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Excerpt from working Master's Thesis, "'There Won't Be Death Camps and Cattle Cars:' Anti-trans Policies and the Decline of Democracy in the United States"

By Sab Garduño

> *"These people had worked out a very simple solution to the problem of transgender people and the norms revolving public restrooms.*
> *They wanted transgender people to die.*
> *They were quite explicit about it, very blunt 'They should die.' That simple. That concise.*
> *'They should die'*
> *Let me be entirely clear about this – they knew what they were saying, they knew exactly what they wanted. They didn't want a trans man in the women's room. They wanted the trans man to be dead"*
> - Brynn Tannehill, *The Transgender Question.*

For a notable portion of the American polity, transgender people constitute an existential threat, one that is incompatible with their understanding of what it means to be 'American.' According to data from the Pew Research Center, thirty-two percent (32%) of Americans agree that greater acceptance of transgender people is "bad for society"; 65% of Republicans agree that acceptance of transgender people has been "bad for society," in addition to the 6% of Democrats (Brown). This view is influenced and encouraged by an increasingly powerful political coalition: the far-right. As of March of 2022, 238 bills targeting the political and social rights of queer Americans have been passed by conservative state legislatures. This is more than three every day. About half of these bills specifically target transgender people—particularly, through access to public bathrooms, the participation of transgender children in school sports, and access to gender-affirming healthcare (NBC News). Data from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Freedom for All Americans shows that nearly 670 bills of this kind have been filed since 2018. Legislation is not the only force actively harming one of the most vulnerable demographic groups in the country. Transgender Americans face higher poverty rates, healthcare

disparity, and labor discrimination and they are targets for violence and harassment and face increasing alienation from their communities.[1] This is not a coincidence.

Trans rights activist and fascism scholar Brynn Tannehill argues that this discursive and political attack on transgender people in the United States is "opening the Overton window wide enough to fit the Nuremberg laws through them, because, *what could be less American, less Christian, than transgender people?*" (emphasis mine). Judith Butler identifies the rise in bioessentialist 'anti-gender' behavior with "fears of infrastructural collapse, anti-migrant anger, and, in Europe, the fear of losing the sanctity of the *heteronormative family, national identity and white supremacy,*" which interpret gender play and deviance as a *"foreign invasion"* (emphasis mine). What does this mean? Butler argues that this ideological compulsion is a mechanism of nation-building seeking to preserve a nation "[built] upon white supremacy, the heteronormative family, and a resistance to all critical questioning of norms" (Butler). I frame my analysis following this argument, with an understanding of reactionary anti-trans attitudes as reflective of other—broader, perhaps bolder—concerns with regard to the "Nation." Why is it that the existence of transgender people threatens the Nation?

The attack on transgender people in the United States today is ideologically aligned with the political goals of the far-right and has significant similarities to actions taken by the Nazi party during the fall of the Weimar Republic (Tannehill). While comparisons to the Nazi regime are not scant, I focus on the fall of the Weimar Republic for this analysis because of three specific similarities: the attacks against Magnus Hirschfeld's research on gender and sexuality and criminalization of gender-affirming healthcare as "deviant" and in conflict with the Nation and its ideal subject; the normalization and legitimization of political exclusion through the law;

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[1]For more information see National Center for Transgender Equality. Transgender Americans face Staggering Rates of Poverty, and Violence. February 18, 2015.

and the condition of liberal democracy with a highly conservative judiciary and unstable

institutions. A similar analysis can be made of the United States today; there is a significant push

against recognized medical and scientific institutions that don't chastise gender-affirming

healthcare as an abomination; transgender subjects are positioned as either irrational and

confused (i.e., not actually trans) or un-American and therefore not deserving of rights,

narratives that are echoed in all areas of public life, from the legislature to the classroom; lastly, a

judiciary stacked with conservative judges is present, especially since 2016. In responding to the

increase in reactionary, far-right political collectives and policies in the United States, it is of

utmost importance to center those who are the most affected by these. Black feminist scholar

Kimberlé Crenshaw writes: "Why is the intersection of maleness and whiteness driving our

analysis and not the intersection of being a woman and a person of color?" I use Crenshaw's

framework as a guideline for my analysis and focus on transgender people in the United States,

with the understanding that any anti-fascist intellectual project should prioritize Black, queer,

and decolonial studies. Racist collective amnesia manages to disguise fascist policies embedded

in the American polity under liberal claims of "freedom," and "democracy," that primarily

benefit the white, economically secure, cisgender, heterosexual majority. White supremacy,

patriarchy, and capitalism sit at the very center of fascism and liberalism. In responding to the

imminent threat of democratic collapse, then, it is necessary to question and challenge these

normative systems of control. I demonstrate the linkages between fascist tendencies and

anti-transgender policies in the United States drawing on Black, queer, feminist, and decolonial

studies to develop my theoretical framework.

Following contemporary dialogues on trans people in American society, I set out to

analyze the attacks on transgender people in the United States today, understanding this as a

deliberate political choice made by the far-right and engaging its manifestation in the public and political spheres.

On May 10, 1933, Nazi students across Germany gathered to publically burn books deemed "un-German" in the Opernplatz in Berlin. Historically, book burning has been used as a tactic to alter the balance of power in a deliberate, systematic, political strategy by those in power (Boissoneault). The collection of "un-German" texts included the library of the Institute for Sexual Research, founded by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a gay Jewish man, and known to be the first transgender clinic in the world. Joseph Goebbels, Nazi propaganda minister, declared that this symbolic action would "prove to all the world that the intellectual basis of the November Republic is here overturned" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). It was an action that protected Germany from what the Nazis proclaimed to be 'decadence and corruption.'

The book burning in the Opernplatz symbolized the end of the intellectual and cultural authority of the Weimar Republic, thus strengthening the legitimacy of the Nazi regime. Goebbles was keenly aware of the necessity to maintain a national myth aligned with the party in an effort to sustain the regime. This myth was generated and upheld under the control of the cultural sphere, controlling the production of knowledge and exercising censorship over intellectual materials that threatened the State. Today, far-right circles consider Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's historical activism and practice on behalf of queer people to be an "attack on the existence of white people." This quote references a post made on July 18, 2021, on a neo-Nazi blog by Andrew Joyce who writes, "Racism, homophobia, and transphobia, which together essentially boil down to the idea that Whites should be able to live normally and by themselves, are perceived today as beyond the sphere of this deified 'love' and are therefore representative of a kind of modern heresy" (Lavin).

The far-right's obsession with book burning extends beyond symbolism. In 2021 nearly 1,600 complaints against books were filed by parents and right-wing political groups, largely targeting books discussing race, gender, and the LGBTQ community (Wilson). The demonization of transgender people (and cisgender queer people) in conservative media today uses old, baseless tropes framing queer people as "predatory" towards children, with the justification of protecting them.[2]

Lavin mentions Drag Queen Story Hour—an organization where drag queens read books to children in libraries, schools, and bookstores, promoting spaces where "kids are able to see people who defy rigid gender restrictions and imagine a world where people can present as they wish"[3]—which has been the target of the far-right (and neo-Nazis) in recent years. Attacks on the organization range from fear mongering news segments on Fox News to doxxing (a process of publicly threatening individuals by leaking their personal information) participants of the project.

Screen capture of a Fox News segment criticizing Drag Queen History Hour.

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[2] It is worth noting that narratives surrounding the idea of "protecting the children" are used in different contexts in the far-right. During the 2020 elections, for example, the hashtag #SaveTheChildren was attracting people to QAnon. For more on this see: North, Anna. How #SaveTheChildren is pulling American moms into QAnon. Vox. September 18, 2020.

[3] For more information on Drag Queen Story Hour see https://www.dragqueenstoryhour.org.

This latest iteration of stochastic terrorism utilizes the cultural and mediatic villainization of queer and transgender Americans to incite violence against these communities. In August, far-right, anti-transgender reactionaries organized online campaigns targeting pediatric hospitals in the Northeast of the United States. The attacks ranged from online mobilization to shut down hospital call centers and websites; threats to nurses and physicians, including a bomb threat;[4] and general disruption to hospital operations (Bond, 2022). These efforts paralyzed hospitals, affecting patients and caretakers indiscriminately, all under false claims on the "negative effects" of pediatric gender-affirming healthcare. These types of behaviors continue to be incentivized by media narratives that question transgender people as deserving of rights, legitimizing the exclusion of transgender Americans from an "acceptable" national imaginary. On November 14, 2022, the second day of Transgender Awareness Week, the New York Times published a misleading article titled "They Paused Puberty, But Is There a Cost?"[5] that was criticized by the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH) as furthering "the atmosphere of misinformation and subjectivity that has grown to surround the area of gender-affirming medical interventions for transgender youth."[6] Just days after, on the eve of Transgender Day of Remembrance, a queer club and community hub in Colorado Springs, ClubQ, was attacked by an armed gunman. The attack is being investigated as a hate crime (AP News).

According to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) "Standards of Care, 8th edition" gender-affirming care for children entails "developmentally

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[4] For more information on this see: NBC Boston. Police Investigate Bomb Threat to Boston Children's Hospital. August 31, 2022.
https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/police-investigate-after-bomb-threat-to-boston-childrens-hospital/2822245/
[5] For the full article see: Twohey, M. Jewett, C. They Paused Puberty, but Is There a Cost? The New York Times. November 14, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/health/puberty-blockers-transgender.html
[6] For the full statement see: USPATH and WPATH Respond to NY Times Article "They Paused Puberty, But Is There a Cost?". November 14, 2022.
https://www.wpath.org/media/cms/Documents/Public%20Policies/2022/USPATHWPATH%20Statement%20re%20Nov%2014%20202022%20NYT%20Article%20Nov%2022%202022.pdf?_t=1669173834.

appropriate psychosocial practices" given that "unlike prepubescent gender diverse children are not eligible to access medical intervention" (67).

Youth Healthcare Bans
AL SB184 - Public health, minors, biological male or female, sexual state, practices to alte or affirm minor's sexual identity or perception such as prescribing puberty blocking medication or surgeries, prohibited, exceptions, nurses and school personnel... (Signed/Enacted)
Public health, minors, biological male or female, sexual state, practices to alter or affirm minor's sexual identity or perception such as prescribing puberty blocking medication or surgeries, prohibited, exceptions, nurses and school personnel...
04/07/2022: Assigned Act No. 2022-289.
AZ SB1138 - Irreversible gender reassignment surgery; minors (Signed/Enacted)
Irreversible gender reassignment surgery; minors
03/30/2022: Chapter 104
TN HB2835 - AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 8; Title 9; Title 14; Title 33; Title 63 and Title 68, relative to health. (Dead/Failed/Vetoed)
As introduced, enacts the "Youth Health Protection Act." - Amends TCA Title 8; Title 9; Title 14; Title 33 Title 63 and Title 68.

Screen capture from Freedom For All Americans: Legislative Tracker. Tracking LGBT-related legislation nationwide (November 2022)

However, public debates on the matter often allude to genital mutilation, sterilization, and genital surgery. The use of these narratives, speaks directly to the figure of the child as "innocent and pure", untouchable by anything that remotely discusses sex, and soon-to-be reproducers for the nation that will continue to populate the nation speaks directly to concerns over acceptable reproduction of the state (Lane-McKineley). Anti-transgender legislation targeting gender-affirming healthcare can be understood as a state tool that acts as an aid in the reproduction of the nation and is legitimized through misguided media tropes that solidify "American" gender and sexuality as cis-heterosexual by definition.

Censorship of criticisms to these narratives are similarly shaping a skewed coverage of transgender politics and their struggle against fascism in the US. An example of this is 'The Guardian US', which recently censored an interview with queer feminist theorist Judith Butler and journalist Jules Gleeson entitled "Judith Butler: 'We need to rethink the category of woman.'" The Guardian US removed the interview's concluding three paragraphs alongside its final question, in which Butler identifies the anti-gender ideology movement as one of the "dominant strains of fascism in our times," and also draws a connection between the current trend in anti-intellectualism with the increasing normalization of neo-fascism in the public sphere (Butler, via Gleeson). Gleeson commented on the actions taken by the Guardian a day after the censorship took place, explaining how she preemptively adjusted the questions provided for the interview so as to not reference any ongoing legal procedures. The original question reads as follows:

> It seems that some within feminist movements are becoming sympathetic to these far-right campaigns. This year's furore around Wi Spa in Los Angeles saw an online outrage by transphobes followed by bloody protests organized by the Proud Boys. Can we expect this alliance to continue?

The edited version reads:

> It seems that some within feminist movements are becoming sympathetic to these far-right campaigns. In 2019 NBC news reported that the US right-wing lobbying group The Heritage Foundation had hosted 'gender critical' feminist perspectives. Remarkable given the Heritage Foundation is pushing for restrictions on abortion, as seen in Texas.

Gleeson is firm on her stance that the changes made to the question preserved the issue being discussed without discussing an ongoing legal case, and yet the question remains deleted from the article. She calls this an act of censorship, and I agree. The unapologetic omission of critical statements from a historically anti-fascist intellectual showcases the shift in the Overton window

theorized by Tannehill. This act of suppression is of critical importance to the preservation of "democracy" in the United States.

     In a separate dimension of media, TikTok –a social media platform featuring short videos of up to three minutes and a highly personalized content algorithm– the framing of trans people as a threat and the ideological links to the far right that it represents looks different. To study the treatment of transphobia by the app's algorithm, Abbie Richards and Olivia Little conducted a study by creating a TikTok account which exclusively 'engaged' —through likes, comments, and watch-time— with transphobic content. This experiment led the platform's ostensibly unbiased algorithm to flood the account's "For You Page" (the main content feed of the App) not only with more homophobic and transphobic content but also with other types of hate speech, far-right, and violent content. This included everything from misogynistic content to white supremacy, anti-vaccine videos, and conspiracy theories (Little, Richards).
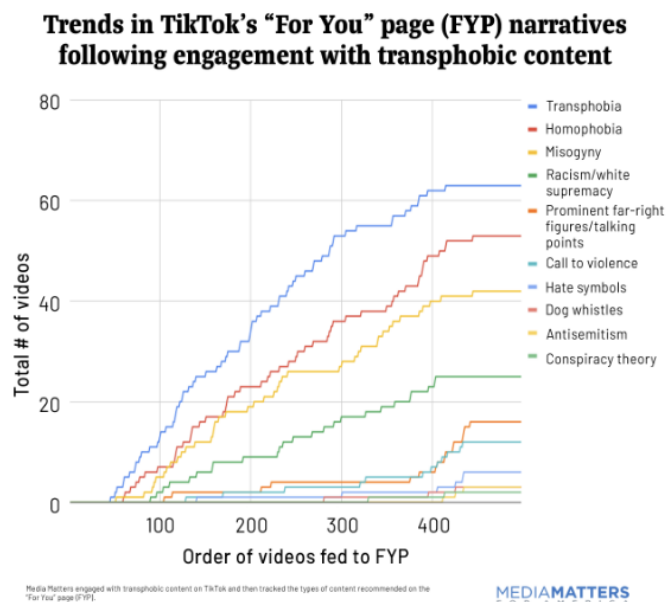

Figure presented in "TikTok's algorithm leads users from transphobic videos to far-right rabbit holes" observes the trends uncovered by the study.

