elites. This aspect has become particularly important as the Taliban have gained greater territorial control and influence. In order to gain legitimacy, they must demonstrate that they have something to offer beyond violent resistance to what they see as a US occupation.

Alongside the Taliban's military wing, their sophisticated system of parallel governance has spread across the country, collecting taxes, regulating government-provided health care and education, and dispensing justice. In taking over these functions, the Taliban seek to capitalize on the Afghan government's weaknesses to further undermine its legitimacy. However, the reality on the ground is complex. Afghans living in areas where the Taliban are present have little choice but to obey their rules. "At least they are less corrupt" is a common refrain among civilians in such areas, but they also frequently tell stories of Taliban abuses and intimidation.

Despite billions of dollars in foreign assistance, the Afghan Ministry of Education is still one of the most corrupt and dysfunctional government

departments. One in twelve schools is a "ghost school" that exists only on paper, and teacher absenteeism is widespread. Taliban education monitors coerce teachers into showing up and observe their work, forcing the removal of those who fail to perform to their standards. They have removed subjects seen as "un-Islamic," such as civic education, from the curriculum, and banned a culture textbook that included a photo of female police officers. They have also introduced religious education into schools and prevented girls from attending secondary school in many areas under their control.

A particularly important element of the Taliban's shadow governance structure is the provision of justice. Government courts are often available only in district or provincial centers, resulting in high transportation costs for people from more rural areas. Cases tend to drag on for years. Bribery is rife, if not a requirement to get a case settled; often the party that pays the most money or has better connections to the official involved is likely to win the case.

By contrast, Taliban courts have a reputation for being accessible, fast, cheap, and fairer, or at least less corrupt, than their government counterparts. In many districts, the Taliban deploy judges who hold session

once or twice a week. Their court system reaches far beyond the area they can be said to control: some people who live in areas that are only under Taliban influence or in cities under government control may still bring their cases to the Taliban courts. They do not necessarily support or favor the Taliban, but may feel that they have no viable alternative.

For instance, if two families cannot agree on who owns a certain piece of land, they can go to a Taliban court on one of the scheduled days in a nearby village. If only one party requests a ruling, the judge will ask both sides to appear at the next court date with documents or witnesses that support their position—and will reach a decision by the end of that day. Bribes are less common than they are in government courts, and a party who disagrees with a verdict can request that an appeals court hear the case.

Few appear to do so, however, probably for fear of incurring the anger of the Taliban judge whose decision they wish to reverse. Many Afghans say the quickness of rulings is an asset but also raises

*In most areas under
their control, the
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questions. The efficiency and consistency of these courts provide a certain level of predictability, albeit sometimes at the cost of due process. Taliban justice may be swift and relatively accessible, and better than the alternative, but it is not necessarily well-informed or just. There is also a significant difference in the handling of civil cases, like land disputes, and criminal cases. Criminal punishments include amputations, beatings, and public shamings, and those convicted of “spying” are routinely executed.

The Taliban also collect taxes far beyond the borders of areas in which they have achieved territorial dominance. There is a high degree of coercion involved, and most people have little alternative but to pay. But Taliban taxes are often seen as more predictable and less onerous than the fees and bribes levied by government officials or at pro-government checkpoints. Along with ordinary people, the Taliban now often tax Afghan corporations, construction firms, and aid agencies in many areas, bringing in steady revenues.

The Taliban’s strategy is to gradually increase their control over society. They use their parallel governance system to keep people at least marginally satisfied and boost perceptions of their legitimacy. This, in combination with their coercive power, secures the population. The Taliban provide services against a backdrop of violence targeting those who pose a threat to them, whether it is the summary execution of Afghan security forces personnel or spectacular attacks in cities that also kill civilians. Such violence sends a warning to the the civilian population.

THREAT PERCEPTION

There are a number of dividing lines in how the Taliban are perceived, whether geographic, economic, or ethnic and tribal. Most crucially, there is a divide between major cities, particularly Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif, and more rural and remote parts of the country. Particularly in urban areas, the lives of many have improved considerably since 2001. These are also the places that suffered the brunt of Taliban brutality in the 1990s. In these areas, the Taliban are often described as a threat to Afghanistan that originates in Pakistan, or as a movement primarily made up of Pakistani madrassa students. They are depicted as foreigners

or proxies of foreign governments rather than real Afghans, and thus delegitimized.

Others struggle to understand why the international forces cannot defeat the Taliban. They see the Taliban’s resurrection as part of a grand strategy orchestrated by the United States that aims at undermining Afghanistan’s stability. In this narrative, the Taliban’s purported role as a US pawn or proxy also renders them illegitimate.

However, considering the Taliban’s level of control and influence in Afghanistan today, it is hardly accurate to characterize them as something “external.” The extent of their control does not rest only on force and coercion. The Taliban have a domestic support base; its core comprises those who have suffered most in the conflict and have been profoundly marginalized by the post-2001 political settlement. In most areas under their control, the Taliban are local people. They are from the same villages that they rule, which gives them a deep understanding of the specific local context and the people’s problems, grievances, and expectations.

People in places like Kabul have better access to education, health care, and government employment. They can more easily participate in the democratic process. Corruption also matters in the cities, of course, undermining the

state’s legitimacy. For instance, government jobs often can be obtained only through personal networks or bribes, resulting in the marginalization of those who lack the right networks and financial means. Even so, most do not consider the Taliban a viable alternative—for historical, ideological, political, and cultural reasons.

Just as the Taliban seek to undermine the Afghan government by delivering basic services, they also aim to do so through violence. Attacks on security forces and government offices in supposedly safe cities like Kabul have a high symbolic value. They enable the Taliban to illustrate their power and undermine the legitimacy of the state. These attacks serve as a warning to those siding with the government, and demonstrate that it is incapable of protecting the people even in its remaining strongholds. Even among those who are existentially opposed to the Taliban returning to power, such attacks chip away at their confidence in and support for the government.

