

Not a pretty picture

The contours of a new world order are on your TV screen



JAMES M DORSEY

TELEVISION news summarises daily what a new world order shaped by civilisationalists entails. Writer William Gibson's assertion that "the future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed" is graphically illustrated in pictures of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of desperate Syrians fleeing indiscriminate bombing in Idlib, Syria's last rebel stronghold, with nowhere to go.

It's also evident in video clips from the streets of Indian cities where police stand aside as Hindu nationalists target Muslims and Prime Minister Narendra Modi turns Muslims into second-class citizens; refugee camps in Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled ethnic cleansing in Myanmar linger with no prospect of a better life; a devastating civil war in Libya fuelled by foreign powers propagating a worldview that has much in common with civilisationalism; a take-it-or-leave-it US plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that belittles and disregards Palestinian aspirations; the Trump administration's adoption of rules that favour immigrants from Europe rather than Africa, Asia and Latin America; and China's brutal efforts to erase the identity and culture of its Turkic Muslim minority.

The constant TV diet of the horrors of civilisationalist-inspired violence, war, human suffering, discrimination and prejudice, coupled with fears of existential threats posed by the *other*, migration and globalisation, no longer sparks outrage.

"The horrors in Idlib are one face of the emerging 'new world disorder,'" said Wall Street Journal columnist Walter Russell Mead. Underlying civilisationalist discrimination and repression that risks dislocating minority segments of populations, political violence and mass migration on unmanageable scales is the mainstreaming of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and the demonisation of liberal values that propagate basic, human and minority rights and ideologies that seek to synthesise democratic and conservative values steeped in tradition and religion, particularly Islam.

Civilisationalists and right-wing populists, including Messrs. Trump and Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Chinese President Xi Jinping, feed from similar philosophical troughs.

Political scientist Shawn W Rosenberg argues that the political structures of states that are governed by populists and/or defined by a civilisation rather than the Westphalian concept of a nation are built on the notion that people are characterised not by their ties to one another, but by being part of a nation.

Civilisationalists and populists ignore individual differences and emphasise an individual's relationship to the nation. In their world, individuals are at the bottom of the heap in a civilisationalist state that is anchored in concepts of loyalty to the nation, and obedience to the state and its leaders who embody the will of the people.

Rosenberg warns that civilisationalists see an independent judiciary, Western concepts of rule of law, and a free press as institutions that not only obstruct accomplishment of their mission but also undermine their definition of the role and place of the individual.

To protect a nation's integrity, civilisationalists and populists seek to shield "the people" from foreign influences, migration and the nation's competitors—other nations. They see their nation's power as derived from being stronger than others and doing better than others at the other's expense.

Foreign policy is geared towards that goal rather than towards a global community that upholds principles of equality, equity and cooperation, Rosenberg asserts. Civilisationalists and populists seek economic and/or military diminution, if not domination of others, which by implication requires a rejection or hollowing out of international institutions.

The civilisationalist approach is making itself felt not only in lands governed by civilisationalists. Mainstream political leaders like French President Emmanuel Macron, widely viewed as a centrist who is attempting to counter civilisationalism and populism, are not immune to aspects of civilisationalism.

Nor is the Dutch parliamentary commission that earlier last month held controversial hearings about

"unwanted influencing by unfree countries" that focused on Gulf support for Dutch Muslim communities and an unannounced view of political Islam. The commission contemplated following in the footsteps of Austria, which has banned foreign funding for Muslim organisations. France is considering a similar ban.

Speaking in the city of Mulhouse earlier last month, Macron laid out his strategy to combat political Islam represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists, who in his words insist that Islamic law supersedes the laws of the French Republic and emphasise "Islamist separatism" and cannot require certificates of virginity to marry," Macron said.

Macron's sweeping opposition to political Islam persuaded him to support Libyan rebel leader Khalifa Haftar, who stands accused of human rights violations and has aligned himself with a Saudi-backed strand of Salafism that preaches absolute obedience to the ruler.

Haftar, who also enjoys the support of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, two countries opposed to democracy and any expression of Islam that rejects submission to an autocrat, is seeking to wrench control of the Libyan capital of Tripoli from the United Nations-

them to accommodate dominant mores.

Civilisationalist approaches, nonetheless, contribute to the failure to be agnostic in countering all forms of supremacism and racial, ethnic or religious prejudice and the lumping together of ideologies that reject democratic values with ones that seek accommodation.