How can algorithmic suggestions of content—a 21st Century phenomenon—be compared to the physical act of burning a book? Trevor Paglen discusses how algorithms operate as tools of power, identifying that:

> Machine-machine systems are extraordinary intimate instruments of power that operate through an aesthetics and ideology of objectivity, but the categories they employ are designed to reify the forms of power that those systems are set up to serve. *As such, the machine-machine landscape forms a kind of hyper-ideology that is especially pernicious precisely because it makes claims to objectivity and equality* (emphasis mine).

While algorithms and the algorithmic suppression and promotion of certain content take a very different form than book-burning, they follow a similar logic: those with the power to shape the cultural sphere—politicians during the nation-building process or profit-driven social media companies, in this case—manipulate and alter access to information, strengthening the national myth they are trying to uphold. Ernest Renan said it best:

> The act of forgetting, I would even say, historical errors, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings back to light the deeds of violence that took place at the origins of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been the most beneficial. Unity is always achieved brutally (Renan, 251).

Renan's analysis is framed within the idea of the nation as a "daily plebiscite;" he argues nations are constituted with the assumption and acceptance of a common past as a prerequisite for an expressed desire to live a common life (Renan 261-262).

The censorship and suppression of queer media exposes the dominant fallacy that queerness is inherently dangerous to American national identity. The promotion of anti-queer discourses has a similar effect. As Richards and Little's study shows, engagement with transphobic directs users towards more far-right and neo-Nazi content, *by design,* and further solidifies the insertion of transphobia and other bigoted opinions into users' "daily plebiscite" of a "legitimate" American national identity. This study serves as one of many examples of the

material-discursive linkages between anti-trans policies and fascist discourse. Understanding this connection is fundamental in the fight to protect democracy.

Anti-transgender movements are reactionary, fascist, and increasingly authoritarian. Following Umberto Eco's definition of fascism, Butler analyzes the way the "anti-gender movement" "mobilizes a range of rhetorical strategies from across the political spectrum to maximize the fear of infiltration and destruction," which ultimately finds strength in its inconsistency and incoherence.

Eco's Ur-Fascism (also *Eternal Fascism*) identifies 14 characteristics that each indicate the presence of fascism (Eco, 5). Eleven of these conditions parallel Butler's illustration of the anti-gender movement: a cult of tradition; the rejection of modernity; fear of difference; anti-intellectualism; appeal to a frustrated middle class; an "obsession with the plot," developed to construct the national myth; popular elitism; machismo and phallocentric exercise of power which "implies both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality;" selective populism; and the use of *Newspeak* (a reference to George Orwell's *1984*), since Eco himself argues that "we must be ready to identify other kinds of *Newspeak*, even if they take the apparently innocent form of a popular talk show" (Eco, 14).

Tannehill similarly presents an analysis of the Trump Administration's aggressive anti-trans policies, arguing that the Administration had "many of the same effects used in Germany to isolate Jews prior to WWII," like banning transgender people from the military, for example (Tannehill). Furthermore, attempts at restricting access to public bathrooms for transgender people –claiming that their presence violates the rights of others– effectively acts as a 'purge' of transgender students and employees from public schools and shared workspaces.

This further normalizes anti-transgender behaviors, amplifying the belief that the "discrimination of transgender people is a moral imperative and a social good" (Tannehill).

Recent policies have accentuated the existing vulnerability of transgender people in the United States. The current efforts to strip queer American's social and political rights—for example, aggressive legislation restricting gender-affirming healthcare; the misidentification of supportive parents as predators;[7] and the progressive effort to erase trans people from public spaces,[8] force transgender Americans into an increasingly precarious position. In addition to the existing threats to transgender people and the rise in anti-trans discourse in the media, transgender Americans have become the far-right's scapegoat. Tannehill argues:

> There won't be death camps and cattle cars. Those are specific to a particular time and place in history. What I am seeing is that conditions in the U.S. will likely be there for a Republican-led effort to remove a class of people from American life via a combination of demonization, legal oppression, and stochastic violence, with the goal of forcing all of them to either flee or hide who they are to avoid persecution.

Moreover, Tannehill brings attention to the political position of transgender Americans that have no "political power or friends in government," or belong to a group that "would cause minimal economic disruption." Transgender people are marginalized in dominant culture and excluded from positions of economic and political power, and are therefore left without the political power to defend themselves against far-right scapegoating.

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[7] Transgender youth, particularly transgender youth of color, are already targeted directly by aggressive, dehumanizing policies (see National Center for Transgender Equality and ACLU references) and face higher risks of suicide (Austin, et al) than the majority of Americans. This proposed law in Texas would categorize supportive parents as abusers if they aid their children in obtaining gender-affirming health care. Aside from the concerning material implications of these policies, including the potential of sending even more vulnerable children to a failed foster system (Oxner); the ideological premise of this type of law further solidifies the idea of queer people as predators that prey on children. For more information on this see: Strangio, Charles. Texas Wants to Take Trans Kids from Their Supportive Parents. We're Suing. ACLU. March 1, 2022. https://www.aclu.org/news.

[8] Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) on transgender people "If any one of us wants to dress up as a woman or man and wants to live as woman or man and believes that we might be something other than what we were born, God has made each of us with free will and the ability to choose to do that if man wants to dress as woman and live as woman, and have a bathroom at home."

In the United States, trans people are being targeted, demonized, isolated, and stripped of rights in parallel to the rhetorical and material formulas that targeted Jewish people during the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi dictatorship. Although transgender people are not the exclusive targets of the far-right, they have specific political and social circumstances that can benefit from a comparative historical analysis. Transgender Americans have a uniquely weak political position in the country which allows the far-right to publically target and persecute them. As Tannehill argues, this is shifting the Overton window; radically transforming the political sphere through the normalization of reactionary fascist policies disguised as 'politics as usual.'

Recent developments in the judiciary, especially the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* showcase this. *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* crumbled precedents surrounding the 14th Amendment, threatening landmark cases that have granted Americans rights including the right to gay marriage (*Overgefell v. Hodges*), the decriminalization of "sodomy" (*Lawrence v. Texas*), the right to contraceptives (*Griswold v. Connecticut)*, and the right to interracial marriage *(Loving v. Virginia)*. Nonetheless, the recent emergence of powerful, publically far-right politicians and organizations raises justifiable concerns. The Overton window has been moved. The playing field is not even. The courts have a significant conservative lean, and have shamelessly started a campaign that aims to strip Americans' rights; 11.85% of all state legislators have digital ties to far-right groups (Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights); talking, reading, and teaching on issues like race, gender, and queerness are being restricted by the government (Wilson); and the shadow of January 6 remains present (and tragically unaddressed). Fascism is not a foreign, far-away, improbable possibility for the United States. American political institutions are fragile, weakened

by anti-democratic behaviors (both amongst civilians and elected officials) that continue to be disregarded as 'politics as usual.' There are direct links between the attack on trans and gender non-conforming people and the emergence of fascist political coalitions in the United States, both ideologically and materially. In the collective struggle against fascism in America, and elsewhere,[9] it is necessary to understand these associations in order to develop critically informed policies and social action.

A great example of scholarship within this line of questioning is the book *The Transgender Issue* by journalist and trans rights activist Shon Faye, wherein the author conducts an analysis of the material conditions of trans people in the United Kingdom. Faye analyzes the effects of issues such as lack of access to proper healthcare, the prison industrial system and immigration detention system, and fragile labor rights on trans people in the United Kingdom. She calls for political action that addresses the dire conditions of trans people in the United Kingdom. Faye's analysis of issues like housing and healthcare sets a solid ground for her argument: transgender people are targeted by discriminatory policies in all areas of life (from immigration to housing and healthcare), because of this, advocating for trans liberation is necessary when advocating for any type of liberation. Faye's analysis is situated in a well-established Black feminist tradition that identifies the liberation of the most vulnerable members of society as a necessary step in the collective struggle for liberation. The Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 reads: "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression." Following this logic, Faye prompts the reader to question what would change for cisgender Britons if the needs of marginalized communities in the country, in this case transgender people, were addressed? By paying attention to material changes that would be

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[9] Butler and Tudor offer extensive analysis of this phenomenon elsewhere. See the reference list for further reading.

necessary, for example in the public healthcare system, to address discrimination against

transgender Britons, Faye demonstrates that these types of policies would have a positive impact

on the population at large.

An important consideration when analyzing the attack on transgender people in the

United States today lies in understanding the racial and colonial implications of modern gender.

This necessitates a reframing of modern understandings of gender towards an anti-colonial

epistemology that views the modern gender binary as a Western, colonial artifact of population

control. Eurocentrism is defined by Anibal Quijano as "the hegemonic perspective of

knowledge," (Quijano, p. 542) one that is based on

> Two principal founding myths: first, the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power. [...] The fact that Western Europeans will imagine themselves to be the culmination of a civilizing trajectory from a state of nature leads them also to think of themselves as the moderns of humanity and its history, that is, as the new, and the same time, most advanced of the species. But since they attribute the rest of the species to a *category by nature inferior and consequently anterior,* belonging to the past in the progress of the species, the Europeans imagine themselves as the *exclusive bearers, creators, and protagonists of that modernity* (Quijano, p. 542 emphasis mine).

Modernity is a colonial mechanism. One that became possible through the creation of a new

paradigm of space/time through European Imperialism in the Americas (Quijano, p. 533). With a

similar analysis, David Goldberg identifies the inherent raciality of modern states arguing that

> States are drawn into racial frames of reference, into the rings of racial globalities, in entering into the circles of modernity, in becoming modern states. Race then is not a premodern condition but a quintessentially modern one [...]. States have acquired their modernity more or less and partially through racial assumption, through being drawn into the terms, forms, shapes, temporalities and rhythms of racial world ordering and world racial definition (Goldberg, pp. 106-107).

Quijano's theorizing of modernity as colonial is only supported by this identification of the

modern state as inherently racial. Moreover, because the racial state must be seen "as a *political*

force fashioning and fashioned by *economic, legal, and cultural forces,*" (Goldberg, p. 109)

interrogating other modern constructions (like gender) is necessary to understand current fashionings of racial and colonial oppression. Modern gender, during colonial times and today, serves as a tool for population control, particularly as it relates to the acceptable reproduction of the nation. Ultimately, the colonial imposition of European gender roles included the imposition of European understandings of sexuality and marriage. Goldberg identifies how "the polite Victorian hope of racial improvement sprang eternal through the gendered domination of racial intermarriage and interracial offspring" (Goldberg, p. 81). Heterosexuality became the de-facto acceptable sexuality because of its reproductive potential and what this represented for racial capitalism (Tsing, pp. 141-154). This indicates yet another violent colonial imposition challenging pre-colonial notions of self and sociality. Analyzing the homologous relation of sexual and political dominance deployed by Western colonialism, Ashis Nandy argues that by defining Western sexuality as heterosexual by definition

> the homology [...] legitimized Europe's post-medieval models of dominance, exploitation and cruelty as natural and valid. Colonialism, too, was congruent with the existing Western sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life they represented. It produced a cultural consensus in which political and socioeconomic dominance symbolized the dominance over men and masculinity over women and femininity (Nandy, p. 4).

Therefore, the imposition of gender not only served as a mechanism of population control but also acted as a legitimizing logic in the colonial oppression of native peoples. Transgender people do not inhabit the gender binary and therefore inherently defy colonial scripts of life that prioritize reproduction of economically productive, heterosexual national subjects. At the very core of anti-transgender politics is a concern over the reproduction of the nation. Because of this, it's necessary to understand the attacks on transgender people in the United States as part of a larger political project that perpetuates the racist, patriarchal, and colonial characteristics of the

United States. As demonstrated above, transphobic policies create opportunities for more

reactionary far-right policies to take place as legitimate policy decisions.

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Just Another Country: Questioning American Primacy in the 21ˢᵗ Century

By Griffin Elliot

On January 23, 2012, my maternal grandfather, my father, and I left the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley. The trio: a lifelong patriotic Republican, a liberal Canadian, and myself, a young starry-eyed journalist with one foot in each country and two passports in my back pocket. As our car pulled down the long winding driveway, the two older generations of my lineage were engaged in their usual spirited debate about the direction in which then President Obama was steering America. My grandfather, arguing America's diminishing role on the world stage, said: "The rest of the world is treating us like we're *just another country*." I have grappled with a dualling nationalism my entire life; little did I know that my grandfather's seemingly innocuous statement would shape my identity for the next decade, compelling me to question the wavering relationship America has with both allies and enemies.

In this article, I will explore the sentiment behind my grandfather's words: *Is* America *just another country?* America and Americans alike have a long history of predicting the fall of the United States from grace on the world stage. By the end of the Cold War there had already been five academically recognized waves of declinism in the relevant literature. I acknowledge that there have been three more viable claims for declinism since the dawn of the new millennia: The War on Terror, the financial crisis of 2007-2008, and an isolationist president. Once I have established the context for what ignites the declinist debate, I will look toward the aspects of what constitutes declinism. Is American primacy relative or absolute? Is the U.S. truly in decline? Then, I will examine the idea of *The American Century,* reviewing potential timeframes and assessing the implications ascribed to this label, to help understand what America is

declining from. Finally, I will seek to answer the question: Does a great power, such as America, have the capability to renew itself?

Waves of Decline

"Throughout the 17th Century and the 18th Century and the 19th Century, this continent teemed with manifold projects and magnificent purposes," Henry Luce triumphantly prosed in *Life* magazine. "It is in this spirit that all of us are called, each to his own measure of capacity, and each in the widest horizon of his vision, to create the first great American Century."[1] The idea of "The American Century" was first penned in February 1941 as the rest of the world was consumed with war and America stood on its precipice. By the end of the year America would be thrown into World War II, turning the tide in favor of the allied forces, changing the course of history.

"The United States has a history of worrying it's losing its edge,"[2] and the end of the American Century presumes an inevitable decline in American primacy on the world stage. Long have the heralds forewarned of America's failing influence, which begs the question: is decline inevitable? Is the diminishment of a superpower a foregone conclusion? Also, why have the conveyors of declinism been wrong so often? By outlining the modern waves of decline and dispelling them, we can see that declinism is not a conclusion of power but rather an inescapable fallacy espoused by critics.