In the context of the current peace talks, other fears are growing. People in places like Kabul

*Capacity to govern became
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are worried about losing the freedoms they have gained since 2001 if the Taliban reimpose their harsh rule of the late 1990s. A particular concern is what may happen to women's rights if the Taliban become part of a new government, extending their influence over Kabul and the other urban centers.

At least in theory, the Afghan constitution grants equal rights to women. While this has not translated into general practice, women today play an important role in all sectors of society—at least in Kabul and other major urban areas. Walking through Kabul, it is easy to find coffeehouses filled with young people, including many women.

The Taliban's approach to women's rights remains deeply conservative, even though their policy is not consistent and varies across the country. In general, the freedoms of women living under Taliban rule—even in already conservative rural areas—are significantly curtailed. More broadly, the variance in the Taliban's approach to women's rights reflects how different rural communities in Afghanistan think about the role of women. While some rural areas are more progressive, large parts of the countryside remain conservative. This mindset stands in stark contrast to the more educated and liberal communities within Kabul and other major urban areas.

The diversity of experiences, views, traditions, and practices in Afghanistan is often overlooked. It is a deeply divided country, and this divide is at the root of the conflict.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

When they ruled the country, the Taliban were notoriously closed to outsiders and shrouded in mystery. They shunned major media; access to their top leadership, particularly Mullah Omar, was closely guarded. Their relative openness and media savvy as an insurgency have marked a substantial shift from the 1990s. Early on, they established a fairly sophisticated media operation that began to produce an English-language website with regular press releases, readily responded to press inquiries via cell phone and messaging apps, and spread their propaganda on social media platforms like Twitter.

The Taliban have increasingly sought to engage with the international community. While many remain reluctant to deal directly with the Taliban, the UN and aid organizations engage with them on humanitarian and human-rights concerns. Mullah Omar issued a letter in 2007 ordering Taliban

fighters to facilitate polio vaccinations and calling on parents to have their children vaccinated “for the benefit of our next generations.” This proclamation was an outcome of negotiations with the UN at a time when few entities were willing to engage with the Taliban at all. While this kind of humanitarian dialogue does not bestow official recognition on the group (in the UN's view, at least), it does implicitly recognize that Taliban support is required for achieving international priorities such as eradicating polio in Afghanistan.

In 2011, Taliban representatives began a confidential, routine dialogue with representatives from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on civilian casualties—a dialogue that was initiated by the Taliban. They have consistently referred to civilian casualties caused by international and Afghan government forces as a justification for their operations, despite the fact that the Taliban themselves have long been responsible for the majority of civilian deaths.

The UN estimates that armed opposition groups are responsible for 23,050 civilian deaths since 2009 (when it started keeping records), nearly four times the number attributed to pro-government forces. In its latest report, the UN said 2018 was the deadliest year so far for civilians, with 3,804 deaths.

Whether the Taliban have taken any steps to spare civilians is unclear; the number of civilian casualties attributed to them has consistently increased year after year. However, they have publicly cited the talks with the UN to support their claims that they are attempting to protect civilians. The Taliban pursue this kind of dialogue because it confers on them some form of recognition by the international community, however limited that might be, and deflects criticism of the harm they are causing to civilians on the ground.

A pivotal shift in international legitimacy came in 2013, when the Taliban opened a political office in Doha, Qatar. The office was opened with the consent of the United States, after a long series of secret talks among the Taliban and the Qatari and US governments. The Taliban soon moved their political commission to Qatar. The office initially stirred controversy and then languished for years, as once hopeful prospects for peace talks faltered. Nonetheless, their Doha presence gave the Taliban an accessible address, free from Pakistan's control and located outside the conflict zone.

Talks are now underway between the United States and the Taliban. The Trump administration, eager to end the war and bring the troops home,

appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation in September 2018. Khalilzad has advanced the talks rapidly. The Taliban's key demand is the withdrawal of US troops, and most Taliban fighters will be ready to lay down arms if this condition is met. It has long been clear that the Taliban are willing to meet the core US demands of renouncing al-Qaeda and pledging not to give foreign terrorist groups safe harbor in Afghanistan. The Taliban for some time have been fighting against factions of the Islamic State that emerged in Afghanistan.

At least a partial US withdrawal looks all but agreed; in December 2018, President Donald Trump reportedly ordered the pullout of half the remaining 14,000 US troops in the country. The future of Afghanistan, however, looks more precarious than ever. The real question now is whether the parties to the conflict can broker an intra-Afghan settlement that will ensure stable governance in the future. There are clear ide-

logical differences between the Taliban and the various factions that comprise the Afghan government, and those factions are increasingly divided. The Taliban continue to refuse to engage with the government in any formal talks.

The Taliban's success is not only a setback for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the international community, which has supported the government with more than \$100 billion in aid over the past seventeen years. The Taliban's increasing international legitimacy and the progress in the peace talks pose a threat to those Afghans who have benefited most from the post-2001 government. A peace agreement with the Taliban threatens to erase what they have achieved, including the country's slow transition toward democracy and the modest acceptance of women's rights. While the Taliban are willing to talk to the United States to secure the withdrawal of foreign forces, it is less clear whether they will be able to come to an agreement with their Afghan adversaries. ■

“Myanmar has consolidated its impunity, making its crimes a *fait accompli*. To do so, it first destabilized the legitimacy of the Rohingya as a group . . . ”

The Making of the Rohingya Genocide and Myanmar’s Impunity

C. CHRISTINE FAIR

In the district of Cox’s Bazar on Bangladesh’s southeast coast, as far as the eye can see, the Rohingyas’ immiseration stretches across a sea of camps consisting of fragile huts protected by tarps. These refugees from Myanmar stand in endless lines for the most basic of rations, like water. Men and women, young and old, healthy and infirm alike carry as much of this precious cargo on their backs as they can over long distances, walking in flip-flops or on bare feet. Their bodies bear the signs of malnourishment and exhaustion. Electricity is provided by small sets of portable solar panels that have sprung up to charge cell phones or car batteries, which in turn fuel modest lights after dark. Children work or languish near their mothers, who take care of the tasks necessary for survival.