It is a failure that creates the environment in which someone like white supremacist Tobias Rathjen was emboldened, earlier last month, to kill nine people with immigrant backgrounds in the German city of Hanau. German politicians accused the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party of contributing to that environment. They demanded that the party be placed under surveillance.

Countering civilisationalism is one side of the coin. Avoiding unhelpful generalisations and oversimplifications is another.

In an examination of the concept of popular sovereignty in Islamic thought, political scientist Andrew F March argues that this decade's popular Arab revolts marked an "intellectual revolution" and "a comprehensive reformulation of Islamic political philosophy", involving not only "reducing rulers to their proper status as agents of the people but also implicitly raising the people to the ultimate arbiters of God's law."

No doubt, it is a revolution that is rejected by ultra-conservative Muslims, elements of the Brotherhood and various strands of Salafism. Nonetheless, it was a revolution articulated in February 2011, days after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, by none other than Al-Qaradawi, one of the most prominent Islamist thinkers.

Quoting Martin Luther King Jr's prediction that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice," Mead, the columnist, concluded that this "is hard to see from Idlib."

He could have just as well been speaking about the dislocation and suffering in a civilisationalist-dominated world that plays out on television screens across the globe in which rights, equitable rule of law and international law are relegated to the dust bin.



PHOTO: MANDEL NGAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

US President Donald Trump looks on as India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves during a rally in India in February 2020.

"Islamist supremacy."

Kuwait and Qatar are funding the construction of an Islamic religious and cultural centre in Mulhouse. Qatar has backed the Brotherhood in the past and is home to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, widely viewed as one of the foremost influencers of the Brotherhood, a catch-all for a multitude of aligned Islamist groups that bicker among themselves.

"In the Republic, we cannot accept that we refuse to shake hands with a woman because she is a woman. In the Republic, we cannot accept that someone refuses to be treated or educated by someone because she is a woman. In the Republic, one cannot accept school dropouts for religious or belief reasons. In the Republic, one

recognised Government of National Accord (GNA). The GNA is backed by Turkey and includes elements associated with the Brotherhood.

To be sure, France has had its share of jihadist violence in recent years, with deadly attacks on a French satirical newspaper, restaurants, music halls and soccer stadiums and the ramming of a truck into a crowd on the streets of Nice.

Creeping civilisationalism does not, however, by definition characterise the efforts by Europeans like Macron and others to ensure that minority communities, including Muslims, are full-fledged participants in a society that should afford them equal opportunity and rights and requires

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IMPLEMENTING SDG 7 Powering progress through clean energy



SYED YUSUF SAADAT

IMAGINE a 187-foot tall tower with a 55-tonne steel dome on top. At first, it seems like a structure from a future base on the planet Mars. But the Wardenclwyffe Tower is not an abstraction from the future. It was built in 1901 in New York by Nikola Tesla—a towering figure in wireless power transmission. Initially, Tesla planned to utilise the tower to transmit messages across the Atlantic Ocean and also to ships at sea. However, when he read about Guglielmo Marconi transmitting radio signals over the horizon, Tesla made a change of plans. Tesla decided to scale up the Wardenclwyffe Tower for wireless transmission of electricity. While the electricity itself would have to be produced at some expense, Tesla's vision was to transmit the power for free by creating a channel between the Earth and the ionosphere for anyone to tap into. Tesla believed that he could wirelessly transmit electricity worldwide by creating ripples that spread through the Earth and could be detected at great

distances by receiving circuits.

Unfortunately, Tesla's main financier, JP Morgan, was petrified at the notion of transmitting electricity for free instead of making a fortune in the power transmission business. Morgan refused to provide the additional funds required for upscaling Wardenclwyffe Tower, and Tesla was compelled to abandon the project altogether. If Tesla's radical ideas had been executed, then billions of people could have been provided with electricity without the need for spending trillions of dollars in power transmission infrastructure.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 reiterates Tesla's vision of affordable and clean energy, albeit with wires attached. SDG target 7.1 calls upon countries to ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services by 2030.

Access to electricity in Bangladesh has increased rapidly in the past two decades. Data from the World Bank's Sustainable Energy for All database show that only 8.5 percent of the population had access to electricity in 1990, whereas 75.9 percent of the population had access to electricity in 2016. The rural-urban divide in energy access has also been reduced.

In 1991, access to electricity was 53.5 percent lower in rural areas compared to urban areas; however, in 2016, this difference decreased to 25.1 percent. Therefore, the short-term and long-term measures that have been adopted by the government over the years, such as importing power and increasing installed capacity, have succeeded in bringing electricity to more households in Bangladesh than ever before. Thus, the government has given power to the people, just like the people have given power to the government.