Samuel Huntington wrote in 1988 that "the United States reached the zenith of its fifth wave of declinism since the 1950s."[3] Though not a declinist himself, Huntington outlined these surges in American malaise as follows: In 1957-1958, Soviet missile advancements threatened

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[1] Henry R. Luce, "The American Century," *Life* (February 1941), 65.
[2] Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 210.
[3] Samuel P. Huntington, "The U.S. – Decline or Renewal?" *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 2 (Winter 1988/89): 76.

American nuclear dominance, and the successful launch of Sputnik started the so-called Space Race. In the late 60s, President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, prematurely forewarned the end of bipolarity, assuming U.S. and Soviet military dominance would soon be made obsolete by the economic booms in Europe and Japan. In 1973, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo and the resulting surge in oil prices showed the world just how dependent the West was on the black gold coming from the Persian Gulf. In the late 1970s, the U.S. suffered defeat in Vietnam and embarrassment at the Watergate Hotel – compounded by another oil price hike, and the Soviet Union got the closest yet to winning the Cold War by expanding power in Africa and the Middle East. Then, the stock market crash of October 1987 continued to exacerbate the feeling of a fading American economic primacy. The merits of these waves' crests and troughs can rightfully be debated; however, I will spend no time doing so here. Each argument for decline was inevitably proven wrong and swept back by the undertow as American economic and military supremacy remained intact when the U.S. came out of the Cold War victorious.

Since the dawn of the 21st century, three more waves of decline have lapped on the shores of American pre-eminence, all of which created ripples that the country is still dealing with today. In 2001, Americans gawked in horror as the Twin Towers came crashing down in New York City; Muslim extremists had brought the fight to the hegemon's doorstep, sparking a War on Terror while reigniting debates about the implications of so-called American imperialism. Next, the American-borne financial crash of 2007-2008 spurred economic crises around the world, which called into question the stability of the global capitalist system of which America is at the center. And in 2016 the U.S. elected to put "America First" as an isolationist president made the world rethink America-backed commitment, treaties and agreements. We do not yet

have the benefit of time to disprove these declines as merely trends of national sentiment, or

partisan ploys, so I will have to point to the holes in their logic myself, with the help of

contemporary scholars.

The 9/11 terrorist attack on the U.S. illustrated the "power of asymmetrical warfare and

of non-state actors."[4] The subsequent U.S. *National Security Strategy* reflected a shift in priority

towards counterterrorism: "Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and

suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to

penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us."[5] The attacks

propelled President George W. Bush, and his successors, into long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The War on Terror highlighted the ineffectiveness "of the world's strongest military" when

"dealing with complex regional scenarios and new security threats."[6] The U.S. withdrew from

Iraq in December 2011, and last year President Biden oversaw a chaotic withdrawal from

Afghanistan, 20 years after provocation.[7] However, as catastrophic as these events may have

been, they did force the hand of American policymakers to rethink foreign policy in the Middle

East. The U.S. military has effectively prevented another large-scale terrorist attack on American

soil by decimating terror cells like Al Qaeda and ISIS.

On the 2007-2008 financial crash, Canadian authors and political economists Leo Panitch

and Sam Gindin comment, "there's nothing like a crisis to clarify things." Panitch and Gindin

argue that crises are an inevitable function in the global capitalist system, therefore America's

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[4] Barbra Zanchetta, "Deconstructing 'declinism': The 1970s and the reassertion of American international power," *International Politics* 53, no. 3 (May 2015): 269.
[5] Department of Defense, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2002), https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2002.pdf?ver=oyVN99aEnrAWijAc_O5eiQ%3d%3d.
[6] Zanchetta, "Deconstructing 'declinism,'" 269-270.
[7] Karen DeYoung and Missy Ryan, "Biden will withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, 2021," *The Washington Post*, April 13, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/biden-us-troop-withdrawal-afghanistan/2021/04/13/918c3cae-9beb-11eb-8a83-3bc1fa69c2e8_story.html.

role in "failure containment" during the financial crisis rather than "failure prevention" reiterated American influence on the world stage.[8] The authors argue that through the globalization of capitalism, the U.S. has created "a world in its own image."[9] Thanks to the capital controls put in place by the U.S. Treasury and the Federal Reserve, in hand with the centrality of the U.S. dollar to international business, the U.S. was able to pull its market, along with the global market, out of a tailspin and into recovery rather than ruin. This globalized capitalist system, within which America has made itself central, cannot function without the U.S. as its shepherd.

In 2016 the U.S. saw its "first declinist candidate for president."[10] President Trump's isolationist foreign policy, eloquently embodied by his slogan "America First," saw the U.S. pull out of the Paris Agreement and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known as the Iran nuclear deal. The administration stressed relationships with European allies by threatening to withdraw from NATO. And through the Trump years, the U.S.' policy towards China was hostile, spitting vitriolic rhetoric and amping up a trade war. However, for all the rightfully garnered criticism President Trump received, NATO allies did rise to meet their spending commitments, and the administration did officially recognize great power competition as the primary goal of U.S. defense strategy for the first time since 9/11.[11]

There is a fair argument to be made about three more declines in American preeminence in the new millennium: a striking unilateralist President Bush, President Obama and his administration's Asia Pivot as well as its role in the Arab Spring, and the explosive rise of China

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[8] Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London: Verso, 2012), 247-248.

[9] Panitch and Gindin, 275.

[10] Tom Engelhardt, "Donald Trump Might Set a Record – for the Biggest Decline of American Power in History," *The Nation,* June 13, 2017, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/donald-trump-might-set-a-record-for-the-biggest-decline-of-american-power-in-history/.

[11] Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.

as a global power. However, with regards to claims on Bush and what my grandfather considers the Obama era declinism, these hypotheses rely heavily on partisan sentiment, rather than hard facts of American power. While I do characterize the War on Terror and the 2007-2008 financial crisis as waves of decline that happened under their respective administrations' watch, it would be farfetched to argue that either president was solely responsible for initiating these events and their global repercussions. And while the rise of China certainly threatens American primacy, it has yet to overtake any facets of American power. Instead of waves of decline, these events "may be better indications of American psychology than of American power."[12]

Aspects of Decline

Joseph Nye gives us a helpful distinction to make when looking at the decline of primacy, whether it is *absolute* or *relative*. Nye characterizes the former as "domestic deterioration or decay" and the latter as "decrease in relative external power," and the two are not necessarily inseparable.[13] A cynic might read these definitions and point first to the internal domestic social injustices, or insane mass shootings, and literal attacks to its democracy that America sees on its news media every day. However, while these types of events may be a "national embarrassment,"[14] they do little to harm the American-led liberal democratic order. Nye bases this argument on historical evidence from one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen: "Rome reached its apogee in AD 117, but the Western Roman empire did not collapse until some three and a half centuries later, and the Eastern Roman empire persisted until 1453."[15]

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[12] Huntington, 95.
[13] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Is the American Century Over?* (Malden: Polity Press, 2015), 22.
[14] Betsy Klein, Kate Sullivan, and Manu Raju, "Biden calls gun violence 'a national embarrassment' and order flags to half-staff after another mass shooting," *CNN*, April 16, 2021, https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/16/politics/biden-indianapolis-shooting/index.html.
[15] Nye, 20.

Relative decline poses a more structural challenge to global American leadership. As Huntington points out, "the predominant view among declinists points to external expansion rather than internal stagnation as the principal cause of the decline of nations."[16] Fareed Zakaria titles this challenge, "the rise of the rest."[17] The globalization of capitalism has spurred economic capabilities throughout the world. As Zakaria factually posits, "this is creating an international system in which countries in all parts of the world are no longer objects or observers but players. It is the birth of a truly global order."[18] China as the leader of the pack, and consequently the largest threat to American unipolarity, is poised to overtake the U.S. as the world's largest economy, which some statisticians predict could be as soon as 2026.[19] However, economic status is only one facet of global power. Any potential hegemon of the international order would certainly need to have a clear military dominance over all others, which China is far from achieving.

Cultural influence or *soft power* also goes a long way towards being a global superpower. Nye argues that even though the accumulation of soft power need not be a zero-sum game, the U.S. has been able to retain the highest level amongst global powers because "of its critical and uncensored civil society," that allows citizens to speak up when they disagree with government policies.[20] So, while America may stand to lose its measure of economic dominance to China, the U.S. still has a globe-spanning cultural impact that has international students flocking to learn at its universities; music, movies and TV shows that disseminate American pop culture into living

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[16] Huntington, 88.
[17] Zakaria, 2.
[18] Zakaria, 3.
[19] Naomi Xu Elegant, "China's 2020 GDP means it will overtake U.S. as world's No. 1 economy sooner than expected," *Fortune*, January 18, 2021, https://fortune.com/2021/01/18/chinas-2020-gdp-world-no-1-economy-us/.
[20] Nye, 45-46.

rooms around the world; charities that provide aid and relief to some of the world's poorest

areas;[21] all backed up by a military power that can destroy the world 10 times over.

> *"It was hegemonic in that the United States aimed to be the most powerful state in the world by a wide margin, and it was liberal in that the United States sought to transform the international system into a rules-based order regulated by multilateral institutions and transform other states into market-oriented democracies freely trading with one another."[22]*

Let Hegemons Be Bygones

Now that we have established prospects for and aspects of decline, we need to ask what is

the U.S. declining from? Furthermore, quantifying a prospective timeline of the peak of

American power and influence is also an essential parameter of the discussion of declinism.

Luce's triumphalist call for an American-led world order has since been pondered, studied, and

subjected by many academics and scholars. For instance, the precise beginning of "the American

Century" has been a matter of debate. Joseph Nye postulates three dates that could constitute the

beginning of the American Century. The first, the eve of the 20th Century "when the United

States became the world's largest industrial power."[23] However, to assume the American Century

began around 1900, and ended with the millennium, one would have to ignore the massive

influence that the U.S. has had over the world order since the early 2000s. America contained the

War on Terror, the global financial crisis, brokered peace agreements and stemmed nuclear

proliferation. Yes, these catastrophes may have been American made or provoked, but that

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[21] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Whatever Happened to Soft Power?" *Project Syndicate,* January 11, 2022, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/whatever-happened-to-soft-power-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-01.

[22] Barry R. Posen, "The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March/April 2018): 20.
[23] Nye, 11.

argument only strengthens its antithesis; that for at least the first two decades of the 21st century America has had an undeniable influence on global affairs.

Another potential date could be identified in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union and "when the United States became the only nation able to project military power on a global scale."[24] Standing victorious in the Cold War propelled us into what some scholars, Charles Krauthammer among them, dubbed "the Unipolar Moment." Krauthammer says of this time, "there is but one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival it."[25] Well, now we are no longer in Krauthammer's immediate future and the U.S. is looking down the barrel of an economically explosive China, a former Soviet Union looking to reassert its independence, and no shortage of new actors trying to increase their rank in the new world order. In short, to predict the international political landscape of 2091 is rocky, at best.

The most realistic proposed birth of the American century is the year that Luce identified, 1941, as Roosevelt entered the U.S. into WWII. The so-called American Century would then span from 1941-2041.[26] Nye's suggested timeline accurately encompasses American leadership through triumph of the last world war and weathered global preeminence. Compared to an explosive Chinese economic growth, and with predictions of Beijing to overtake New York City as the "de facto global capital,"[27] it would be a reasonable assumption that American primacy is on the way out, however, not finished yet.

Many proponents of inevitable American decline point to its hegemonic instability as a faltering of global leadership. In fact, proscribing the title of global hegemon to the U.S. would be a mistake at its onset. Neorealist pessimist, John Mearsheimer, strongly argues that "it is

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[24] Nye, 13.
[25] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/91): 24.
[26] Nye, 16.
[27] Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin 2012), 504.

virtually impossible for any state to achieve global hegemony."[28] Similarly, Nye takes issue with

the looseness of the term "hegemony" saying that it is, "too imprecise a concept to be useful in

defining 'the American Century,'" preferring to use the terms *half-hegemony, pre-eminence,* or

primacy.[29] I add that the term hegemony holds too much weight to accurately describe

unipolarity. Robert Gilpin equates empire to hegemon and defines the structure as one where "a

single powerful state controls or dominates the lesser states in the system."[30] At no time, in any

of the proposed American Centuries, did the United States hold absolute resolution over all

actors in the international system.

A Chance for Renewal

Martin Jacques, a purveyor of inevitable decline colorfully argues, "if the United States is

unable to come to terms with its decline, paralysed by a psychosis of denial and a refusal to let

go of the past… then its decline is likely to be that much faster."[31] Conversely, Zakaria says that

it is precisely because America acknowledged its decline that it was able to prevent it.[32] In this

vein, Huntington also agrees "declinism is a theory that has to be believed to be invalidated."[33]

These two authors point to a trend that Jacques and many other declinists regard as an inevitable

or automatic outcome. They ignore the fact that "the ultimate test of a great power is its ability to

renew its power."[34] As I have examined above, "American strength is peculiarly

multidimensional."[35] With that point in mind, and again taking into consideration the centrality

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[28] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 41.
[29] Nye, 16.
[30] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 29.
[31] Jacques, 496.
[32] Zakaria, 210-211.
[33] Huntington, 96.
[34] Huntington, 90.
[35] Huntington, 90.

of America to the liberal world order, the path for American leadership to regain a perceptive

dominance is wide open.

For all the criticisms garnered (and some rightfully so) by the Trump administration's

"America first" and hardline foreign policies, I argue that this set the stage for a renewal; dead

ends have been clipped, palates cleansed, and alliances tested. Because the country swung so far

to the political right, domestically, debates around social justice issues and the values of

democracy have been brought front and center, and internationally, countries that may have been

offended or embarrassed on the world stage by Trump are now more likely to strike up a

productive working relationship with President Biden. The current administration has every

intention of reigniting American global prestige. USAID Administrator Samantha Power

discounts foreign policy criticisms as she says, "foreign leaders and publics largely retained

respect for the United States' willingness to undertake challenging endeavours and its ability to

accomplish difficult tasks – a significant but underappreciated cornerstone of American

power."[36] This sentiment is reminiscent of Panitch and Gindin's praise for American failure

containment. Power goes on to outline that a refocus on amicable U.S. foreign policy "would

also remind the world not of the nebulous 'return of U.S. leadership' but of specific U.S.

capabilities."[37]

Conclusion

Declinism seems to be as American as baseball or apple pie. Since it rose to the status of

global power, scholars have been predicting American decline. Their assumptions have been

wrong. Decline is not inevitable nor a forgone conclusion. While we are currently seeing a

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[36] Samantha Power, "The Can-Do Power," *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 1 (January/February 2021): 10.
[37] Power, 24.

fundamental change in the international system, characterised by the rise of China and the looming threat of multipolarity, the U.S. is still a major player in the liberal democratic world order it helped create. American preeminence may not be the same as it once was in the new world order, but it also never truly held the benevolent power many scholars and countries attribute to it. In his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Biden praised American resilience and encouraged a renewal of power: "At the very moment our adversaries were certain we would pull apart and fail, we came together. We united, with light and hope, we summoned a new strength, new resolve to position us to win the competition of the 21st century." [38] I will leave both readers and my grandfather with this: While the shining façade of the *City upon a Hill* may have been irreversibly tarnished, America is still no less central to the new world order than it was when it helped forge the system.