The United Nations has said it needs some \$920 million in the coming year for the 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh—most of it for critical aid such as food, water, shelter, and sanitation. The remainder is for health care, children’s protection, and camp maintenance. But few donors are coughing up the cash.

While the world appears indifferent to this man-made tragedy, the Rohingya survivors of Myanmar’s ethnic cleansing wait in Bangladesh for some resolution of their fate. Will they be able to return to their homes and live safely? Will they have to stay in Bangladesh forever? Is there a third option yet to materialize?

They have weathered monsoon flooding, ungodly heat, and global apathy while Bangladesh begrudgingly shoulders the burden of sheltering them and the international community struggles

to pay the bills. Myanmar has evaded responsibility for the ethnic cleansing done thus far, even as it continues to carry out a genocide against the 200,000 or so Rohingya who remain in the country, denying them life-saving aid and pressing on with military operations that snuff out their villages.

As time passes, Myanmar has consolidated its impunity, making its crimes a *fait accompli*. To do so, it first destabilized the legitimacy of the Rohingya as a group with a long history in the country. Second, it has taken advantage of global Islamophobia to characterize the Rohingya as Islamists and terrorists, and has allied with countries that share this antipathy toward Muslims for domestic political reasons. Finally, it has capitalized on regional rivalries to render the Rohingya the quarry of the newest Great Game in the East.

The result of all this is that Bangladesh—one of the most densely populated countries in the world—will likely be hosting the largest Rohingya refugee population for the foreseeable future. And this will send a terrible message to aspiring genocidal regimes: Under the right conditions, you can get away with mass murder.

HISTORY DENIED

Utter the word “Rohingya” in Myanmar and you quickly learn that it rankles even those with the slightest sympathy for the people known by that name. The Buddhist majority avers that this appellation is a neologism deployed by an interloper group—whom they prefer to call “Bengalis”—to establish a unique ethnic identity as well as a historical lineage within Myanmar which Buddhists reject. At the same time, Bangladeshis reject the notion that the Rohingyas are fellow Bengalis and are equally adamant that these people—by whatever name—belong in Myanmar. While I have no

C. CHRISTINE FAIR is an associate professor of security studies at Georgetown University and a Current History contributing editor.

the 1960 election campaign. To appeal to Buddhists, former Prime Minister U Nu promised that Rakhine would be granted the status of an ethnic state, which other major ethnic areas had received under the first constitution. But he also pledged to create an autonomous zone within Rakhine, in an appeal to Muslim voters.

The plan to grant statehood to Rakhine was aborted by a 1962 coup but surfaced again in 1973, when the junta convened consultations on a new constitution. It ultimately made Rakhine a separate state, but without any autonomous area for the Mayu frontier and its Muslim residents.

The Muslims of Rakhine subsequently came under various forms of renewed pressure. During the 1971 war in East Pakistan, many Bengalis sought refuge in Myanmar. While most (17,000) returned home after the war to a newly independent Bangladesh, some remained. This exacerbated concerns about growing Muslim clout in the Buddhist-majority state.

The new military junta viewed Muslims with suspicion—and with electoral politics suspended, there was no need to consider their sentiments. A brutal 1977 operation called “Dragon King,” targeting illegal immigration in Rakhine, precipitated bouts of communal violence that forced some 200,000 Rakhine Muslims to flee to Bangladesh. Under pressure from the military dictatorship in Bangladesh, most returned within a year.

The junta in Myanmar enacted a new citizenship law in 1982, which further vitiated Muslims’ legal rights in Rakhine and beyond—as did another military coup, in 1988. In 1991, the junta deployed troops to northern Rakhine and confiscated Muslim agricultural land to feed its troops and establish encampments. Forced labor and arbitrary taxes were imposed. Under these draconian conditions, nearly a quarter of a million Muslims once again fled to crowded camps in Bangladesh.

During parts of this history, there were some Rohingya who fought back. In 1974, ostensibly inspired by Islamist movements elsewhere in the world, the Rohingya Patriotic Front formed but soon split into several ineffective factions. Perhaps its most important and well-known successor was the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), which formed in 1982 but split in 1986, giving rise to the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF). The RSO and the ARIF formed a loose alliance in 1998,

known as the Arakan Rohingya National Organization.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, RSO maintained bases in Bangladesh along the border but had no presence in Myanmar itself. In what may have been its deadliest attack, in April 1994, several dozen fighters infiltrated Maungdaw township from Bangladesh and detonated several bombs that killed many civilians. The RSO never enjoyed much support within Myanmar and was largely defunct by the end of the twentieth century, though it retained some organizational structure in Bangladesh and remained capable of occasional small-scale attacks on Myanmar’s security forces.

A restless peace perdured in Rakhine, with notable exceptions of anti-Muslim violence in 2001. However, things changed in 2010. Buddhists were enraged by a pledge made by the junta’s Union Solidarity and Development Party to grant Rakhine Muslims citizenship ahead of multiparty elections in which they would be allowed to vote.

The communal tensions were pushed to the breaking point in May 2012 when several Muslim men raped and killed a Buddhist woman. The crime catalyzed violence in the northern part of the state and in and around the provincial capital of Sittwe. Later that June, ten Muslims were murdered by a mob in central Myanmar after an anonymous campaign of inflammatory anti-Muslim flyers.

