

Using the 'F' word

Fascism and the rise of the far right



NADIA KABIR BARB

IF 2016 has reminded us of anything, it is that not only do we not learn from our mistakes but we keep repeating them. For a species that is constantly challenging scientific, medical and technological boundaries, we seem incapable of moving forward on a social and moral level. 'Never again' is a phrase we use to appease ourselves, showing that we have acknowledged or condemned an incident, a group of people or whatever the latest outrage or media sensation might be. But here we are witnessing countries being ravaged by war, cities decimated, millions displaced and killed – in the name of religion and in service of greed and political ambition. To commit an act of evil, as they say, only requires good people to do nothing. Whether it is at the level of governments or wider society, we need both to understand and to take responsibility for the consequences of our (in)actions. In a world where truth and accountability have taken a backseat, however, this seems highly unlikely.

It may be argued that the term fascism is used far too frequently and easily these days. The term is banded about in a way which some find historically inaccurate and others disrespectful of the crimes committed by the fascists of World War II. But "fascism" today carries enough of the hallmarks to be worthy of the title without being the exact fascism of Mussolini and Hitler. There has been a rising tide of nationalism that is being used by some as a platform from which to express a form of legitimised racism. According to the United Nations, "The rhetoric of fascism is no longer confined to a secret underworld of fascists, meeting in ill-lit clubs or on the 'deep net'...It is becoming part of normal daily discourse." Human rights are at risk of "unravelling" under unprecedented pressure and the "rhetoric of fascism is being normalised." (*Independent*)

We are witnessing the results of a constellation of multiple phenomena. A prolonged economic recession which has seen the wealthy few prosper but failed to deliver economic benefit to the wider population, has rewritten the political norms and economies of the West. At the same time the brutal war in Syria and ongoing destabilisation of the Middle East has contributed to a humanitarian and refugee crisis of epic proportions. In difficult times, it is understandable that people would be protective of what they have, but in today's Western world this is giving rise to blatant racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, nationalism, white supremacy, fascist groups and a

towards foreigners and immigrants. There is an economically disenfranchised element of the population which represents an easy target for the 'us vs them' rhetoric of irresponsible politicians who are able to market soundbites without having to worry about consistency of logic or even truth.

In June this year, a week before the EU referendum, Labour MP Jo Cox was shot and repeatedly stabbed to death by white supremacist Thomas Mair who has heard saying "This is for Britain", "keep Britain independent" and "Britain first" during the attack. Subsequently, the far right and fascist group National Action came out in support of Jo Cox's killer praising and glorifying him for her murder. They even posted a tweet stating: "Vote Leave, don't let this man's sacrifice go in vain. Jo Cox would have filled Yorkshire with more subhumans!" In an unprecedented move, Home Secretary Amber Rudd approved the order for the group to



Image from Pink Floyd's The Wall

people, hail victory" reminiscent of the Nazi slogan *Sieg Heil*.

Over the past decade, whether it is France, Denmark, Germany or the Netherlands, there has been a re-emergence and rise of right wing (and, to a lesser extent, far left) political parties in Europe and a rejection of the centrist globalising liberal "elite". Far from being relegated to political fringe players and outsiders they are firmly established within mainstream politics, garnering increasing support from the general population. Leader of the Front National Party Marine Le Pen is now one of the main contenders for next year's presidential elections in France. According to her, poverty, insecurity and unemployment in France can be attributed to globalisation, immigration and the failure of the European Union. Not an advocate of multiculturalism, Le Pen states that those who come to France should accept and submit themselves to French culture and the French way of life – "Come as you are, keep living like you do, keep your culture and we will add all that together, doesn't work. Multicultural societies are multi-conflict societies" (CNN). This kind of rhetoric, suggests assimilation over integration and inclusiveness. Having seen the victory of the divisive Brexit campaign in Britain which relied on emotive but empty slogans such as "Make Britain Great Again" opting for sovereignty over globalisation and Donald Trump being elected US President based on his campaign of populism, soundbites, inconsistency, hate speech, racism and misogyny there is a widespread concern that Marine Le Pen might actually win the French presidential elections in 2017.

In an article written by Robert Cagan for the *Washington Post*, he states that "fascism comes to America, not with jackboots and salutes (although there have been salutes, and a whiff of violence) but with a television huckster, a phony billionaire, a textbook egomaniac "tapping into" popular resentments and insecurities, and with an entire national political party — out of ambition or blind party loyalty, or simply out of fear — falling into line behind him".

As we go into 2017 we need to be alert to the mistakes made in 2016. This time rectifying rather than repeating them yet again by acting with wisdom, statesmanship and integrity.

The writer is fiction writer and contributor to *The Daily Star*, based in UK.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Terrorised Tunisia



ERIK BERGLOF

THE recent terror attack on Berlin's Christmas market – which killed 12 and injured more than 50 – cast a pall over this year's holiday celebrations across Europe. Viewed from Tunis, where I happened to be during the fallout, the attack has also had a major, albeit different, impact.

Tunisia, after all, is the home country of Anis Amri, the alleged perpetrator. Like Europeans, Tunisians fear terrorism. But they fear not just individual terrorist attacks, like those in the Bardo museum in Tunis and on the beach in Sousse in 2015, or even the numerous political assassinations it has faced since its regime change began in 2011.