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[38] "Biden's Speech to Congress: Full Transcript," *The New York Times,* April 29, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/29/us/politics/joe-biden-speech-transcript.html.

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Hegemonic Masculinity and the Contemporary Rise of Female Right-Wing Populist Leaders: The Case of Giorgia Meloni

By Liana Almony

Recent decades have seen the proliferation of right-wing populism all over the world, characteristically led by charismatic but controversial leaders who are empowered by the media and the socio-political context to propagate a cult of personality that marginalizes some as it unites others. Most of these leaders are men, their cult of personality illustrating a kind of forceful masculinity, so naturally "studies show that populist parties - especially far-right ones - attract more male participation" (Silvestro and Venturi 2022, 58). However, women have begun to step into these roles as well, exemplified by the recent election of right-wing populist leader Giorgia Meloni in Italy and the increased popularity of Marine Le Pen in France. Given the decades of women's rights advocacy at both the national and international level, including calls for more female representation in political office, this may be seen as a disruption of entrenched gender norms and patriarchal power structures at the global level. The argument could be (and has been) made that more women in positions of power, especially as leaders of nation-states, is progress towards a more equitable world, regardless of the rhetoric and policy in which those women engage. However, rather than disrupt the hegemonic masculinity that has defined governance for centuries, these women tend to reaffirm those very gendered power structures - sometimes inadvertently and implicitly, sometimes strategically and explicitly.

The election of Giorga Meloni to the office of Prime Minister in Italy was viewed by many as a progressive move toward gender equity, including figures such as Hillary Clinton, who remarked that "the election of the first woman prime minister in a country always represents a break with the past, and that is certainly a good thing" (Ben-Ghiat 2022). However, a break

with the past is not possible without addressing and disrupting the gendered norms, roles, and

structures that sustain governance systems and normalize the domination of men in the upper

echelons of policymaking. As Joan Acker claims, "the feminist method is not about adding

women into the system but revealing how the concept of gender is incorporated into it" (Scheyer

and Kumsokva 2019, 60). In fact, the trend taken up by governments and institutions around the

world of "gender-mainstreaming" functionally hides the power politics underlying the normative

conception of gender itself, and places the socially constructed gender before the person and her

policies or beliefs (Torrisi 2022). A feminist analysis, in contrast, reveals how all governance

systems are "highly dependent on gendered norms, roles, and structures," creating hierarchical

orders which justifies unequal distributions of power and a society defined by and dependent on

the dominance of one gender over another (Scheyer and Kumsovka 2019, 60).

All nation-states are circumscribed and sustained by gendered and hierarchical divisions,

but Italy has been criticized for being an especially patriarchal society, with some journalists

referring to Italy as "the land feminism forgot" (Naudeau 2022). Italy is known for its

preservation and valuation of conservative gender roles and traditional family structures, with

only 50% of Italian women participating in the paid labor market due to the strong cultural and

social force of the "myth of motherhood" as the "utmost achievement for women" (Minello

2022). The 2022 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum placed Italy at the

bottom of the regional ranking for gender parity, noting the low levels of economic participation

and opportunities for women despite their overall high levels of education (World Economic

Forum 2022). This has dangerous implications for women given the prevalence of gender-based

violence in Italy, largely in the form of domestic violence in the home. A survey by Milan-based

research institute AstraRicerche, presented to the Italian Senate in 2021, found that 40% of

Italian men consider forced sexual relations to be acceptable if those involved are in a relationship. Among other findings, this led the researchers to conclude that Italy "is still anchored in certain legacies," and to call for reform in Italian schools in order to promote change in the prevailing gender norms (Ambasciata d'Italia Washington 2022). Changing these norms and rethinking the gendered status quo, however, will require an authentic gender analysis in order to reveal the underlying power dynamics behind these social and political norms. As Cynthia Enloe explains, "politics lay behind particular feminized expectations, and when they are internalized it is difficult to see the politics behind them" (Enloe 2014).

An examination of how "traditional" gender roles were made reveals that Italy's long legacy of patriarchal norms and values is inextricably linked to its more recent history of fascism. Gendered and sexual differentiation has always been central to the legitimization of repressive and violent ideology and policy. Fascist regimes gain power by exploiting fears and anxieties around "the loss of markers of identity, economic crisis, and demographic collapse" (Rodrigo 2020). During the interwar period, the militarization of society and rejection of "feminization" resonated among an Italian public reeling from the consequences of World War I. Laura Sjoberg argues that during periods of heightened nationalism or threat, hegemonic militarized masculinity and the associated markers - "toughness, responsibility for protection, assertiveness in decision making, and the importance of maintaining reputation" - are traits valued and expected for men, influencing security discourse and decisions (Cohen and Karim 2022, 427). In contrast, "the idealized feminine traits of women are docility, honor, and caregiving; it becomes the responsibility of the woman to take care of the household and the homeland while the men are fighting in war" (Cohen and Karim 2022, 428).

After World War I, Benito Mussolini projected a hegemonic masculinity that was appealing to a weakened and fragile state seeking strength and retribution, and explicitly emphasized the importance of the traditional gender order. Mussolini's fascist regime "combined natalist policies and repressive measures aiming to increase their demographic power, to confine women to the traditional role of spouse and mother, … and to promote a virile form of authority" (Rodrigo 2020). The strategic importance of the "traditional" gender order for the proliferation of global power in this context is clear: men were needed to defend the state, and women needed to stay at home and produce babies for the continuation of the Italian nation/race. Political claims of "tradition" and "national interest," and the connected use of policy and rhetoric which valued militarized masculinity on one hand, and maternal femininity on the other hand, thus represented a political strategy which constructed and promoted gendered norms in order to increase the fascist regime's power both domestically and in the international realm. The persistence of these gendered norms and roles is evident given the status of women and the expectations they face in Italy today. These hierarchical binaries and their consequences continue to constrain the political, social, and economic freedom of women across Italy, and have only been reasserted and reproduced under their new female Prime Minister.

Understanding these power structures and historical contingencies, and undoing that which is often taken for granted as "natural" or "traditional," helps make sense of how and why Meloni and her far-right party "Brothers of Italy" rose to power. Rather than representing a "break from the past," Meloni's election to Prime Minister and the subsequent dominance of the right-wing party in Italian governance is more reflective of a continuation of militarized and gendered roles and structures, cemented by earlier forms of Italian fascism and which continue to be leveraged by political leaders today. Meloni explicitly invokes gendered and militarized

norms tied to Mussolini's fascism in the title of her party "Brothers of Italy" and in its party slogan "God, Fatherland, Family." This slogan is borrowed directly from Mussolini, and represents the fundamental pillars of patriarchal power which were mobilized to enhance fascist political power and legitimize violence during the interwar period (Rodrigo 2020). Meloni "famously branded herself as 'woman, mother, Italian, Christian'" in a speech at a 2019 Rally in Rome, positioning herself as an embodiment of the "traditional" gender order so valued by Mussolini and associated with right-wing politics today (Torrisi 2022). In fact, the conduct of all domestic and foreign politics has always relied on women in their roles as wives and mothers (Enloe 2014). Yet Meloni's politics are a direct continuation of Mussolini's fascism in an even more literal sense. Brothers of Italy "formed a decade ago to carry forth the spirit and legacy of the extreme right in Italy, which dates back to the Italian Social Movement (MSI), the party that formed in place of the National Fascist Party, which was banned after World War II" (Ben-Ghiat, The Atlantic, 2022). Meloni became the leader of the Brothers of Italy party in 2014, but her roots in the movement run much deeper. She first joined MSI as a teenager in 1992, and has since been instrumental in carrying the movement and its ideas to fame and mainstream acceptance.

The uncanny parallels to Italy's interwar fascist period illustrate that the Brothers of Italy party has leveraged gender and sex just as Mussolini's fascist regime did, although perhaps in a way unique to the modern era, given that a woman is even able to head a far-right political party. For example, a differentialist "new feminism" emerged in the 1920s that was supported by fascist regimes, because these feminists demanded "specific rights for women according to their maternal role" (Rodrigo 2022). This form of "feminism" was institutionalized in state-sponsored "women's" organizations in order to promote the "myth of motherhood." Today, declining birth

rates, an aging population, and an influx of migrants of color fleeing crises in neighboring states has reinvigorated demographic concerns throughout Italy, reaffirming Italy's long-standing "myth of motherhood" as interconnected with masculinized security and racialized nationalist concerns. Central to Meloni's political agenda is her commitment to boosting birth rates, including further restriction of abortion and incentives to give birth. At a rally right before the election, she stated "I don't want this nation to disappear" and added that the "problem should not be solved through immigration" (Povoledo and Pianigiani 2022).

Meloni has therefore stoked and capitalized on gendered and racialized national and geopolitical anxieties in a way similar to her fascist predecessors, and her rhetoric and policy promises reflect the fascist "glorification of women as biological regenerators of the nation combined with a disregard for women as people" (Nikolić-Ristanović 1996, 360). During her campaign, Meloni vowed to "protect" women (Maclellan and Mcglauflin 2022), but the protection she promised is conditional and militarized, and her definition of women is limited and exclusionary. Premised in xenophobic ideas about white female bodies needing protection from the brown migrant "other", and ignoring the fact that the majority of violence suffered by Italian women is at the hands of their Italian male partners, she ultimately reaffirms hierarchical divides while doing little to counter the structural issues at the root of the inequality and violence experienced by women throughout Italy. Her anti-LGBT and anti-immigration discourse and policy positions have also led scholars to refer to her politics as an example of "femonationalism," which sees women and women's rights as threatened by those who do not conform to the gendered and racialized norms of the white nuclear family (Silvestro and Venuti 2022, 68). By reproducing gendered and racialized rivalries under the guise of women's empowerment, and using divisive women-centered demands to promote support for reactionary

policies, Meloni's support of women echoes the differentialist "feminism" promoted by Mussolini's fascist regime.

Of course there are many differences between fascism past and fascism present, not least of which is the global context and contemporary geopolitical values. Decades of feminist activism and gender advocacy, as well as the establishment of multilateral institutions like the United Nations, has had some impact on international relations norms, shaping foreign policy decisions, especially among nation-states seeking legitimacy in the new international system. While hard power and Realist masculinized conceptions of military are still incredibly influential and over-prioritized, multilateral action to encourage cooperation and promote liberal values has forced states to consider that "there is another means to security, one based on the principles of multilateralism, common morality, human rights, and extraterritorial accountability" (Scheyer and Kumskova, 58). The rise of the post-Cold War liberal world order emphasized a global hierarchy where democracies were prioritized, valued, and respected over other political systems, and the increasing importance of democracy was coupled with the global push for gender equality. As gender equality reached the international agenda, "the idea of women's inclusion became an integral aspect of democracy-promotion efforts, to the point where gender equality and democracy are now widely seen as intimately connected and have been described as inseparable 'bundled norms'" (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2022, 61).

In light of these developments, countries around the world have adopted a number of gender-equality reforms since the 1990s, including many autocratic and totalitarian states. Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg explain the increasing political inclusion of women by repressive regimes as an example of "autocratic genderwashing," intended to "help a regime appear progressive, liberal, and democratic" while maintaining persistent unequal power structures and

diverting attention away from oppressive, marginalizing, and often violent discourses and policies. Italy cannot currently be labeled an autocracy for a variety of reasons, including that Meloni rose to power through domestic popularity and was elected to office in a free and fair election. However, the continuities between Meloni's party and Mussolini's fascist regime, including the exploitation of Italians' frustrations and resentments to amass said popularity, certainly raises concerns about the national and global implications of an Italian system again governed by an extremist far-right party. Western journalists, scholars, and politicians have widely labeled the rise of the far-right populist party to power as a return to fascism, and Italy has been the subject of much global criticism as a result.

Further, apprehension about the regression of Italy is heightened given that Meloni's election is part of a broader trend of growing right-wing populism across Europe, a trend which has led to democratic backsliding, human rights abuses, and other troubling consequences. In September of 2022, the same month Meloni was elected to office, the European Parliament condemned the Hungarian government under right-wing populist Victor Orbán, stating that the country can no longer be considered a full democracy, and at best may be considered an "electoral autocracy" (European Parliament 2022). In a tweet to Orbán in October 2022, Meloni actually pledged to cooperate with Hungary on their shared militarized masculinity policy concerns - the economy, energy, and security (Twitter 2022). With the whole world watching, however, the Italian far-right must prove to the international community that Italy is still a modern, liberal, Western democracy that deserves a seat at the table. The political power of Brothers of Italy is simultaneously legitimized and made to seem less threatening because the party is led by a woman, despite a political agenda based on patriarchal values which subjugates women to certain gender roles and justifies oppressive and potentially violent policies.

During her campaign, Meloni overtly exemplified and embodied certain feminized expectations to soften the extremism of her party and the negative connotations associated with its neofascist roots, not only at the global level but among her electorate. Critics argued that "the far-right Brothers of Italy party proved… that you can elect the most right-wing government since Mussolini if you find a pretty blond mom to lead it" (Jong-Fast 2022). Reflecting the particular femininity central to her political ideology, Meloni became known for her oft repeated declaration "I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian" as well as her feminine fashion sense and signature blonde hair always worn down (Friedman 2022). In the photographs of her at various campaign appearances, she projects an image of the idealized white mother. Thus the strategic use of gender norms for political power here is multifaceted. Liberal valuation of "women's rights" opened the opportunity for increased political participation for women, but "political leaders incorporate women for strategic reasons: to increase their vote share and to enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of domestic and international audiences" (Cohen and Karim, 431).