As violence spread, including some attacks perpetrated by Muslims against Buddhists, the government declared a state of emergency and deployed additional troops to enforce it. A modicum of order obtained for a few months. Still, according to government figures, several hundred people were killed or injured; more than 5,000 homes, mostly belonging to Rohingya, were destroyed; and 75,000 people—again mostly Rohingya—were displaced.

Another wave of widespread violence occurred in October 2012, with well-coordinated and targeted assaults on Muslims in general, including the ethnic Kaman group. Again, the vast majority of the 32,000 displaced persons were Muslims, compared with a few hundred Rakhine Buddhists. Following these assaults, some 140,000 people were placed in overcrowded camps in Rakhine while others were subject to harsh rules that denied them free movement.

*During parts of this history,
there were some Rohingya
who fought back.*

The United Nations reported that as of December 31, 2018, there were some 128,000 Rohingya living in 24 camps across Rakhine, mostly near Sittwe. This is in addition to a ghetto known as Aung Mingalar where some 4,000 Muslims live inside Sittwe itself. Unable to leave to find jobs, food, or medicine, they are completely dependent on the international community—which Myanmar occasionally grants access, according to its whim.

CONJURING A JIHADIST MENACE

Some contemporary writers point to the 1940s, when some Rakhine Muslims used the title of “mujahid” and even sought incorporation into Pakistan, for evidence of long-standing Islamist tendencies in Rohingya politics. This is an ahistorical and selective reading of events. While fighters used the “mujahid” appellation, that was not atypical of the colonial period. The guerrillas used this term simply to describe their own Muslim identity. At no point did they seek to install an Islamist regime.

Numerous Muslim Rohingya leaders demanded that the rebels lay down their arms, arguing that there was no justification for jihad (from which the word mujahid derives) and claiming that the majority of the Rohingya were themselves victims of the guerrillas. Some Rohingya leaders appealed to the government of Burma (in 1948, 1950, and 1951) for arms to fight the rebels, but were rebuffed. Due to the government’s enervated response, many of the Rohingya were forced to aid the rebels against their will.

The uprising ended in 1961, after cease-fires and the eventual defeat of the 300 or so surviving rebels. To preclude future insurrections, the government established the Mayu Frontier Administration in 1961 and put northern Arakan under direct military control. The army retained this administrative control over the Rohingya after the military coup in 1962.

While the Muslims of Rakhine state have long been rendered stateless and subject to deprivation of basic human—not to mention civil—rights, what has generally been noted is that they refrained from violent mobilization, with the exception of such small-scale and ineffectual uprisings. This appeared to change in October 2016, when a previously unheard-of group, Harakah al-Yaqin (Movement of Faith), conducted several high-

profile attacks against Myanmar’s Border Guard Police headquarters and two other bases. The military responded by launching brutal counter-insurgency operations. Tens of thousands of Rohingya again fled to Bangladesh and elsewhere, after which security forces burned their homes.

The insurgent organization subsequently rebranded itself as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), dropping the Islamist connotations of its old name. Whereas previous Rohingya militias were based in the hills along the border and launched hit-and-run attacks from sanctuaries in Bangladesh, ARSA was based in Rohingya villages within Myanmar and had a cellular structure led by local religious leaders (*maulvis*).

In August 2017, ARSA set the stage for today’s tragedy when it executed a complex attack on 30 police posts and an army base in Rakhine, which resulted in the deaths of at least 59 insurgents and 12 security forces personnel. In response, the military mobilized to conduct mass atrocities that the United Nations has declared to be tantamount

to genocide. (Amnesty International also asserts that ARSA carried out at least one and possibly two massacres of nearly 100 Hindu women, men, and children as well as other atrocities in August 2017.)

ARSA’s most recent attack occurred on January 5, 2018, when the group targeted a vehicle with a remote-controlled mine and then staged an ambush; six soldiers and one civilian driver were injured. It has been quiescent since then.

ARSA’s leader, Atta Ullah, is a Rohingya Muslim born in Karachi, the Pakistani port city, to a Rohingya migrant father. When he was a young boy, his family moved to Mecca, where he studied in an Islamic school. Little is known about his subsequent path, but he seems to have departed Saudi Arabia in 2012 shortly after violence erupted in Rakhine.

While ARSA has had no discernible religious motivations, it legitimized its violence against the security forces in the name of Islam. It encouraged senior Rohingya and foreign clerics to issue fatwas declaring its campaign legal, in light of the state’s ongoing persecution of Muslims in Rakhine.

Myanmar contends, with scant evidence, that ARSA is an Islamist militant group that aims to undermine the Buddhist nature of the state. Some journalists and scholars have also warned that the

*The military junta
viewed Muslims
with suspicion.*

group could be the next jihadist menace. Dilating on Atta Ullah's ties to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, they assert that he is close to terrorist groups like Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Some have attempted to link him to Abdus Qadoos Burmi—a Pakistani of Rohingya descent, based in Karachi and linked to LeT, who has appeared in videos calling for jihad in Myanmar.

But analysts who allege that ARSA is an Islamist organization with ties to Pakistani and other international terrorists have failed to produce evidence beyond citing anonymous "intelligence sources," most of whom are said to be officials within the current Indian government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP is a Hindu chauvinist party with a long history of condoning discrimination against Muslims in India. The BJP's supporters—much like the Buddhist majority in Myanmar—allege that Muslims have a long-term plan to replace Hindus as the Indian majority. The BJP government has pledged to deport all Rohingya in India back to Myanmar, where they will face near-certain human rights abuses.

ARSA has consistently asserted that it is not seeking a separate state or the imposition of sharia law. In September 2017, the group said it wanted to "make it clear" that it had no "links to al-Qaeda, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, Lashkar-e-Taiba, or any transnational terrorist group."

