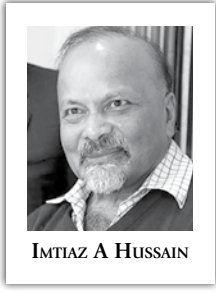


# 9/11 anniversary, Afghanistan and values



**“W**HAT goes around comes around” may be an apt and oft-used cliché, but in referencing 9/11 and Afghanistan, it only embitters. US President Joe Biden’s withdrawal from “forever wars” was supported by

54 percent of US adults, according to a September 4 Pew survey. They were not pleased, by a 71 percent margin, with how Biden exited, and a whopping 69 percent acknowledged the 20-year failure of “Operation Enduring Freedom.” In spite of deploying a NATO-based coalition (of over 40 countries), two of every three coalition fatalities were in no other uniform than that of the United States. Which is why when former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair dubs Biden’s withdrawal as being “imbecilic,” more cans of worms can be opened than not.

Blessed with the most “baby-faced,” even impish, British chief executive looks (the youngest since Robert Jenkinson in 1812), Blair blazed into 10 Downing Street with “Third Way” reform promises. Only Margaret Thatcher rivals his three consecutive election victories. He won almost half the votes in 1997, nearly three-quarters in 2001, but his sinking 2005 popularity of 35 percent spoke volumes. No electoral defeat evicted him. His fall from grace was softened by a 1994 Granita Pact with Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown. Both headed rival Labour factions, but if Labour won, they agreed Blair would hold the reins for two terms, then Brown.

Another “forever war,” in Iraq, doomed Blair from 2003. Alone among European “powers,” he supported US President George W Bush (Bush Junior), henceforth his “blood brother,” to invade a country already defeated and dismantled in the January 1991 Desert Storm War. Bush Junior wanted to link 9/11 to Saddam Hussein, even though Britain and the United States supported him in the 1980s Iraq-Iran war. Bush Junior innocuously confessed to the press: Saddam “tried to kill my dad.” The *Vulcan Group* ensured he never spoke his mind so freely again.

This *Vulcan Group* would meet in Montgomery, Alabama (so named because of a 1903-built statue of the Roman god of

fire in the city). It was home to Condoleezza Rice, George HW Bush’s (Bush Senior’s) National Security Advisor on Soviet Union/East Europe. She parleyed with Bush Senior’s Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney, President Gerald Ford’s Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell (a Colonel under Rumsfeld in the late 1970s), an academic, Paul Wolfowitz (Bush Senior’s Under Secretary for Defence), and Bush Senior’s Presidential Special Negotiator Richard Armitage. James Mann incisively explains

Organisation from the city, the Iran-backed *Hezbollah* picked up the anti-Israel mantle. Back in Washington, the 1953-founded American Israel Public Action Committee (AIPAC), which began successfully funding congressional candidates, suddenly burst into influencing policy-making circles with enormous clout. Its golden age would be to help Jared Kushner, President Donald J Trump’s Assistant, Senior Advisor (2016-20), and son-in-law, snatch Palestinian land for Israeli settlers. All of these were unfolding

Blair, the most “baby-faced” chief executive, but under him the *Vulcan* window flung too wide open for the world to not change.

Cold War-minded *Vulcans* overcame Baby Boomers at the turn of the century. Arguably the most respectable Republican president of the 20th Century, Dwight David Eisenhower, also seeking to halt “forever wars,” made a sagacious 1961 Farewell Address prediction: “...we must guard against...unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex...[M]isplaced power exists and will persist.” A decorated soldier whose World War II leadership salvaged an entire continent smacked the military where it hurts the most: right on the face.

Triumphant military-industrial partnerships left grave 9/11 footprints and potentially graver missing blanks. Reducing Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya to rubble exemplified the former: five weapons producing corporations earned 2.2 trillion USD just from the Afghanistan outlay (Boeing, General Dynamics, Lockheed, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon). Question-marks accompany the latter: why were proportionately fewer executives killed in the 8:45-9:00am attacks in a trenchantly workaholic country inside a building catering mostly to executives (2,606 Twin Towers fatalities were largely service-workers from 77 countries); or how could Dulles International Airport become eerily silent on 9/10 night when it typically bustles with traffic; and did dumping Osama bin Laden’s body into the Arabian Sea, much like opening the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, follow the essence of common law, as practiced in the United States?

Britain’s knight-in-shining armour, Blair, whose “Third Way” honestly and successfully shifted the Labour Party’s obsolete socialist platform towards the suddenly materialistic centre (as Bill Clinton did with his Democrats in the 1990s), was guest of honour in Bush Junior’s first post-9/11 congressional speech. He elevated invisible ephemeral “western values” over tangible economic successes, stoking embedded anti-Islam and anti-immigrant European moods in the process. The long-term damage of empowering rudderless populists in the 1990s only stiffens their resolve today, irrevocably reconfiguring European political calculations.