Zillah Eisenstein describes these women in positions of power while militarist masculinism is at its height as "gender decoys… they play a role of deception and lure us into a fantasy of gender equity rather than depravity. As decoys they let us pretend that this is what democracy looks like" (Eisenstein 2007, 37). However, this is not to say that Meloni has no agency and is simply a pawn of Italian right-wing populism. She benefits from the patriarchal structure, and in doing so further entrenches not only the hierarchy between masculinity and femininity, but also a hierarchy among women which privileges certain forms of femininity over others. As one journalist commented, "part of Meloni's schtick comes in the form of being a working woman and an active, hands on mother… but time and time again, Meloni has played

this part in an initiative to reduce women to their reproductive value and paint them as bastions of a regressive social order" (Noman, MSNBC, 2022).

While Meloni played into certain feminized expectations on the campaign trail, since she took office her performance of hegemonic masculinity has shifted to accommodate different gendered expectations. As Eisenstein describes, "the brilliance of females being used as decoys for democracy is that the unstable relationship between sex and gender can be deployed in their confused and fluid meanings" (Eisenstein 2007, 38). As a result of the gendered and hierarchical systems and norms which define all governance systems, legitimacy in both domestic and foreign policy requires "masculine attributes." Research "shows that, whether our political leaders are male or female (and sometimes even more when they are female), we expect them to display traits associated with masculinity: strength, aggression, autonomy, stoicism, bravery, and protectiveness" (Sjoberg 2015, 444). In this way while there has been an increase in women's numbers as representatives, at the same time there has been a remasculinization of politics and public discourse.

Accordingly, now that Meloni is Prime Minister, she has strived to perform this hegemonic masculinity in order to prove herself as a strong, reliable, and reassuring leader. For example, Meloni stated that she should only be referred to in the masculine form of her new title, *il Presidente* rather than the feminine *la Presidente*, "sparking a debate on the issues of female empowerment and political correctness" (Reuters 2022). Journalists have pointed out that since she took office she has abandoned her colorful dresses and sweaters for solemn black suits. Interestingly, Italy has a long history of the "projection of power and ideology through dress," exemplified in "the Black Shirts of Mussolini's Fascist party" (Friedman 2022). Hegemonic

militarized masculinity continues to be prioritized over even idealized forms of femininity as the only legitimate way to govern or wield power.

In *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe raises the question of whether women in power are merely a historical blip or part of a sustainable political and social transformation (Enloe 2014). The answer to this question may be both. Clearly a focus solely on gender parity and even women's empowerment is not enough to foment the structural transformation necessary to progress towards true gender equity. Instead, "such an approach only implies an attempt to embed women firmly inside a patriarchal system and fails to challenge the underlying gender norms that fuel violence and conflict" (Enloe 2014). Claire Duncanson, however, describes hegemonic masculinity as a fluid and dynamic concept. As "hegemonic masculinities which have adopted 'softer' traits in order to retain power will contain contradictions, this creates opportunities for feminists to push at those contradictions, make them explicit, in the hope of forcing consideration of the underlying problems" (Duncanson 2015, 243). This may be seen in the eruption of feminist protests across Italy since Meloni's election, and the proliferation of academic and journalistic articles drawing attention to the contradictory and problematic nature of Meloni's brand of "women's empowerment." In late November 2022, feminists convened in Rome to protest Meloni, "calling her a fascist and saying her government threatens the right to abortion in the country" (Pascale 2022). While progress has been slow, the work of early feminists has opened the space for feminists today to continue to question the power dynamics and political interests behind social norms at all levels of the international system.

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National Identity in Pakistan: Past, Present and Future

By Amna Azam

Introduction:

When Pakistan gained independence from colonial rule, its founders had sought to create a democratic state free of religious persecution. Today, the country is plagued with intolerance and religious extremism. What changed since its inception in 1947? The aim of this expository paper is to conduct a theoretical exploration to observe patterns, behaviors and/or trends that would help solve this puzzle. Overall, it illuminates how present illiberalism and extremism can be traced to colonial policies of imperialist powers

I employ a two-pronged approach to analyze the research question — why is there relative increase in radical thought in Pakistan? First, it conducts a post-colonial analysis by studying accounts in historiography. This will be followed by an inquiry into the contemporary successor of colonialism: neoliberal interventionist imperialism. This methodology is used in an effort to connect the past with the present, and explore implications for the future. How do colonial legacies inform social behavior in present-day Pakistan? Detrimental in nature to the incremental progression and development of a state, society and culture, how are these legacies further compounded by imperialist policies in contemporary society? Finally, bridging the past to the present can help lay the groundwork for further research.

Security studies have developed robust scholarship on radicalism, radical thought and what constitutes "radical." For the purpose of this study, this term is operationalized more loosely and not as a binary, but rather a spectrum that encompasses a range of social behaviors that take root in radical thought. This means that there exists a range of intensities (violent and

non-violent) in which radical thought manifests. For example, Islamist fundamentalist radicalization is one instance of radicalization (with varying degrees of intensity observed within this subcategory), but it is not to be conflated with other forms of radical thought such as the level of radical thought observed in an average Pakistani that is vehemently anti-West, but not violently so. The former might manifest as an insurgent attack on a girls primary school, while the latter can be observed on a domestic and individual level such as a feverish fascination with a Pan-Muslim identity across borders.

Nationalism, populism, and discrimination against religious minorities or gender, etc. are all different points on the continuum. The less violent radical thought is, the more abstract it looks on paper. In the same vein, the more violent radical thought is, the more tangible its presence is. However, it is to be noted that non-violent radical thought permeates society in implicit ways that have tangible outcomes. An example of this is the association of "modernity" with "Western influence," which is perceived as a threat to cultural preservation. While this is an abstract observation, it has real-life effects when progressive movements experience severe backlash from people who see it as "Western propaganda" seeking to destroy Pakistani "values." In such an instance, many feminist marchers had to seek refuge after being subjected to false blasphemy charges in 2021 (Hashim, 2021).

In the first section of this paper, I conduct a historical analysis of the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition by using a post-colonial lens. In the next section, I analyze the impact of Neo-Imperialism and Neoliberal Interventionism in a contemporary context. Finally, a case study on the Rise of Populism illustrates the combined effects of aforementioned factors. A brief conclusion with future implications follows.

i. Post-Colonialism and Partition:

The end of over 200 years of British colonial rule in the sub-continent was marked by the partition between India and Pakistan as two separate, sovereign states. The partition manifested as a mass migration crisis across the nascent states' newly drawn borders. Due to the lack of reporting and publishing of credible data from both states, scholars have relied on their own ethnographic research to estimate the human cost of the partition. However, a consensus remains amongst scholars that the real numbers of violent incidents are higher, and the violence more brutal. It is most widely agreed that the total death toll as a direct result of the partition was approximately around one million (Dey, pp. 105).

State Formation and Narrative:

The formation of the new Pakistani state at the end of British Colonial rule was the manifestation of the struggle for freedom, born out of the sacrifices of its people. At the time, the country was divided between West Pakistan and East Pakistan. East Pakistan later seceded during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 as an independent, sovereign state. The mass exodus is often conceived of as a one-time event. However, it requires more nuance to fully grasp the impacts it has had. First, the partition was preceded by about 200 years of brutal, extractive colonial rule. The creation of the nation-state and fight for independence was accompanied by independence movements resulting in violent wars that ultimately crystallized into the partition. Secondly, the partition itself was a bloody, atrocious event that continues to live in the memory of the people that suffered through it. The second point is especially important when considering the distinct lack of reparations that accompanied the Partition. Entire families were uprooted and estranged without compensation for their material and emotional sufferings.

In the absence of a state-led and institutional response to such grievances, the tumultuous

and horrifying accounts of people who lived through them have become part of informal history. These stories have been passed down from generation to generation, with people still living in the long shadow cast by the massive transfer of populations across borders. These memories are not just that. They live and breathe in the way people think, and act. The disputed Kashmir territory, the precarious and fragile India-Pakistan relations are just some of the macro-level ways in which state behavior has roots in its colonial past. Additionally, there was no effort for true reconciliation, as has happened in other cases of de-colonization or violent state formation. The Pakistani state has strategically capitalized on these memories to try to justify its aggression over and over again. Against its own people through various brutal military dictatorships (an establishment which is very much in power in the country even today), extrajudicial killings and mass enforced disappearances, most frequently carried out in the province of Balochistan. It is also used to justify state-sanctioned violence and war crimes beyond its own borders as observed when Bangladesh fought for its independence and Pakistan's own violent and imperial presence in Afghanistan.

Decolonization: Process or Event?

An important distinction between post-colonialism and decolonization is imperative for the aim of this study. Post-colonial studies aim to analyze the effect, causes and implications of colonial legacies on an institutional and social level; decolonization is the deliberate exploration into dismantling the structures that continue to impact the formerly colonized. It is actively seeking to enfranchise them by making them the subject of theory, and subsequently — praxis. Beyond this, there is no universal definition of decolonization: it takes shapes in various formal and informal ways; it also manifested differently for the colonized across the world as decolonization is a direct response to the physical, social and cultural degradation brought on by

its colonial rulers. In Pakistan, decolonization has not been a one-time event that ended with its independence, but rather a process observed over a period of time in which the formerly colonized subjects explicitly and implicitly seek to assert their agency.

In one of the most prolific works on decolonization, *The Wretched of the Earth,* Frantz Fanon establishes at the outset of his book that "decolonization is always a violent event" (pp. 1). In the context of this paper, this is important to remember when critically engaging in the examination of radical behavior observed in Pakistan, among Pakistanis. Disruptive and hostile in nature, radical thought stems from the desire to "decolonize." In that, the subjects seek to push back against foreign influence and interference they perceive as threats — manifesting as an amalgamation of the frustrations of the collective in different ways through which this collective seeks to establish its self-determination. It is also a reflection of the unexpressed trauma of the past.

In an effort to decolonize, radical thought is found to be pervasive in Pakistan on a local, institutional, and state level (Chart 1.1). On the local level, it is observed in the domestic and civil society realm. It is the landscape from which social norms emerge from, dictating socially acceptable behavior. For example, women who wear Western clothing are generally frowned upon in Pakistani society. The logic of this stems from the rejection of "Western influence," while women's bodies are policed in order to "protect cultural values." In an honor-based society, this association of "bad morality" severely ostracizes women.

Level Actor(s)
Local Independent Individuals and Civilians
Institutional Universities, Media, Legal, Political Parties, Military
State Narrative, Policymaking, Extrajudicial Killings

Chart 1.1: Levels of Radical Thought

On an institutional level, decolonization becomes more formal and structural in nature. An example of this is the formal imposition of gender segregation in primary schools, colleges and universities to push back against "foreign influence." Modest dress codes are also strictly enforced to police how students dress. These policies are observed in both private and public schools. Additionally, chapters of the far-right Islamist student group called the "Islami Jamiat Talaba" are found in most universities. These student organizations act as the unofficial moral police of the campus, beating up a professor in one instance in the prestigious University of Punjab (Tavernise, 2010).

Finally, on the state level, it is how the state itself builds its narrative by using history to legitimize its rule and subsequent power. It is seen in the ways policies are made and enforced. This includes the narrative it creates: a Pan-Muslim, patriotic, loyal, Urdu-speaking population that must be vigilant against the "threat" of foreign actors that seek to destroy culture, religion, state and society. Building off this narrative, ethnic, religious, sectarian and racial minorities are subjected to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and draconian blasphemy laws. The state is able to justify and rationalize its violence and institutional failures using this narrative as a veil. Overall, the process of decolonization in Pakistan continues to this day. The following section explores how it is further intensified as a response to US imperialism that is weaponized

by neoliberal interventionist foreign policy.

ii. Neo-Imperialism and Neoliberal Interventionism:

Neoliberal Interventionism for the purpose of this study involves geopolitical and foreign policy initiatives taken by the US during the Global War on Terror beginning 2001. The "interventionist" aspect includes the direct actions taken to enforce and/or coerce state behavior in Pakistan through militaristic means (drone strikes, covert operations, etc). Neo-Imperialism is defined as "the economic rather than military domination of foreign countries" (Chitadze, pp. 130). This includes the imposition of economic sanctions. The earliest economic sanctions were imposed by the US government in 1977 for Pakistan's pursuit of a nuclear programme. Later, sanctions were imposed in response to the growing Taliban militancy in the country from 2017-18. These sanctions are imposed by withholding military and economic aid to the country. The failure to enforce foreign policy by using economic sanctions has been considered a failed deterrent by experts (Pandey, 2018).

Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, Washington's relations with Pakistan have become relatively minor. However, this relative "peace" has not always been the case. Pakistan-US relations have been tenuous and volatile, with a strong anti-American sentiment among the Pakistani population, especially in the post-9/11 era. This hostility is a product of years of US-led neo-imperialism enshrined in neoliberal interventionist policies. Whereas the initial years of Pakistan's engagement with US foreign policy during the 1950s and 1990s were not so contentious, as it worked closely to fight against the Soviet threat, these sentiments soured over time as US interventions stepped beyond bilateral agreements and

pursued militarized interventions on Pakistani soil. The colonial legacies still alive and fresh in the collective memory have made people predisposed to being anti-Western and extremely wary of foreign presence. Against this backdrop, the US as a hegemonic Imperialist power further bred this existing mistrust. Over the years, these interventions have been employed in different ways, including drone strikes, weaponization of public health initiatives, crippling economic sanctions, and support for brutal military dictators. These have fostered strong anti-Americanism and anti-Western thought.

Militaristic Interventions:

In the absence of transparency and accountability, the global War on Terror in the post-911 era had a devastating impact for innocent civilians around the world. In Pakistan, this resulted in the egregious loss of human lives as collateral damage. Between 2004-2018, there have been at least 430 confirmed drone strikes carried out by the US (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism). It is reported that "approximately 56,661 Pakistanis – civilians and opposition fighters – have been killed since 2001. Of these, about 23,300 are civilians" (Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs). Although there is no universal data due to lack of transparency by the US and Pakistani governments, these drone strikes are estimated to have killed between 172-207 children, and injured between 1,161-1,719 people (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism).

Additionally, these attacks were disproportionately carried out in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region that "often ignores long-standing, systematic political marginalization and human rights abuses" (Open Society Foundations, pp. 3). Today, there is a growing separatist movement stemming from this region. One study finds that "some suicide bombings in Pakistan are carried out in direct retaliation to U.S. drone strikes in the region"

(Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs). Additionally, research in the discipline of Peace & Security has a general consensus on the strong correlation between military intervention and radicalization. One study analyzing Pakistan concluded that "drone strikes appear to increase anti-US sentiment and radicalization" (Mahmood and Jetter. pp. 1).