Indeed, ARSA has nothing to gain and everything to lose by associating itself with any Islamist movement. Problematically for the group's messaging, though, its flag depicts all of Rakhine state. This makes Buddhists suspect that ARSA's agenda is not limited to securing the political conditions for the Rohingya to safely return, but that it conceals larger ambitions to gain dominance over the Buddhist-majority state.

Myanmar's claims about a potential Rohingya jihadist threat have been embraced by Russia and China, which have concerns about their own Muslim populations and appalling records of subjecting them to internment, torture, violence, and ethnic cleansing. At the level of global public opinion, there may be a certain reluctance to rec-

ognize Muslims as victims due to the wave of Islamophobia that has washed over the world since the events of 9/11 and, more recently, the rise of the Islamic State.

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

In the end, Myanmar has seemingly gotten away with genocide. It has profited from burgeoning international interest in the country as a consequence of the ruling junta's 2011 decision to make way for a modicum of civilian government, which led to the release of hundreds of political prisoners including the long-time opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Having recently lifted sanctions on Myanmar, the international community is not inclined to reinstate them. Even the United States, which has been the toughest on Myanmar, now has little appetite for sanctions, given the evolving economic and strategic high stakes in the country and the region. Myanmar's neighbors China and India are vying for access for their ambitious and competing connectivity projects, which include roads and pipelines.

Both Russia and China prize Myanmar as an important destination for weapons sales. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China is the largest supplier of arms to Myanmar; Russia is second. But Myanmar's military is wary of Chinese weapons because China also arms most of the other ethnic insurgencies challenging the writ of the government.

These geopolitical realities offer an important lesson for aspiring genocidal regimes: make sure your friends are important. With major stakeholders intent on their strategic interests, Myanmar has been able to escape accountability for the crimes committed thus far and to continue its campaign of ethnic cleansing. For Bangladesh, this effectively means that there will be no exit for the Rohingya. If the international community cannot muster the fortitude to compel Myanmar to alter its course and create the conditions for a safe and voluntary return of the refugees, it could at least have the decency to pick up the tab for sheltering them in the camps at Cox's Bazar. ■

The Death Wish in Pakistan's Aid Dependence

S. AKBAR ZAIDI

In the seven months since Imran Khan took office as Pakistan's prime minister, much of his time and energy has been spent on trying to manage the country's perpetual economic and financial problems. For him and his government, this primarily has meant visiting other countries with a begging bowl, hoping that they might offer some form of assistance.

These problems are perennial—it would be incorrect to call them a “crisis”—largely because of the Pakistani elite's ability to avoid taxing itself. Instead, successive governments have preferred to leverage Islamic militancy (ignoring the risks of doing so) while relying on financial aid from outside countries with geopolitical interests in the region and from international financial institutions. The Pakistani elite frightens foreigners into providing funds to stabilize the country against a self-created, false threat of extremists taking over a nuclear-armed state.

This is a classic moral hazard problem: the luxury of always being bailed out has allowed the Pakistani elite to live with great impunity, beyond responsibility, in cocoons of lavish unaccountability. They feel little need to undertake structural reforms of the economy and institutions that would result in a fairer, more just, and more equitable form of government and representation.

Now, however, as geopolitical changes are emerging in the region and internally as well, there are welcome signs that the too-important-to-fail ploy used so often by Pakistan's political and military elites might be losing its edge. Being a precarious nuclear state may no longer suffice. Adapting to these changes could require paying greater attention to internal reforms than to obtaining bailouts.

TAX AVERSION

In simple accounting terms, Pakistan's dependence on financial aid results from its failure to collect taxes sufficient to cover consumption and

investment expenditures. On the tax side, this arithmetic is fairly clear. Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio is around 11 percent, less than half a percent (1 million) of its 210 million citizens pay any income tax, and hugely regressive indirect and withholding taxes have become the main form of revenue collection.

Nearly 70 percent of those who are supposed to make the laws on taxation—elected members of Parliament—do not file income tax returns. Most enjoy lifestyles that would probably put them in the country's highest tax bracket. Imran Khan, a former cricket star whose political career has been based on crusading against corruption, owns a 37.5-acre estate in a section of Islamabad that is one of the most expensive locations in Pakistan. The property is worth more than \$7 million, yet he paid income tax of only 100,000 rupees (approximately \$714) in 2017, while declaring assets worth 3.8 billion rupees.

This is not to single out the prime minister; many of his predecessors and numerous influential lawmakers, as well as generals, judges, and other respected members of society, often end up on lists of those who have paid little or no income tax. Yet when someone who champions the anticorruption cause, and whose political party is called the Movement for Justice, has such a lax record of supporting equitable taxation, the social and ethical consequences run deep. Rather than simply a question of arithmetic, this becomes a matter of morality. The World Bank has estimated that only 20 percent of Pakistan's potential revenue is actually collected. The result is a permanent shortfall in resources.

The little revenue that the government collects ends up largely in two pockets: interest payments on loans to keep the country running and military-related expenditures, leaving barely a fifth for anything related to development. The political economy of defense, serving a false imperative largely concocted by the military, holds the country's economy, society, and foreign relations for ransom. The overly powerful military, always backed by foreign powers (notably the United States in

S. AKBAR ZAIDI is a Karachi-based political economist currently teaching at Columbia University.

times of its own need), has had a heavy influence on Pakistan's domestic politics and foreign policy.

In recent months, the military has forced a clampdown on what used to be a free media. There is ample evidence of censorship and threats to publishers and journalists. Military censors suppress news about certain organizations, such as the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, an ethnonationalist group seeking civil rights for the Pashtun minority. Many activists and bloggers, particularly from the Baloch and Pashtun ethnic groups, have been “disappeared” at the hands of military agencies.

Even in more mundane arenas such as the economy, the shadow of the military looms large. Military-owned corporations and economic interests often get preferential treatment and are believed to be lucrative.