French President Jacques Chirac and Germany’s Chancellor Gerhard Schröder

denounced the Anglo-American Iraqi invasion. Rumsfeld dismissed both as “old” Europe leftovers. Britain, one of Europe’s most historically stooped countries, led its “new” Europe, with ostensibly “democratic” East European newcomers (Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland). Blair’s public approval fell to 27 percent when he left 10 Downing Street, but his “values” priority skyrocketed. It fed the Brexit psyche, European isolationism, and Muslim denigration (precisely when Muslims stand demographically taller and more inescapably European today).

A British public inquiry into the 2003 Iraq war causes (the 2009 Chilcot Report), concluded Britain was not threatened by Iraq. Even the International Court of Justice branded that war a crime (of aggression, since it was not in self-defence nor sanctioned by the United Nations). Future historians objectively assessing today’s emergent populism might shed more light on which is worse: being “imbecilic,” or practicing value-infused turncoat politics.

European anger at the United States for leaving Afghanistan is flat-footed. Europeans had 100-odd days after Biden’s announcement until August 2021 to do something. They did nothing. As European and US citizens rivet against each other over populism, regionalism, and the Atlantic partnership, the bells may toll for the British-US “special relationship.” Winston Churchill romanticised it during World War II, based upon spattering ground-level dynamics on free-trade preferences and democracy/welfare gestures from a century earlier. Germany’s 1871 creation further warmed Anglo-American relations (almost a century after Britain recognised the United States in 1785), but today’s ebbing glow foretells uncertainty.

Inter-ethnic sparring inside Afghanistan hinders intra-cultural tussles, but the “forever wars” crippling Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya leaves unquenched coals. Other fires cannot but flare. Other countries cannot but fan them. We learned how: (a) filial or value-laden bondages rock the international relations boat more than an arms-race; and (b) without sturdier safeguards, we will never know if mature democratic countries are also wolves in sheep’s clothing.

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George Bush and Tony Blair shake hands following a summit in Thurmont, Maryland, in 2001.

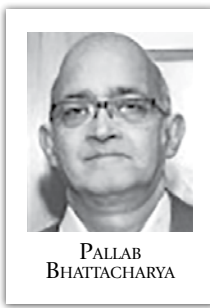
PHOTO: AFP

how they planned the Cold War from the 1970s. After winning the Cold War, they probed the nature of a “new world order.”

Islam became the new villain, abetted by Israel. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s successful 1979 revolution became a strategic US loss. When Israel’s 1982 Lebanon War evicted the Palestinian Liberation

when Samuel P Huntington’s early 1990s book, *Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, was sowing western mindsets against immigrants. Hispanics and Muslims faced the brunt of public wrath. Bush Senior lost the 1992 election, thus postponing *Vulcan* plans, but when his son won in 2000, the setting changed. Bush Junior was, like

## Two years on, NRC’s bumpy road ahead



PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

**O**N August 31, 2019, the “final” draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam was published amidst considerable expectations, excitement and anxiety. It was a document of “genuine” Indian citizens that was thought to be the panacea for the state’s long-festering

issue of illegal immigrants. It either and are seeking for a re-verification of 20 percent of the names which figured in the final NRC.

Does it mean that 1.9 million people who are out of the final NRC have become stateless? Not quite. Those excluded from the list can appeal to the special tribunals as well as the Supreme Court. But they face a few key challenges: for one, the burden of proof is on the accused or the alleged foreigner. Secondly, many families are unable to produce documents due to poor documentation culture, illiteracy or because of lack of funds to

citizenship status based on the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and Foreigner (Tribunals) Order, 1964. However, those excluded have not been issued “rejection slips” by the NRC office, which would help them to file appeals. All India United Democratic Front legislator Ashraf Hossain, who was actively involved in helping Muslims of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to file their documents for moving the foreigners tribunals, has called for immediate issuance of the “rejection slips.” Adding to the predicament of those left out of the NRC, the Registrar General

and the state government’s social welfare schemes and secure jobs by getting multipurpose Aadhaar Unique Identification Card. But many of them continue to struggle to get the card even today because of a “freeze” on the release of biometric details and therefore the Aadhaar cards, adding to their trauma of finding themselves in a “so-near-yet-so-far” situation. The trauma for the people excluded from NRC is mounting with each passing day as they wait for the exercise to resume.

Aadhaar card is not only required for buying ration and enjoying the benefits of the government’s schemes. The collection of biometrics of those excluded from the NRC following a Supreme Court-approved standard operating procedure in November 2018, is needed during the hearing of their claims for inclusion in the NRC and objections to the inclusion of people who may have figured in the citizens’ list erroneously or through alleged manipulation. Officials at the Aadhaar card issuing office in Guwahati reportedly told *The Indian Express* that they cannot issue the Aadhaar cards “till a clarification is received from RGI and the matter is communicated to UIDAI by Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.”