Support for Military Dictators:

Historically, Pakistan has been unable to sustain a democratically elected government as a direct result of a military coup. The precedent for US support for military dictators bred discontent and mistrust in the collective memory of the people. Despite its "pro-democratization" foreign policy talk, the US has been a supporter of military rule in Pakistan as far back as 1958 during the rule of General Muhammad Ayub Khan as the country's first military dictator. In the past, it was the fight against the Soviet Union, while more recently it has been anti-Taliban sentiment that made the military establishment a better ally for US interests. This is because a democratically elected, civilian government would have political costs for being an accomplice to the civilian death toll accompanying drone strikes. Ironically, the violent oppression of women, religious and sectarian minorities that were a product of the constitutional amendments made by US-backed military dictators have caused rampant anti-Americanism in the country today. US aid to Gen. Zia ul Haq's regime facilitated a period of rapid Islamization of unprecedented levels in the Pakistani civil society.

Public Health:

In a 2011 covert operation, the CIA weaponized public health to locate Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan. Under the guise of administering vaccines against hepatitis B to babies, the Agency collected DNA from civilians in the city of Abbottabad. When this operation was reported, it "led

to uproar in Pakistan and a number of anti-vaccine campaigns were started by Islamic extremist parties" (Shah, New Scientist). Creating extreme distrust in vaccines provided by foreign actors, Pakistan remains one of the only countries in the entire world that has failed to eradicate polio.

Economic Sanctions:

Another tool used by the US has been the imposition of economic sanctions to influence state behavior. Initially, sanctions were imposed to restrict and deter nuclear weapons proliferation. Since the launch of the Global War on Terror under the Bush administration, however, economic sanctions have been imposed more liberally. In addition to the ineffectiveness of these sanctions in coercing state behavior, they have been associated with human costs. Many experts in International Relations have contended that economic sanctions are an ineffective foreign policy tool, having been "frequently criticized, even derided" (Haass, 1998). One study analyzing various periods of economic sanctions found that "they not only had a severe impact on the economy of the country but also had worse social effects" (Malik, pp. 140). The economic detriments are most acutely felt by civilians who suffer from their consequences, such as inflation. It breeds poverty by further widening the wealth gap between socioeconomic classes. Underscoring gaps in contemporary research on radicalization, one study concludes that there is a direct causal link between poverty and radicalization/violent extremism (RVE). It notes that "especially in countries such as Pakistan, where there are high levels of poverty and militant groups both recruit and supply social services, and where poverty-stricken young men have few livelihood options other than that of joining a militant group" (Mesøy, pp. 1). In the Pakistani context, at the least, these sanctions create resentment in the population that it targets; and at worse, they serve as a pipeline to radicalization.

All these factors have laid a fertile ground to create conditions and grievances through

which radical thought takes place: alienation, disillusionment, lack of reparations and compensation, poverty, mistrust and violence. These are not isolated incidents, and neoliberal intervention has a longstanding history of forgoing the autonomy of the Pakistani people, and infringing upon the sovereignty of the Pakistani state. Below is a case study on the rise of populism that shows how wounds of the past (colonial legacies) and grievances of the present (neo-imperialism) wed in a culmination of radical thought.

iii. Case Study:

Rise of Populism

In 2018, Pakistan elected Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan as its first executive leader that did not come from a dynastic political party. As a politician and PM, Khan was a classic populist: demagogue, anti-West, nationalist, misogynist and anti-corruption crusader. Widely popular amongst the urban, middle class population, Khan was able to achieve remarkable support. He appealed to the right-wing and liberals alike and this is not primarily owing to his demagoguery. He voiced and weaponized grievances that people have shared for many years, promising them solutions that only he could offer. In fact, prior to his election, he "stated that he would rather die than go to the IMF for a loan" (Hanif, *The Guardian*). His staunch anti-Americanism appealed to the masses who resent the neoliberal interventionist machinery which has heavily impacted their lives.

In addition to Khan presenting himself as a "savior" who sought to fight against "Westernization," he is also a figure that is perceived as a "fixer," with the power to undo the "erosion" and "destruction" of culture and religion brought by Western interference. An example of this is the introduction of the Single National Curriculum that will enforce a uniform school syllabus throughout the country. Analyses of the curriculum show that there is a large increase in

religious studies, specifically Islam. So much so that "public and private schools will be teaching more religion than even the *madressahs*." (Nayyar, 2020) Using religion as an antithesis to the West, Khan taps into collective memory of the unhealed trauma of the past, and uses it to propel into the future as the sole, "saving grace" of the country. This rhetoric is not an entirely new phenomenon as Pakistan previously underwent a period of rapid Islamization under the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988.

After losing support from the military establishment, Khan was ousted from office. Urban centers across the country erupted in protests, with people challenging the military led by General Qamar Javed Bajwa. A key point here is to note the kind of narrative that Khan and his many followers have employed in debates on his tenure and future role in politics: traitors vs. loyalists. People who do not subscribe to Khan's pan-Muslim, nationalist, patriotic and anti-West ideals are labeled as "traitors" of the state. This false dichotomy has been perpetuated by Khan's party and his supporters on a large scale. Considering the historical context of the narrative built during the 1947 partition and subsequent formation of the State of Pakistan, it becomes clear that this "traitor/loyalist" association with national identity has been a part of the social fabric since its inception. The success of a populist like Imran Khan was not due to any single reason; however, the conditions in which a figure like him could thrive have roots in the colonial legacies, compounded by imperialist, neoliberal interventionism.

iv. Conclusion:

This paper is an ambitious attempt to condense a nuanced topic by drawing from a complicated history of a country with a violent past and uncertain future. It uses Pakistan's colonial past as a backdrop to explain how the past informs the present. It also considers the compounding impacts of neo-imperialism, and ultimately, how the lines between colonial

legacies and those born of neo-imperialism begin to blur. The case study on the rise and success of populism is used to highlight how current issues have roots in the past, and in order to address the challenges they present to the country today, a reconciliation with its history is imperative.

It is to be noted that the operationalization of "radical thought" in this analysis was done broadly, taking into account non-violent, unconventional types of radicalization. It is important to avoid and push back against the orientalist tendency to demonize brown people as "savages" and inherently "violent." This study looks at the *relative* increase in radical thought and behavior — not contending or implying that the majority of Pakistanis subscribe to violent extremism. Nuance is critical to understanding the logic of behavior observed on a social level, and Pakistanis are not a monolithic people. Instead, the aim of this study is to observe and point out the more implicit ways in which the effects permeate state and society on an individual level. In fact, it is essential to look beyond the material and how it shapes individual thought. As Ashraf and Farooq astutely point out, "little attention, however, is paid to the local public imagination to know how the ordinary people consume this everyday destruction and what kind of cultural production it ensures that shapes and inspires their imagination" (Ashraf and Farooq, pp. 17).

Moreover, this analysis is not novel or groundbreaking in South Asian studies. In fact, many Pakistanis have diverse, unique and interesting ways of relaying this information. One study analyzed Pashto poetry and showed how themes have changed after the War on Terror: "the contemporary form of the *tapey* depicts the pain and injury of people affected by the high-tech warfare" (Ashraf and Farooq, pp. 18). Portrayed in movies like *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Waters) and TV shows such as *Dastaan* (A Tale), artists in contemporary media depict the pain and trauma in a way to reconcile with the past. Sadat Manto's literary work gave voice to the suffering, alienation and disillusionment of the collective that came from the partition of India

and Pakistan.

When looking at the future of Pakistan, it is hard to say anything conclusively. The lack of relevance in geopolitics after US withdrawal from Afghanistan might provide some respite. However, China's ambitions speak of trouble, this is especially concerning when the volatile attacks carried out against Chinese workers in Pakistan by the separatist movement in Balochistan. This region has been the subject of military interventions by the US, and Pakistan itself. An agitated population fears Chinese encroachment as the Belt and Road Initiative is underway. In fact, there have been insurgent attacks against Chinese people in Pakistan, with "rebel groups warning of even harsher attacks" (Al Jazeera, 2022). Some scholars have begun to identify China's role in Pakistan as "Neo-imperialist" (Ejaz, pp. 85). Out of context, these fears and concerns may seem premature and alarmist. However, when considering the history of colonialism and imperialism in the country, it shows how the logic of this response. It is unclear if Neo-Imperialism will serve as a third wave of foreign interference in Pakistan but we have the past to caution against the implications it could have. Transparency and accountability among the state and public, and between Pakistan and China remains crucial.

Oral history, real life accounts/testimonials, historiography, literary analysis, ethnography and other forms of qualitative research methods are essential in painting the accurate picture of the reality of people social sciences aim to study. In addition to human rights abuse, the implications for the future of such scholarship are completely missing. This is a reflection of the Otherizing, orientalist disregard of the real, human cost of neoliberal interventions in the Global South. Post-colonial and historical analyses must be wedded to mainstream IR scholarship to reorient the way we engage in research. Recognizing the humanity of the people we seek to study is fundamental to our knowledge.

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How Will Nationalist Currents Affect Transboundary Water Issues? A Risk Framework of the GERD Dam

By Claire Bracco

Executive Summary

The concept of globalism and nationalism have increasingly gained more importance in our contemporary world. That importance lies within their role in the creation of interdependent, or autonomous, societies and nation-states. Scholars have argued that nationalism has struggled surviving in the contemporary world, becoming less important. However, it is clear that the balance between nationalism and globalism is changing. That changing balance has direct effects on how nation-states tackle non-traditional challenges. This essay will examine how a new balance could affect transboundary issues such as water and river management, looking at the Ethiopian GERD dam as a model for the creation of a new risk and resolution framework. The conclusion sees a combined approach of both globalist and nationalist strategies to solve the stalemate and obtain the best strategic results.

Globalism and Nationalism

Globalism is defined as the political space where "human beings assume obligations toward the world as a whole and they expose values which take the globe as their frame or reference point" (Albrow, 1996). In other words, it is an ideology that understands relations between states as a network of interdependence. Globalists realize that sovereignty is limited when challenged with non-traditional challenges, such as epidemics or climate-related security concerns, and adopt multilateral institutions to tackle them. The expansion of globalism as the main political ideology is associated with globalization due to capitalist expansion. The limits of globalism, and

capitalism at the same time, then refer to their main managing force, the United States. Indeed, as the US has been pushing its own agenda in multinational organizations, globalism has taken on government-centered values which ignores the different relationships of interdependence between stakeholders.

The extreme dichotomy that has resulted from ignoring the need for inclusive agendas and ideas led to an "us" versus "them" political discourse. By bringing back hypernationalism and an exclusive emphasis on love for the fatherland and absolute sovereignty, national popular movements are taking over multiple states. Parties such as Poland's Law and Justice (PiS), the Sweden Democrats, Brothers of Italy (FdI), the National Rally (RN) in France, Fidesz and Our Homeland in Hungary, Vox in Spain, the Alliance for Romanians' Unity (AUR), Slovakia's We Are Family and Estonia's Conservative People's Party have gained increasing influence over national and international politics. Their ideas relate to more restrictive immigration and refugee policies, exclusionary nationalism, and support for traditional gender roles to protect their "national" identity. Nationalism, by definition, is the "feelings of attachment to one another that members of a nation have, and to a sense of pride that a nation has in itself" (Kacowicz, 1998 in Abdulsattar, 2013). Established with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, it refers to the understanding of one's identity through their nation-state. It is the basis of modern society.

Historically, nationalism has been used to further the interests of nation-states in peace or war, galvanizing public opinion to support their goals. But nationalism does not harm people or states. Nevertheless, it can be dangerous if applied to the wrong contexts. This happens when variants of nationalism, such as protectionism, or the application of specific trade policies to promote

domestic products by imposing tariffs on foreign goods, are applied to an interconnected community of states. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent, states rely on each other for the acquisition of goods or the distribution of them. In a globalized world, to cut ties with all the other states is to fall behind. Still, extreme nationalist movements are rising in influence.

Ethnonationalism in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the first elections following the loss of power by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party (PP) won a landslide victory opening the opportunity for Ethiopia's political transition after years of repressive rule. However, ethnic tensions are rising, as are media censorship, the arrest of opposition politicians, political purges across state institutions, and civil war spilling from the Tigray region (Clingendael, 2022). Abiy's administration is currently attempting to move away from ethnonationalism, but internal challenges remain as conflict with the TPLF has resulted in a civil war. Ethno-nationalist sentiments remain highly salient and shape domestic and international decisions. Additionally, the economic downturn and unstable foreign currency reserves threaten the continued economic growth of the country, leading to more conservative decisions. Because of the current and past political and social features of the country, Ethiopia has been extremely averse to cooperation and globalism. This relates mainly to issues of conflicts and transboundary matters. Therefore, this paper will examine the future risks for nationalist and authoritarian governments when challenged with interdependent issues, such as water and dam management. Because of the inherently intricate nature of the issues, this paper will specifically focus on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam controversy and the risks associated with it, creating a model risk framework for future similar matters. Indeed, the dam offers a great example of common access resources in

a competitive environment. In this case, climate change and the lack of national cooperation create the appropriate context for nationalism to triumph.

Transboundary water management: an overview

Transboundary waters account for 60 percent of the world's freshwater flows. However, cooperation on the matter is lacking in most countries as national interests are put first. Most countries still do not have all of their transboundary basin areas covered by operational arrangements (UN Water, 2020). Indeed, a unilateral nationalist move by one country to build a dam could drastically reduce a river's flow downstream in another country. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) is the most comprehensive document on the matter. The document was adopted in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996. It is a unique legally binding instrument promoting the sustainable management of shared water resources, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the prevention of conflicts, and the promotion of peace and regional integration (UNECE).

As signatories of the Convention, Parties are required to prevent, control, and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way, and ensure their sustainable management. Similarly, parties bordering the same transboundary waters have to cooperate by entering into specific agreements and establishing joint bodies. In the African continent, only a few states have signed the Convention, with Chad and Senegal becoming the first in 2018. Ghana then acceded in 2020 and was followed by Guinea-Bissau and Togo in

2021. For the purpose of this paper, it is worth noting that neither Egypt nor Ethiopia is among the signatories of this convention.

The GERD Dam

Ten years ago, the Ethiopian government announced the construction of a new dam on the Nile, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (herein referred to as GERD). The dam is the largest hydropower project in Africa (Chen and Swain, 2014), exceeding 1800m in length and a height of 155m with an overall capacity of 74 billion cubic meters (Heggy et al, 2021). Storing up to a year and a half's worth of Blue Nile flow, the GERD will double Ethiopia's electricity generation capacity, help regulate the highly seasonal flow of the river and reduce the annual quantity of sediments deposited in the canals in Ethiopia and neighboring countries.

As it is located 12 miles from the border with Sudan, Khartoum will enjoy the majority of these benefits. However, the riparian countries- Tanzania, Uganda, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Eritrea, and South Sudan are also majorly affected.

The dam will mainly be used for energy production by using the water to power the turbines of the two hydroelectric power stations installed and then returning it to the river basin. Neighboring countries and their flow of water from the Nile will thus not be affected by the GERD in the long-term, but there are still some unresolved issues concerning. On August 12 of 2022, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced the completion of the third filling of the reservoir and that the second of the GERD's 13 hydropower turbines is now operational (Arab Center, 2022). However, without an agreement or consultation between the parties involved,

Ethiopia created reasons for tensions with the neighboring countries. Some of these issues include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring water supply to all parties involved
- Avoiding civil unrest
- International recognition of Egyptian and Sudanese dependence on the Nile
- The filling period of the GERD
- A water management protocol to enhance equitable use of the Nile.

Egypt is a rapidly growing desert nation with more than 100 million people that relies almost entirely on the Nile River for its water needs. Any changes to the normal flow would possibly affect its supply of water, causing disastrous natural and social consequences that would also affect the stability of the regime. Moreover, Egypt's electricity and sedimentation control needs are already regulated by the Aswan High Dam, completed in 1970. Thus, the GERD will only disadvantage Egypt and enhance the regional risk of droughts and social unrest. Moreover, Ethiopia's unwillingness to comply with regulations and to recognize Egypt's historical rights on the river create new challenges in the era of an already unstable region.

Regional and International risks

The GERD is creating a major issue in the region, as there will now be two major storage reservoirs in the same international river basin, each with a huge capacity but no legal regulation to manage them. This could lead to both countries simultaneously filling up their reservoirs in anticipation of a drought causing major water shortages. It is necessary for both countries to immediately trace a strategic path to contend with the situation before it leads to unprecedented consequences for their population.

A 1902 Agreement between Great Britain and Ethiopia prohibited the construction of any waterwork across the Nile in exchange for Ethiopian sovereignty over the Benishangul-Gumuz region, where GERD is located. As the climate crisis worsens, Ethiopia's geographic advantages generate a sizable comparative advantage whereby controlling the Nile's water supply presents an opportunity to subjugate Egypt and Sudan to its will. The cost of conflict against one of Africa's strongest armies, for Egypt, could outweigh the benefits regardless of the outcome. However, now that Ethiopia has started filling up the dam without any agreement, Egypt could use an offensive military option to ensure the halt of the GERD project and end Ethiopia's impudent attitude towards international law. An airstrike could hit the dam, causing flooding and major disruption for the communities on the Sudanese border. At the moment, because of Sudan's interests in GERD-produced electricity and its relationship with Egypt, Khartoum has maintained a neutral stance in the dispute. Still, if a conflict was to break, it would probably be the most affected country, and Egypt would lose a precious ally. Moreover, any conflict that involves accidental casualties, which would inevitably occur with flooding, will attract international attention and possible sanctions.

Strategic recommendations

- Third-party involvement

Egypt has already asked for third-party mediation in the negotiations with Ethiopia in regard to the filling period of the GERD. However, to this day, the Ethiopian government refuses any agreement on the issue, pointing at the supposed US favoritism towards Egypt. Still, this paper argues that by involving international neutral parties there could be some long-awaited developments in the frozen situation.

The recommended parties are:

- African Union: As an external neutral party, the African Union should be more involved in negotiations. Ethiopia is already causing the extinction of Lake Turkana in Kenya due to the unilateral decision to fill up another dam near the Somalian border, and the AU should be more involved in this matter (Zahran, 2021). Moreover, by engaging with the AU instead of leaving the issue to the mediation of supposedly external biased actors such as the US and the UNSC, Ethiopia will be more prone to find a compromise.

- World Bank: Although the World Bank has already been criticized for its bias towards Egypt and its geopolitical advantages (Tekuya, 2020), its involvement could provide very interesting insight during the negotiations. In fact, the WB has technical expertise in the field, as it played a key role in crafting the highly effective Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan.

- China: The country is engaging with multiple projects in the region and contributed an estimated $2 billion to the $4 billion required for the construction of the GERD (Mbaku, 2020). The Chinese government is manipulating the historical conflict between the two countries, Egypt and Ethiopia, to its benefit by trying to replace the US as the main regional influence.

- Judicial intervention: Intervention by the International Court of Justice could be used to validate the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty on Egyptian Nile hegemony.

- Other parties (EU, UN, European Investment Bank, Sudan): All of these parties have interests in the area and enough leverage to force Ethiopia into a fair and binding agreement and ensure its compliance. Ethiopia's need to be more involved in the international community will influence its attitude in any negotiation mediated by any influential institution.

The United States, with its unstable foreign policy in the region, has gained the reputation of an unreliable ally. Instead, third-party involvement from more neutral and unbiased states would hopefully lead to pressure on the parties to find a solution. Similar to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek deal on the management of the Syr Darya River, this option requires the signature of the Cooperation Framework Agreement (CFA) from Egypt in exchange for Ethiopian compliance and accountability for the GERD project. This agreement was signed in 1999 by the riparian countries for water allocation and includes the establishment of the Nile Council of Ministers (Nile-COM), a body in charge of all water affairs in the Nile River. Ethiopia has reported multiple times that without opening from Egypt and its signature on the CFA it will not accept any water quota obligations. Therefore, this policy suggests an Egyptian opening on the negotiation table to the CFA to avoid the escalation of the situation.

However, signing the CFA will automatically invalidate the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian treaty and affect the legal allocation of the Nile to Egypt, and it is unlikely that Egypt would agree to this. Still, an opening from Egypt that allows for a more equal repartition of water allocation and still grants the majority of the Nile to the Egyptian community for its survival needs could finally solve the stalemate and create a new system of cooperation in the region. All the riparian countries have interests in Egyptian cooperation and have shown to be open to a possible new allocation of Nile's water.

- Reduction of Aswan High Dam filling

Scientific scholars agree that the best option to deal with the inevitable shortage of water caused by the GERD is mitigation. A revaluation of the Aswan High Dam (AHD) operations could return some water to the basin and mitigate possible drought. Moreover, by reducing the operation of the hydropower plants, Egypt will also reduce the effects AHD has on the soil fertility and the erosion of the Nile Delta coast, increasing the lifetime of the dam itself.

Nevertheless, by slowing down AHD, a need remains for a counterbalancing action to prevent GDP loss and electricity shortages. In this case, an agreement could be found with Ethiopia to guarantee financial compensation through the surplus electricity generated by the GERD to indemnify Egypt for its mitigation strategy. On its part, Egypt would have to accept Ethiopia's timetable on the GERD completion and resize its water quota requests. Although this policy option mitigates both possible water and electricity shortages in Egypt through economic means, it will not solve the issue. A financial compensation of any sort requires first a mutual recognition of the size of the financial damages arising from the GERD, and Ethiopia is unlikely to settle down for anything except its own terms. Moreover, this policy would undermine Egypt's position in the region as a power that prefers to lower its requests more than defend its legitimate rights.

- Improving water infrastructures

Egypt's irrigation methods are currently highly inefficient. Israel, with a similar climate and even greater water shortages, manages to produce the same crops every year using less water and electricity (Ottaway, 2020). By investing with the IMF or Saudi Arabia in desalination implants or fixing leaks in the canal system, Cairo could notably reduce the impact of a possible drought

on the population. Although this mitigation policy would not solve the issue with Ethiopia by itself, it will have positive consequences for the future of Egypt and guarantee more water protection in the era of climate change.

Conclusion

This paper recommends following the three policy options delineated to ensure the best possible outcomes for all the state parties in addressing the GERD dispute. By engaging with more external neutral parties, negotiations will be more involved in the international community, shining additional light on the issue and pressuring Ethiopia to comply with legal requirements in view of possible criticisms from the media. Moreover, third parties will bring expertise and help craft a beneficial agreement for all the nation-states involved. Additionally, this paper calls for a combination of nationalist and globalist strategies. As Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan become more open globally, they should also use nationalist movements to invest in more efficient water infrastructures to prevent catastrophic consequences.

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Assessing Russia's Position in the Horn of Africa

By Elizabeth Jefimova

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to assess Russia's position in the Horn of Africa to 2026. Specifically, this paper will assess US influence in the Horn of Africa and examine the impact of Russia's activities on its partnerships in the region.

Scope

This paper will assess Russia's position in the Horn of Africa and Moscow's ability to project influence in the region. US influence in the Horn of Africa will also be discussed. This paper will specifically focus on Russia's and the US's relations with Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan (North and South). Impact of Russian hybrid warfare in these countries will be examined. While Kenya and Uganda are considered to be a part of the Horn and have their own respective relationships with Russia and the US, they will not be a part of the paper. China is also excluded but is recognized as another important global player that seeks to gain more influence in the region. Though the current crisis in Ukraine impacts Russia's relations and ability to project power in the region, it will not be the primary focus of this paper. Mention of the crisis will be brief and limited to its influence on relevant partnerships in the region.

The time frame for the Key Judgements is out to 2026. The paper assumes that Vladimir Putin will remain in power but will not predict when, or if, the conflict in Ukraine will end. It is also assumed that present civil conflicts in the Horn of Africa will continue. Only developments

leading up to December 2022 are considered and any additional developments are outside the scope of this paper.

Key Analytic Judgments

US Influence in the Horn of Africa will likely decrease. This assessment is made with high confidence.
- Washington's lack of a consistent approach to address regional security issues will likely diminish the region's perception of the United States as a credible partner.

- While the new 2022 US Strategy Toward Africa recognizes the need for a new approach toward Africa, many African nations read the strategy along a Cold-War rhetoric and view US renewed interests with caution.

Russian hybrid warfare, and by extension Russian influence, will likely increase in the Horn of Africa. This assessment is made with medium confidence.
- Previous Russian support of conflicts in the Horn shows that Moscow is a reliable and credible partner.

- Current instability threatens the Horn of Africa, which makes Russian hybrid warfare strategies more desirable to address respective security objectives.

Russia will likely acquire a naval base in the Red Sea. This assessment is made with low confidence.
- Increased military cooperation agreements and anti-piracy campaigns dominate the Kremlin's strategy to cement its military position in the Red Sea.

- Sudan's withdrawal from agreements to build a naval base does not mean that Russia is out of viable options. Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somaliland remain possible avenues for Russia to pursue.

Background

Since the second half of the 20th century, Russia's engagement with African nations has centered around Moscow's rejection and fight against Western influence.[1] Following World War II, the Soviet Union was the "ideological role model, ally, and supporter" of many African nations' resistance against Western colonial systems.[2] Using military aid, economic cooperation packages, and African exchange-student scholarships, the Soviet Union created a lasting impression that the Kremlin was a dependable ally to Africa in times of need.[3] However, the collapse of the USSR in 1991 disrupted Moscow's engagement in Africa. Growing domestic issues and the lack of financial resources forced Moscow to end most of its commitments on the continent.[4] Consequently, until the early 2000s, Africa remained on the periphery of Russia's foreign policy.

The election of Vladimir Putin as Russia's president in March 2000 changed this. Embracing the Primakov doctrine, which posits that a unipolar world dominated by the United States is a direct threat to Russia's security and regional interests, Putin sought Russia's return to the world stage.[5] As Russia's economy improved, Russian foreign policy "evolved from a relatively passive refusal to accept Western initiatives to a more active form of resistance."[6] Taking advantage of its newly acquired resources, Russia returned to Africa, particularly the Horn of Africa, to continue

[1] Guido Lanfranchi and Kars de Bruijne, "'The Russians Are Coming! the Russians Are Coming?' Russia's Growing Presence in Africa and Its Implication for European Policy," *Clingendael Institute*, June 2022.
[2] Mehmet Cem Oğultürk, "Russia's Renewed Interests in the Horn of Africa As a Traditional and Rising Power," *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (2017): pp. 121-143.
[3] Guido Lanfranchi and Kars de Bruijne, "'The Russians Are Coming! the Russians Are Coming?' Russia's Growing Presence in Africa and Its Implication for European Policy," *Clingendael Institute*, June 2022.
[4] Maxim Matusevich, "Russia in Africa: A Search for Continuity in a Post-Cold War Era," *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 1 (2019): pp. 25-39.
[5] Eugene Rumer, "The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* June 5, 2019.
[6] Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer, "Russia's Global Ambitions In Perspective," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 20, 2019.

its Soviet legacy. The Horn's rich reserves of oil and rare metals and its cheap raw materials further renewed and increased Moscow's engagement in the region. [7]

Yet, it was not until the 2008 piracy crisis that Russia shed its status as a peripheral player in the Horn of Africa. Due to the threat posed by Somali pirates to Russian nationals, Russia, in a "rare avenue of cooperation" with the West since its 2008 Georgian War, supported a UN intervention against Somali pirates.[8] Still, Russia's efforts to combat piracy "did not significantly expand its geopolitical presence in the region."[9] To fix this, Moscow's re-engagement in the Horn incorporated a hybrid-warfare strategy that involved a broad range of subversive instruments of power and influence with a focus on nonmilitary tools.[10] In the Horn, the latter are seen in Russia's use of private military contractors (PMCs), like the Wagner Group, to "redress complex local military and terrorism conflicts with which African governments have struggled" to Moscow's favor.[11] Russia's stance in the Horn is also advanced by the expansion of its arms sales in the region and signing of several security cooperation agreements.[12] For example, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia continue to be Russia's top arms buyers in Africa.[13] This strategy increases the Horn's dependencies on Moscow's military assets and in exchange provides Russia with access to vital natural resources and the Red Sea.[14]

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[7] Mehmet Cem Oğultürk, "Russia's Renewed Interests in the Horn of Africa As a Traditional and Rising Power," *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (2017): pp. 121-143.

[8] Samuel Ramani, "'Engaged Opportunism': Russia's Role in the Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy Research Institute,* November 24, 2020.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Christopher Chivvis, "Understanding Russian 'Hybrid Warfare'," *RAND Corporation*, March 22, 2017.

[11] Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, Commercial Concessions, Rights Violations, and Counterinsurgency Failure," *Brookings*, February 8, 2022.

[12] Samuel Ramani, "'Engaged Opportunism': Russia's Role in the Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy Research Institute,* November 24, 2020.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, Commercial Concessions, Rights Violations, and Counterinsurgency Failure," *Brookings*, February 8, 2022.

Russia's successful engagement in the Horn over the last decade is highlighted in the wake of

Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Most countries in the Horn either abstained, voted against, or did

not vote in the UN General Assembly March 2022 resolution that condemned Russia's

invasion.[15] In April 2022, alarmed by Russia's growing presence and influence in Africa, the

United States passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, which monitors

"African governments working with Russian entities sanctioned by the United States."[16] Despite

the bill receiving backlash for its Cold-War rhetoric, in August 2022 Washington published its

new strategy toward Africa, which explicitly referenced Russia seven times and warned that

Moscow "views the region as a permissive environment for parastatals and private military

companies, often fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit."[17] Thus, unlike its

previous policies towards Africa, which lacked clear objectives, Washington now recognizes that

a new approach toward Africa is needed to preserve and enhance US influence since it has been

on the decline for several years now.[18] However, a more specific US approach to the Horn of

Africa remains to be seen.

Discussion

The following assessments regarding Russia's position in Africa are:

Declining US Influence in The Horn of Africa

Since 9/11, US policy in Africa has primarily focused on countering violent extremist

organizations.[19] The "absence of an overarching framework to understand and address complex

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[15] Aude Darnal, "How the War in Ukraine Illustrates the Weakness of US Policy toward Africa," *Just Security*, April 18, 2022.

[16] The White House, " U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Sahara Africa," August 2022.

[17] Nosmot Gbadamosi, "Is the New U.S. Africa Strategy More of the Same?," *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2022; The White House, " U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Sahara Africa," August 2022.

[18] The White House, " U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Sahara Africa," August 2022.

[19] Gabriel Negatu, "The US Risks Losing Its Influence in the Horn of Africa. Here's How to Get It Back.," *Atlantic Council*, January 11, 2022.

regional priorities" pushed Washington to pursue "singular agendas and respond to challenges

and crises when and where they arose."[20] Consequently, by viewing Africa, and by extension the

Horn, as a "problem to be managed rather than as a partner in shaping the next century,"

Washington's credibility, and ultimately, influence in the Horn has waned.[21] For example, in

Ethiopia, Washington's support of the problematic Meles Zenawi regime, which violated a

number of human rights, and that of his successor, in 2018 and later its hesitancy to condemn a

rebel assault on the democratically installed government projected an image that Africa was not a

priority to the United States.[22] In 2020 the withdrawal of US troops from Somalia, a critical area

for combatting al Shabaab, an al Qaeda-linked insurgency, further highlighted this image.[23]

While the Biden Administration recently announced a return to Somalia, it was only after the

election of a new Somalian president, who was assessed to have a cooler attitude towards

Russia's allies Ethiopia and Eritrea.[24] Considering that redeployment also came shortly after the

passing of the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, it is highly likely that

Washington only reversed its position so it can counter Russian influence in the region.[25]

Though the US has now published a new strategy to address Russian activities in Africa, it is

unlikely that the strategy will succeed in pushing the Horn towards the US sphere of influence

and away from a Russian one. The Biden Administration's current hesitancy to sanction

coup-plotters and human-rights violators in Ethiopia and Sudan and its ease in sanctioning

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Joe Bruhl, "America Ignores Africa At Its Own Peril," *War on the Rocks*, June 14, 2022.

[22] Gabriel Negatu, "The US Risks Losing Its Influence in the Horn of Africa. Here's How to Get It Back.," *Atlantic Council*, January 11, 2022.

[23] Phil Stewart and Steve Holland, "Trump to Withdraw Most Troops from Somalia as Part of Global Pullback," *Reuters*, December 4, 2020.

[24] Stig Jarle Hansen, "What Us Re-Entry into Somalia Means for the Horn of Africa and for Bigger Powers," *The Conversation*, May 30, 2022.

[25] Nosmot Gbadamosi, "Is the New U.S. Africa Strategy More of the Same?," *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2022.

Eritrean forces throughout the Ethiopian civil war continues to underscore Washington's inability to enforce a consistent strategy towards African nations.[26] Even nations outside the Horn have noted that "long-standing US approaches to Africa have become 'insufficient' to meet new challenges in a more contested and complicated world."[27] For example, many African nations were not impressed with US leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and felt that Africans were left to fend for themselves while the West enjoyed ample amounts of vaccines.[28] This indicates that the Horn will likely view Washington's renewed interest in the region with caution because of previous inconsistencies in US policies towards Africa. Furthermore, while Washington insists that its new strategy in Africa is "not centered on great power rivalry," most African nations will likely continue to read Washington's new strategy along a Cold-War rhetoric because of its history.[29] Thus, the fear of a possible proxy war and the lack of consistent policies to address regional security issues will most likely prevent nations in the Horn from falling under US influence and instead push them away from Washington.

Strengthened Partnerships

In July 2022, at a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, Joseph Siegle, director of research at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies stated that "Russia has arguably gained more influence in Africa over the last several years than any other external actor."[30] Indeed, Russia's ability to fill the vacuum left by an absent US policy and aid African nations in their respective conflicts showed the Horn that the Kremlin is a reliable partner that is capable and willing to help

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[26] Robbie Gramer, "Team Biden Balks on Africa Sanctions," *Foreign Policy*, October 20, 2022.
[27] Nosmot Gbadamosi, "Is the New U.S. Africa Strategy More of the Same?," *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2022.
[28] David Pilling, "Why the US Is Re-Engaging with Africa," *Financial Times*, September 2, 2022.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Robbie Gramer, Amy Mackinnon, and Jack Detsch, "Russia's Dreams of a Red Sea Naval Base Are Scuttled-for Now," *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2022.

Africa."[31] The expansion of Russian influence in the Horn has centered "on the use of private security companies to deliver counterinsurgency and counterterrorism training and advising to local governments struggling to counter militancy" and arms sales.[32] For example, the use of the Wagner Group to suppress Sudan's pro-democracy revolutionary movement strengthened Sudan-Russia partnerships.[33] In Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, Russian arms sales allowed each country to pursue their respective security objectives and strengthen their relationship with Moscow.[34]

Today, Russia's gains in influence are seen in the UN General Assembly, where some African nations in the Horn, like Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, remain unwilling to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.[35] Some have even helped legitimize Russia's war. For example, the Wagner Group colluded with political and military leaders in Sudan to exploit the country's gold reserves "in a bid to fortify Russia against increasingly robust Western sanctions and to buttress Moscow's war effort in Ukraine."[36] While other countries in the Horn, like Somalia and Djibouti, voted in favor of Ukraine, they did not vote the same way regarding a later UN resolution that sought to remove Russia from the Human Rights Council. In fact, all countries in the Horn either were against the resolution, abstained, or were absent from the vote.[37] Though the Ukrainian war

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[31] Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, Commercial Concessions, Rights Violations, and Counterinsurgency Failure," *Brookings,* February 8, 2022.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Oscar Rickett, "Russia's Wagner Group 'Getting Rich in Sudan' from Gold Mines and Government," *Middle East Eye,* June 7, 2022.

[34] Samuel Ramani, "'Engaged Opportunism': Russia's Role in the Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy Research Institute,* November 24, 2020.

[35] Carlos Mureithi, "How African Countries Voted on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Quartz*, March 7, 2022.

[36] Michael Fitzpatrick, "How Russian Mercenaries Colluded with Khartoum Regime to Exploit Sudan's Gold," *RFI*, November 6, 2022 ; Nima Elbagir et al., "Russia Is Plundering Gold in Sudan to Boost Putin's War Effort in Ukraine," *CNN*, July 29, 2022.

[37] United Nations "Suspension of the Rights of Membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council," April 7, 2022.

worsened food shortages and raised fuel prices in Africa, the Horn's voting suggests that the region is likely unwilling, or unable, to turn away from Russia.[38]

The current instability in the Horn also indicates that cooperation with Russia, in the form of arms sales and use of PMCs, will likely increase. For instance, Somalia is still at civil war. Sudan is in "a political impasse between the military leadership and the civilian pro-democracy movement" that has "paralysed the country's political transition."[39] Ethiopia is in a fragile ceasefire between the Ethiopian government and the leadership of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which may not remain due to previously broken ceasefires.[40] And Eritrea-Djibouti relations continue to be hostile due to previous border conflicts that left many dead and may boil over if the Ethiopian ceasefire breaks.[41] While these conflicts may not seem to have direct Russian support, each conflict was either supported by Russian arms sales and/ or collaborated with Russian PMCs, like the Wagner Group.[42] Considering that US support is contingent upon human rights responsibilities, which African leaders in the Horn move away from, Russia will remain a valuable partner for the foreseeable future as long as these conflicts continue.[43] Thus it is likely that the Horn will reach out to Russia, as it had in the past, for more support. Russia, which seeks access and payments in concessions for "natural resources, substantial commercial contracts, or access to strategic locations" will most likely agree to

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[38] Ashish Kumar Sen, "Russia's War in Ukraine Is Taking a Toll on Africa," *United States Institute of Peace*, June 15, 2022.

[39] "A Big Picture View on the Conflicts and Crises in the Horn of Africa," *Crisis Group*, October 14, 2022.

[40] Eliza Mackintosh, "Warring Parties Have Agreed to a Truce in Ethiopia's Two-Year Civil War. Here's What to Know," *CNN*, November 7, 2022.

[41] Eliza Mackintosh, "Warring Parties Have Agreed to a Truce in Ethiopia's Two-Year Civil War. Here's What to Know," *CNN*, November 7, 2022; Evan Winslow, "The Impact of the Djibouti-Eritrea Conflict on Citizens," *The Borgen Project*, August 6, 2021.

[42] "Eritrea Seeks to Evade Sanctions through Russia, China Alliances," *Eritrean Research Institute For Policy and Strategy,* February 22, 2022; "Russia to Offer Africa More Military Equipment and Support," *Horn Observer*, August 21, 2022.

[43] Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, Commercial Concessions, Rights Violations, and Counterinsurgency Failure," *Brookings,* February 8, 2022.

increased arms sales and/or use of PMCs.[44] As a result, Russian hybrid warfare strategies will likely increase in the Horn and further strengthen Russian influence and partnerships in the Horn.

Increased Russian Naval Presence

Since the 2008 piracy crisis, Russia also expanded its role as a security provider in the Red Sea through military cooperation agreements, anti-piracy missions, and naval base negotiations.[45] The use of Djibouti's ports and the Ethiopian-Russian agreement that will have the Russian Navy train the Ethiopian Navy are just a few examples of Moscow's intent to secure and increase its presence in the Red Sea through cooperation with the Horn.[46] However, due to the deepening of Russia's partnerships in the Horn, which has led to an increased naval presence and more cooperation agreements, the Kremlin's footprint could potentially expand into the Red Sea, to the Gulf Aden, and, ultimately, to the Indo-Pacific and the Persian Gulf.[47] Such an expansion would likely increase the likelihood of confrontation with the United States, boost Russian influence in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific, and accomplish the Kremlin's foreign policy objectives in those respective regions.

However, to expand, Russia needs a naval base in the Red Sea.[48] In Sudan, Russia attempted to acquire a naval military base in 2020 and agreements were drawn up to finalize construction. But the agreement fell through in July 2020 with the new Sudanese administration, who did not want

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Thomas Harding, "Red Sea Competition Growing as Russia Enters Region" *The National News*, September 2, 2021.

[46] "Russia to Increase Cooperation with Ethiopia in Info. Network Security, Digital Skills," *Addis Standard,* December 2, 2022.

[47] Samuel Ramani, "'Engaged Opportunism': Russia's Role in the Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy Research Institute,* November 24, 2020; Samuel Ramani, "Russia's Growing Ambitions in the Red Sea Region" *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, September 20.

[48] Samuel Ramani, "Russia's Growing Ambitions in the Red Sea Region" *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, September 2021.

to antagonize the West and risk sanctions.[49] One U.S. intelligence official assessed: "We see it as unlikely that the Port Sudan deal is going to be done anytime in the near future and that Russia is potentially looking to seek other options if Port Sudan doesn't work out."[50] One option may include Somaliland. During the Cold War, the Soviets had a military base in Berbera, which was later abandoned due to Soviet support for Ethiopia during the Ethiopian- Somali conflict.[51] Though deployment of the Wagner group could potentially resolve tribal conflicts and boost Russian influence in the area, the lack of an official legal status of Somaliland may prevent Russia from acquiring a base. Eritrea also remains a possibility as Moscow held talks about establishing a "logistics" hub on the Eritrean coast.[52] Moreover, though Sudan denies Russia a port at this time, it does not mean it would never do so. Since the deal to acquire a port fell through, Sudan and Russia have held regular talks about strengthening trade and economic cooperation with one another.[53] While Sudan is hesitant to provide Russia with a naval base for fear of a return of sanctions and alienation from the West, Sudan did not outright say no to the Kremlin and remains a possible option for Russia's naval goals.[54]

In short, Russia has not given up in its pursuit of a naval port in the Red Sea and is likely to continue exploring its options because of its foreign policy goals in other regions. Russia will likely seek to increase its military cooperation agreements, as seen with the Ethiopian navy, anti-piracy campaigns, and hybrid warfare in the Horn, which would officially allow Russia to

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[49] Robbie Gramer, Amy Mackinnon, and Jack Detsch, "Russia's Dreams of a Red Sea Naval Base Are Scuttled-for Now," *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2022.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Anton Mardasov, "Russia Eyes Port Sudan as Key Naval Hub," *Al-Monitor*, August 5, 2022.
[52] Robbie Gramer, Amy Mackinnon, and Jack Detsch, "Russia's Dreams of a Red Sea Naval Base Are Scuttled-for Now," *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2022.
[53] Anton Mardasov, "Russia Eyes Port Sudan as Key Naval Hub," *Al-Monitor*, August 5, 2022.
[54] Ibid.

increase its naval presence in the Red Sea. Thus, Russia's naval presence will likely increase and may boost the Kremlin's chances of acquiring a naval base in the Red Sea in the coming years.

Conclusion

While Russia is likely to remain an "engaged opportunist" in the Horn, the relative success of Moscow to create and keep its sphere of influence in the region highlights the lengths the Kremlin will go to expand its foreign policy objectives.[55] This is largely the result of a perceived decline in US influence around the world, which has allowed Russia to cement its ties with Africa while it continues to wage war on Ukraine.

Aside from Soviet legacy, the failure of previous US strategies in Africa likely allowed Russia to take advantage of various political vacuums and increase its presence in the Horn. Consequently, in the last two decades, Russia strengthened its position and influence in the region through hybrid warfare strategies. The use of these strategies will most likely increase as various civil conflicts continue to destabilize the Horn and African leaders seek advantage over their local adversaries. Though Moscow's plan to acquire a naval base in the Red Sea faces obstacles, this does not indicate that Russia will never acquire a base. Rather it is highly likely that Moscow will increase its naval presence in the Red Sea and hybrid warfare on land to increase its chances of securing a deal. While the trajectory of the Ukrainian war may impact Russia's ability to finance its position, history has shown that Russia will return one way or another.

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[55] Samuel Ramani, "'Engaged Opportunism': Russia's Role in the Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy Research Institute,* November 24, 2020.

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