In 2010, at a time when the military was relatively weak, the elected Parliament was able to enact a devolved model of fiscal resource-sharing, allowing the provinces greater control of their finances at the expense of the central pool of collected revenues. Having regained its political dominance since then, the military has questioned this redistribution enshrined in the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, making the case that it leaves insufficient resources for defense.

Attempts by the military to roll back these reforms so far have been resisted by Parliament.

Many other countries have lower social and human development indicators than Pakistan. What makes Pakistan's case unique is its severe lack of economic resources and the dominance of the political economy of defense. This creates the dependence on aid to fund development projects for which Pakistan's civilian and military elites do not provide the necessary revenue.

Foreign and international organizations are always willing to help. Even projects and interventions that focus on, say, polio eradication—Pakistan is one of only four countries where polio still exists—or resources for women's health, or poverty alleviation measures, end up being donor-funded, while Pakistan's untaxed elite enjoy the lifestyle of the global rich.

OLD AND NEW FRIENDS

The United States has long been Pakistan's largest aid donor. In the 72 years since Pakistan was founded, Washington has provided it with around

\$70 billion in publicly disclosed aid—though researchers have pointed out that this figure is on the low side, since a great deal of covert or military assistance may not be easily estimated. Some of this aid was given on humanitarian and developmental grounds, but much of it has served US strategic interests in South Asia and the Middle East.

The relationship began as a Cold War alliance in the mid-1950s. Pakistan was seen as a liberal, modern Muslim country—how times have changed!—often opposed to Soviet communism's expansion, and hence a key US ally. For many years, along with Egypt, Israel, and Jordan, Pakistan ranked among the leading recipients of American taxpayers' money. Over a long-running series of wars and military interventions, notably in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, Pakistan has continued to receive generous US assistance—some of it developmental, but mostly military. The flow of aid has contributed to strengthening the military's domestic hold on power.

Moreover, Washington's support is often reflected in its endorsement of Pakistan's applications for aid from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and

the World Bank. It helps to have the United States as an ally when it comes to seeking assistance from multilateral sources.

But now, as the geopolitical climate in the region and US priorities change, Washington's generosity may be waning. In his very first tweet of 2018, President Donald Trump signaled a shift in the relationship. He complained that the United States “has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!”

This accusation implicates Pakistan's military establishment far more than its civilian props. The same military leaders who were once seen as the champions of US interests in the region, and hence deserving of aid, are now viewed from the White House as cheats and liars. The scorn flows both ways: As prime minister, Khan said the United States was making Pakistan a scapegoat for its own failures in Afghanistan. When the Trump ad-

The luxury of always being bailed out has allowed the Pakistani elite to live with great impunity.

ministration suspended \$900 million in security assistance in January 2018, the Pakistani government called the United States “a friend who always betrays.”

As Trump censures Pakistan, others fill the void. One reason Pakistan’s military and political elites have been able to thumb their noses at the United States is that they have found not just one but two alternatives. The Chinese and the Saudis, both old allies of sorts, have stepped in with promises of more aid and investment over the next ten years than the cumulative total of US assistance over the past seven decades.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), part of China’s global Belt and Road Initiative, promises to bring Pakistan \$65 billion in investments, perhaps a fifth of which has already come through in the first five years after signing. CPEC involves building a road link from western China to the Pakistani port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea. It also includes industrial projects, power plants, railroads, and much more.

Meanwhile, opulent and garish displays indulged in by Pakistan’s elite during the recent visit of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, who came bearing promises (as opposed to hard cash) of \$20 billion in potential future investment, have been followed by a flutter of celebration. Pakistani Finance Minister Asad Umar repeatedly said that the country’s economic crisis was over.

ELITE BAILOUTS

The backdrop to this search for new saviors is a serious balance of payments crisis, which Khan’s government inherited but has made far worse through inaction, procrastination, and ineptitude.

Foreign reserves are down to the equivalent of about two months of imports. Desperate for resources to keep the economy afloat, Khan has traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, China, Turkey, and Malaysia, begging for financial assistance. He received \$6 billion from the Saudis and the UAE in cash and some more in deferred oil payments.

Even with aid coming in, the situation is dire. The rupee has depreciated by 34 percent over the past year, inflation has risen to 8.2 percent (the highest in almost five years), and the estimated GDP growth rate has been lowered to 4 percent this fiscal year from 5.8 percent last year (which was the highest in 11 years). There are no signs or prospects of any improvement.

So it is to the IMF that Pakistan turns, yet again—for its thirteenth loan since the 1980s. The IMF is the only institution willing to give Khan what he needs to stabilize the economy, an expected \$12 billion over three years. Before he became prime minister, Khan declared that he would prefer to commit suicide than take loans from the IMF and World Bank. Yet because of its failure to push through reforms, Pakistan finds itself still in the grip of its death wish—in a suffocating embrace of debt that comes with strict conditions of budget austerity, undermining the government’s promised social welfare initiatives and making the development indicators far worse.

Imran Khan probably won’t be committing suicide, but it is very likely that many of the working poor will be driven to the edge of living precariously as a result of the IMF program. The IMF’s conditions, however, will be enforced only for the duration of the program. Pakistan’s benefactors once again have proved willing to bail out its elite. ■

The Long Struggle to Master the Monsoon

ERIC TAGLIACCOZZO

Sunil Amrith's *Unruly Waters* is an accomplished, often haunting book. Amrith, a professor of history at Harvard University, is interested in the how, where, and why of Asia's modern relationship with water. As one can imagine, this is a huge topic. It is also a way of reframing how history is written, away from land-based destinies and more in tune with the realities of the environment—an approach that stretches beyond any putative boundaries of the nation-state. India is at the center of this book, and forms its core; but because water surrounds India, undergirds it, and passes through it both on land and through the air, the scope of the work is larger than just this one country.

Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts, and Seas Have Shaped Asia's History
Sunil Amrith
Basic Books, 2018

Early on in *Unruly Waters* Amrith explains the genesis of the term “monsoon” and its roots in Portuguese, Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu. The monsoon is the inescapable fact of life in southern Asia; it determines when there is too little water, and when there is too much. The former scenario is much in evidence in Amrith's book. He shows how a succession of indigenous dynasties and subsequently the British colonial administration tried to deal with this annual conundrum.

By the time the British “opened” the Ganges Canal in 1854, it was already 700 miles long. Earlier hands had started this project, trying to extend the availability of fresh water. In the Punjab as well, from the 1880s into the 1940s, the British built canal colonies in an attempt to settle millions of farmers near fresh water.

This struggle for water, as Amrith terms it, was vital, and part of everyday life. He shows in grim detail how parts of India were quite literally left in ruins by a succession of famines in the late nineteenth century. The absence of water equated to death for India's masses. These canal projects, whether instigated indigenously or by foreign-

ers, were attempts to respond to the fundamental problem of some areas periodically lacking enough water to support local populations.

This grim calculus swung the other way too. Amrith tells us about the Bengal cyclone of 1864, which terrorized the region. But this event was nothing compared with the storms that pounded the eastern seaboard of India in 1876, when districts along the Coromandel Coast and up toward the Hooghly River in Bengal suffered losses in the range of 40 to 50 percent of their entire populations. Village after village was wiped out.

Too little water could be followed by far too much. The end result was the same for India's laboring poor. As a consequence of this predicament, India started to build up its weather-reporting infrastructure. Amrith outlines a series of personalities who were instrumental in this endeavor. They are fascinating figures, all singular in their own right. Parts of the narrative are a kind of scientific prosopography (or collective biography) of a group that has not received much attention previously, so in and of itself this information is very valuable.

By the later decades of the twentieth century, these projects that began much earlier had evolved into far more sophisticated systems of meteorological observation, and the vagaries of nature were understood more intimately. Indian Ocean monitoring stations flourished, and by the 1980s, satellite and remote-sensing data were also being brought to bear in an effort to better predict nature's fury before it hit the country in annual appearances along the two seaboards.

The price for all of this knowledge has been high. Recent cyclones still inflicted horrendous damage on India—even in the space age we all inhabit, with satellites recording this destruction in real time and relaying it to the television screens of millions scattered across the world. This is a kind of postmodern addendum to the hundreds of

ERIC TAGLIACCOZZO is a professor of history at Cornell University.

years of patterns that Amrith identifies earlier in the book.

HAVES AND HAVE NOTS

Unruly Waters is lavishly illustrated: period photographs, maps, and drawings show us some of the things that Amrith is describing, and add to the overall value of the book. A map on page 178 shows the dispersion of India's dams, from Periyar in Kerala, in the far south, all the way up to Malakand at the very top of the country, right on the border with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tibet. Curiously, this map reveals that India's "soft middle" is the only part of the country which is fairly bereft of dams—a visual observation that tells us something of where some of the worst poverty lies. These are forgotten landscapes of a sort that crisscross the very heart of the nation.

Another map, on page 107, shows the pathways of two remarkable cyclones in 1891 and 1897. They started in Oceania, crossed the lower reaches of the South China Sea, bifurcated the Southeast Asian mainland through parts of Siam and Burma,

and eventually wound their way through the upper stretches of the Bay of Bengal before unleashing their fury on what is today West Bengal and Bangladesh. Geographic notations and rubrics were useless in tracking these events; the storms crossed through at least five putative subdivisions of what we now call "Asia" in their trajectory across the region.

But it is a simple drawing by a nineteenth-century scientist, who sketched from observation the formation of an Indian Ocean storm system, that stands out as perhaps the most powerful image in the book, at least to this reader. A horizon line girds the bottom of the drawing, representing the ocean; above it, pregnant with rain, hovers the beginning of a storm, all cloud and mist and potential. Would this storm give water to the parched plains of India? Or would it wreak havoc and destroy hundreds of thousands of lives? We don't know, and the man who observed it likely didn't know either when he was sketching this lovely picture. It is that uncertainty which appears on the page like a ghost—a specter ready to give

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Climate change is accelerating and efforts to reduce carbon emissions may not be enough. The question of adaptation will become ever more important. How are governments and local communities responding to the climate impacts that are already upon them? How can they adapt livelihoods and infrastructure to an invisible but potentially existential threat? In order to develop a panoramic view of the situation, *Current History* commissioned a series of articles to show how climate adaptation is progressing in each region of the world. The articles collected in this anthology first appeared in the journal in 2017–18.

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life or to give death, depending on how the meteorological conditions ended up evolving at that particular moment.

The writing in *Unruly Waters* is often no less beautiful than this last image I have described. Amrith knows how to tell a story; the narrative focus of the book is clear and easy to follow, because even as he crosses through different topics and emphases, he proceeds chronologically. Yet here and there Amrith allows us to see what appears to be his own melancholy about the whole idea of unruly waters, both in history and also as a focus for writing about people's lives. "To harvest water was to redistribute the inequalities of Nature," he says, an observation that is as pithy as it is true.

Amrith's approach is far from that of the earlier historian Karl Wittfogel and his once-influential theories on the hydraulic origins of "Oriental Despotism"—the title of his 1957 book, which postulated that rulers of various early civilizations (including India) had used control over irrigation to build dominant centralized states. Rather, Amrith develops a simple but effective elucidation of the reality that when it comes to water, there will be and always have been "haves" and

"have nots"—and societal disparities between the two camps are often just this stark.

Likewise, in looking at how nationalist ideologies in the region were bound up with hydraulic technologies at midcentury, Amrith suggests that "[d]am building, more than any other project, epitomized Asia's new leaders' confidence in their ability to tame nature." That rings true as well, and one can almost sense in Amrith's pages the alacrity with which Asian politicians worked in the 1950s toward harnessing the nation-building potential of these big projects. They did this as a measure of their growing political power, but also as a genuine statement of control over their own national destinies, after centuries of foreign rule.

In the last chapter of the book, Amrith tells us about the alarming contents of the Ganges, the holiest of rivers in Asia—used by millions of Indians daily, not just for prayer but for all aspects of life, both sacred and profane. "In 1984, the chemical pollutants that coursed through the holy Ganges reached such concentrations that a stretch of water caught fire: it became a river of flames." Part cautionary tale, part lament, this image shows us the way of the future of Asia's unruly waters, if all of us are not careful. ■

February 2019

INTERNATIONAL

Arms Control

Feb. 1—The Trump administration announces that the US is withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a 1987 US-Soviet pact. Russia announces the next day that it, too, is suspending participation in the treaty, which will terminate in 6 months unless the 2 sides agree to renew it. US officials have accused Russia of violating the treaty by developing a new cruise missile capable of reaching targets in Europe.

Indian Subcontinent

Feb. 14—A suicide car bomber rams a convoy and kills at least 40 paramilitary officers in Indian-controlled Kashmir, the deadliest attack in the contested region in 3 decades. Jaish-e-Muhammad, an Islamist militant group based in Pakistan, claims responsibility. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi blames Pakistan and vows that the perpetrators will “pay a very heavy price.”

Feb. 26—Indian warplanes attack an alleged Jaish-e-Muhammad training camp in northern Pakistan. Pakistan claims it shot down 2 of the intruding jets; Indian officials confirm that an Indian pilot is in Pakistani custody. It is the 1st such cross-border air strike since their 1971 war.

Feb. 28—Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, seeking to deescalate the crisis, says the captured Indian pilot will be released the next day. He warns of the dangers of “miscalculation” when both sides have nuclear weapons.

Korean Peninsula

Feb. 27—US President Donald Trump and North Korean ruler Kim Jong-un meet in Hanoi, Vietnam, for their 2nd summit meeting in less than a year. The talks abruptly end Feb. 28 with no agreement. Trump says Kim made an unacceptable demand that all US sanctions be lifted in return for North Korea dismantling a key nuclear facility but retaining other elements of its weapons program. North Korea says it asked for a partial lifting of sanctions in exchange for extending a freeze on testing.

CHINA

Feb. 4—International human rights organizations call on the United Nations to investigate mass imprisonment of members of the Uighur ethnic group in Xinjiang province in western China. As many as 1 million Muslim Uighurs have been sent to reeducation camps allegedly designed to eradicate their heritage. China claims the sites are vocational training facilities.

EL SALVADOR

Feb. 3—Nayib Bukele, 37, a former mayor of San Salvador and leader of the center-right Grand Alliance for National Unity, wins the presidency in the 1st round of voting with 54% of the vote. The candidates for the 2 parties that had traded power for the past 30 years were far behind, with the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance taking 32% and the leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front just 14%. Bukele campaigned on an anticorruption platform; the country has been plagued by organized crime.

IRAN

Feb. 13—A suicide car bomber kills at least 27 members of the Revolutionary Guard paramilitary force in an attack on a convoy in southeast Iran, 2 days after official commemorations of the Islamic revolution’s 40th anniversary.

Feb. 19—After initially blaming the US, Iranian officials say the attack was carried out by 3 Pakistanis. Iran has long accused Pakistan of harboring Sunni militants and separatists from its southeastern Sistan and Baluchistan province.

NIGERIA

Feb. 27—The national electoral commission announces that incumbent Muhammadu Buhari easily won a Feb. 23 presidential election with 56% of the vote. The election had been abruptly postponed a week earlier, hours before polls were originally scheduled to open, reportedly because of ballot distribution problems. Less than 36% of voters turn out for the rescheduled contest, and at least 39 are killed in election-day violence. After the results are released, runner-up Atiku Abubakar of the People’s Democratic Party calls the election a “sham” and vows to mount a legal challenge.

SPAIN

Feb. 12—The trial of 12 Catalan leaders on charges of rebellion, sedition, and other charges, in connection with an October 2017 independence referendum in the northeastern region of Catalonia, opens in a Madrid court. The defendants include former regional officials and civil society leaders.

Feb. 15—Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez calls a general election for April 28, less than a year after his Socialist party managed to form a government though it held less than a quarter of the seats in parliament. Spain’s 3rd national election in less than 4 years is precipitated by a parliamentary defeat of the Sánchez government’s proposed budget.

SUDAN

Feb. 22—Unable to quell protests that began in December, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who has held power since leading a 1989 coup, declares a yearlong state of emergency and dissolves the government. He also says he is shelving plans for a constitutional amendment that would allow him to run for a 3rd term when his current term ends in 2020. Under the state of emergency, state governors are replaced by military officers and unlicensed protests are banned.

SYRIA

Feb. 22—Trump administration officials now say the US will leave about 400 soldiers in eastern Syria, backtracking from Trump’s own December announcement that he was ordering the immediate withdrawal of all 2,000 US troops deployed in the country. Britain and France reportedly had threatened to withdraw their forces from Syria also unless the US retained a military presence there to continue supporting Kurdish-led militia operations against the Islamic State.

VENEZUELA

Feb. 4—European Union member states join the US, Canada, and most Latin American countries in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the nation’s legitimate interim president, citing the allegedly rigged 2018 reelection of incumbent Nicolás Maduro and his rejection of their demand that he call a new election.

Feb. 23—Amid violent clashes with protesters, pro-government forces block an attempt led by Guaidó to deliver humanitarian aid (mostly from the US) across the Colombian and Brazilian borders to Venezuelans suffering from hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine. ■