Apart from triggering political turmoil, the final NRC released on August 31, 2019 has thrown up more problems as the entire exercise conducted by the Assam bureaucracy at a cost of Rs 1,660 crore got mired not only in controversies over the exclusion of people belonging to both the Hindu and Muslim communities, but also due to legal complications and the absence of intervention by the Supreme Court which had monitored the updating of the list of citizens.

Making the NRC largely acceptable to all stakeholders is indeed a daunting task in a state where ethnic and linguistic faultlines between “original inhabitants” and migrants have always simmered. The road ahead is far from clear. At a more fundamental level, the question is: how bumpy is the road going to be?

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for *The Daily Star*. He writes from New Delhi, India.

The “final” NRC ran into a tsunami of controversy the moment it was published as it came under fire from almost all quarters in Assam as a “flawed” exercise carried out by the bureaucracy.

The NRC is a document of Indian citizens who can prove they came to Assam by March 24, 1971, the day before Bangladesh declared independence from Pakistan. Assam is not the only Indian state which has faced migration of people from across the border, and yet, it is the first and only state which has a NRC which was published for the first time in 1951 based on the first census data of independent India.

When the first draft NRC was released on July 30, 2018, more than four million people found themselves out of the list. An additional 102,462 people were left out in June that year, taking the total number of those excluded to 4,110,169. However, the number came down to a little over 1.9 million in the final NRC. But two years down the line, nothing has changed. Those who were left out of the NRC as well as nearly eight lakh people who were lucky to have made it on to the document continue to stare at a bleak and uncertain future. Equally concerned are thousands of people who, having been suspected of being foreigners, have been put in make-shift camps located in the state’s prisons.

The “final” NRC ran into a tsunami of controversy the moment it was published as it came under fire from almost all quarters in Assam as a “flawed” exercise carried out by the bureaucracy. The Supreme Court, which supervised the NRC preparation process from 2013, has not heard the matter since January 6, 2020. Both the BJP government at the Centre and the state coordinator of NRC have not accepted



People wait to check their names on the draft list at the National Register of Citizens centre at a village in Nagaon district, Assam state, July 30, 2018.

PHOTO: REUTERS

hire lawyers to move the tribunal. It was made clear that those left out of the final NRC would not be declared foreigners and they would have the choice of appealing against their exclusion from the NRC within 120 days in foreigners’ tribunals which was to decide on their

of India is yet to formally notify the final NRC as several applications seeking re-verification of the list are pending in the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court mandated that eight lakh people who made it to the NRC give their biometrics so that they can avail of the federal

### QUOTABLE Quote



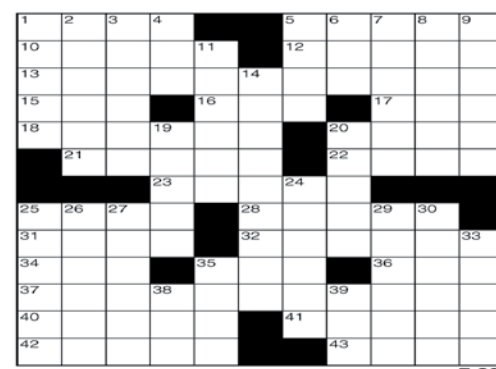
ADAM CONOVER American comedian (born March 2, 1983)

I think that at the end of the day correcting misinformation and questioning what we think we know as a habit of mind is incredibly important.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- |                       |                          |                         |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>         | 32 ATM part              | 7 Wanting               |
| 1 Desire              | 34 Broad st.             | 8 Sure to fail          |
| 5 Trombone part       | 35 Cruise setting        | 9 Goofs                 |
| 10 Notions            | 36 Uno plus due          | 11 Gate tender          |
| 12 Choir member       | 37 Machine failure       | 14 Not well-articulated |
| 13 Lesser crime       | 40 Debate topic          | 19 Espresso order       |
| 15 Poker prize        | 41 Handyman’s collection | 20 Ashen                |
| 16 Wee bite           | 42 Pottery piece         | 24 Short play           |
| 17 Moody music        | 43 Pants part            | 25 Wise teachers        |
| 18 Does refinery work |                          | 26 Sumptuous            |
| 20 Gaze               | <b>DOWN</b>              | 27 Black Sea port       |
| 21 Flag features      | 1 Pushovers              | 29 Choice               |
| 22 Throws in          | 2 Figures of speech      | 30 Convict’s hope       |
| 23 Printing goofs     | 3 Sonnet part            | 33 Tightly packed       |
| 25 Mailbox part       | 4 Owned                  | 35 Took to court        |
| 28 Leading            | 5 Dance bit              | 38 Cat coat             |
| 31 Walk through water | 6 Michele of “Glee”      | 39 “TiK__” (Keshha hit) |

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### BY MORT WALKER

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