However, increased access to electricity in Bangladesh was provided mainly through power generated by fossil fuels. In 2018, natural gas was used to generate 63.51 percent of all electricity in Bangladesh, while hydroelectric and solar power generated only 1.63 percent and 0.01 percent electricity respectively. This means that electricity generated from renewable sources was less than 2 percent of the total electricity output in 2018, and it is unlikely that Bangladesh will be able to meet the target of generating 10 percent electricity from renewable energy sources by 2020 that was put forward in the Renewable Energy Policy of

Bangladesh. Although the dependence on natural gas for power generation has decreased over the years, it has been substituted by power generation through furnace oil and power imports, instead of increased power generation using renewable energy sources. Indeed, renewable energy output in Bangladesh has fallen from 3.44 percent of total electricity output in 1995 to 1.22 percent in 2015.

It is quite appalling that the Power System Master Plan 2016 outlines the intention to increase power generation from coal from 1.6 percent in 2017 to 35 percent in 2030, as a strategy for diversifying the fuel mix for electricity generation. This is despite the fact that the cost of manufacturing solar photo-voltaic cells is falling, making them more economically feasible.

Levelised cost of electricity is defined as the average cost of electricity for every unit of electricity generated over the lifetime of a project, at the point of inter-connection. Research has shown that the levelised cost of electricity generation from utility-scale solar photo-voltaic power plants in Bangladesh is USD 91 per Mega Watt hour (MWh), compared to USD 110 per MWh for coal. Nevertheless, the

enormous potential of utility-scale solar photo-voltaic power plants has hitherto remained largely unexplored, and solar power in Bangladesh has been relegated to roof-top solar panels which are inadequate for meeting urban energy demand.

Even though Bangladesh has come a long way, ensuring accessibility, availability and affordability of clean energy for everyone still remains a formidable task. The power and energy sector of Bangladesh is confronting a number of key challenges. There are concerns of cost over-run, time over-run and low levels of efficiency in certain power and energy projects. Lack of transparency regarding natural gas reserves and impediments in natural gas exploration are depriving the country of potentially vast energy sources. Lack of good governance means that consumers ultimately bear the burden of inefficiencies in the power and energy sectors in the form of higher prices. These issues need to be addressed urgently in order to make sure that Bangladesh can achieve SDG 7 by 2030.

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ROALD DAHL
(1916-1990)
British novelist, short story writer and poet

Having power is not nearly as important as what you choose to do with it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Cut's counterpart

6 Angry look

11 Patriot Allen

12 "The Age of Anxiety" poet

13 Approximating

15 Travel stop

16 Fireplace item

17 NFL player

18 Decreases

20 Up to, briefly

21 Battleship letters

22 Hoe target

23 Yorkshire landscape

26 Nourishes

27 Rams' mates

28 Buck's mate

29 Horse healer

30 Picnic baskets

34 Follower's suffix

35 Saloon quaff

36 Farrow of film

37 Voicing one's opinion

40 Game show host

41 Owner's paper

42 Canary chow

43 Derisive look

DOWN

1 Hazard

2 Be penitent

3 Eshews

4 Shoe color

5 Eternal

6 Sides in turf wars

7 Tote

8 Birth parent seeker

9 Like some Mexican beans

10 Swaddles

14 Charged atoms

19 Takes to court

22 Show sorrow

23 Dreams up

24 Impressive

25 Salad start

26 Whips up

28 Noted surrealist

30 Pluto's realm

31 Ham it up

32 Hunting weapon

33 Less dangerous

38 Homer's neighbor

39 Martini base

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

OPRAH SHADES
PREGO TUBES
TACOS ANISE
IDO TARGEN
CONCEPT CARS
COLE LIVE
LEANS HOLES
OMNI POT
CONCERT HALL
ATE ROBTIE
LITER EVOKED
SOTTO DINERS
NEAR SEEDS

BETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHAT DID YOU DO BEFORE THE ARMY, SARGE?
I WAS A BOUNCER AT A BAR
YOU?!
I CAN THROW GUYS OUT THE DOOR WITH THE BEST OF THEM
I CAN VOUCH FOR THAT!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

OKAY, I GOT YOUR BACKPACK. LET'S GO BACK DOWN.
HANG ON A MINUTE, DAD.
LET'S JUST TAKE SOME TIME TO ENJOY THIS MAGNIFICENT VIEW...
...WHILE YOU TEXT MOM TO TELL HER WE'RE STUCK UP HERE.
WAIT—WHAT?