Tunisians worry that social upheaval will destroy their remarkable but fragile young democracy. Neighboring Libya offers a stark illustration of what that could look like.

The prospect of Tunisia's government attempting to manage the situation alone is not an attractive one. Tunisians know that their state is weak and cannot really protect them. They could end up like Egypt, which is becoming a police state, or move in the direction taken by Algeria, where a brief flirtation with political Islam 25 years ago gave way to an authoritarian clampdown and years of violent conflict.

Making matters worse, concerns

about terrorism have all but killed off Tunisia's large tourism industry, severely weakening the economy. As a result, a country that already receives International Monetary Fund support is trying to buy social stability by increasing state employment. To contain the bulging budget deficit, it has opted to increase taxes, further reducing growth.

This downward spiral has become institutionalised, as the main unions have dug in their heels and civil society has become disillusioned. Young people, in particular, lack trust in institutions – a serious problem in a country where 38 percent of the population is under 25 years old.

The young people I met in Tunis brought together by the British NGO Forward Thinking, which promotes understanding between Christianity and Islam, come from across the political spectrum. But they have one thing in common: they view themselves as victims of globalisation. The international community is, in their view, conspiring against them, undermining their chances to find employment and form families. This perception has created fertile ground for terrorist recruiters; Tunisia has sent more jihadis than any other country to fight in Syria and Iraq.

The threat of cross-border terrorism has attracted international attention to Tunisia. But it is not the only reason we should care about the country's fate. Tunisia remains a beacon of hope for democracy and political freedom in the region.

I visited Tunis with a former official from Ukraine, a country that,

despite having a very different history and culture, has a lot in common with Tunisia. Ukraine, too, experienced a revolution that drove its former leader into exile, only to see sought-after reforms stall. And both have faced serious disruptions from war (in Tunisia's case, in Libya), including an influx of displaced people (each country is home to around

more important – support for broad state-strengthening reforms.

For all of its flaws, the political dialogue that has been initiated in Tunisia, thanks to the Islamist movement Ennahda and the non-religious parliamentary parties, has saved the country from the political abyss. But unless the government can deliver on reforms, that dialogue will collapse –

interests are still resisting progress. While reforms must be owned domestically, outsiders – in particular, the European Union – can help to reinforce the local vision by providing a viable path of institutional change.

Extending a helping hand is in the EU's self-interest. It, too, is facing a refugee crisis, which it cannot address without effective partnerships. For

tion less hazardous for the migrants themselves, more deals with credible partners must be made. And here, Tunisia is a good candidate. Europe already has been able to negotiate arrangements with Tunisia to restrict migrant flows and to return those who have been denied asylum.

Yet the Berlin attack highlights the limits of the country's institutional capacity. Apparently, Amri's expulsion from Germany was postponed, owing to the Tunisian bureaucracy's slowness in confirming his citizenship.

That is why the international community must also offer Tunisia resources to strengthen its state agencies and civil society alike, as well as a vision of closer integration with the EU to help direct the political process, much as it has done in Ukraine. This is not about EU membership, but about opening up markets and relaxing visa restrictions (admittedly a hard sell after the Berlin massacre).

The fear, in both Tunisia and Ukraine, is that Europe will close its doors further. I saw the distress in the eyes of Ukrainian reformers after the United Kingdom's vote to leave the EU, and I sensed a similar reaction in Tunisia when the Berlin attacker's identity emerged. By attempting to insulate itself from the outside world, Europe would only end up depriving these countries' citizens of any hope of better lives at home.

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Demonstrators in Tunisia in an anti-terror march in 2015.

PHOTO: AL JAZEERA

two million refugees).

The international community must help to ensure that both Tunisia and Ukraine can fulfill their revolutions' potential. This must include help in dealing with refugees, as well as – and

and so will the prospects of Tunisia's young people.

Ukraine holds a lesson here as well. Its reform process has taken hold, thanks partly to significant outside support. But entrenched

example, European institutions and the Spanish government have succeeded in containing the flow of migrants across the Strait of Gibraltar.

To get a handle on the wider migration crisis, while making migra-

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ
EGYPTIAN WRITER WHO WON THE 1988 NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Fully developed
- Inte
- Persia, today
- Italian sculptor Nicola
- Main idea
- Company firer
- Allocated
- Drink cubes
- Olympic sleds
- "The Fifer" painter
- Left over
- Easter item
- Take a load off
- Vertle's creator
- Gofe's work
- Flower part
- Peyton's brother
- Frangelico flavoring
- Find
- Lusty look
- Cherishes
- Melt base
- Leave
- Ship pole

DOWN

- Lativia's capital
- Eye part
- Forgoing
- Tempt
- Reach across
- Screen dots
- Depleted
- Zodiac animal
- tear
- Dijon denial
- Acquire
- Preparing for a road trip
- Composer Satie
- Hardens
- Clutter
- Writer James
- African expanse
- Christian of "Mr. Robot"
- Golf need
- Portions out
- Piquancy
- Radius partner
- Bender
- Young fellow
- Fanciful poem
- Force member

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

BOLL	HAGMAN
OBOE	APIECE
NEW	VESTED
DYE	TEXT
SCOT	PAL
ASCR	STOLE
ROAN	AWES
NOSED	EXECS
ONE	ONAIR
TROT	BIN
FATHER	JADE
AXIOMS	OSLO
DEARIE	TEEN

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott