

THE TRANSNATIONAL REVIEW

Britain's New Isolationists

James Snell on the new, inward-looking Britain

THE MEANING OF THE U.S.
MID-TERM ELECTIONS

Tom Switzer

OUR ALLIES IN SYRIA

Kyle W. Orton

THE FORGOTTEN CRISIS

Aydon Edwards

RECOGNISE PALESTINE

James Turner

TURKEY'S TERROR PROBLEM

Joseph Power





Contributors:

Joseph Power, James Turner, James Snell, Kyle W. Orton, Tom Switzer, Aydon Edwards.

Harris Terrace
46 George St
Brisbane, 4000
Queensland, Australia

Contact:

GPO Box 1916,
Brisbane,
QLD 4001

E: qld.branch@internationalaffairs.org.au

W: www.internationalaffairs.com.au

© Australian Institute of International Affairs

Cover Image: British Prime Minister, David Cameron, during a press conference following the G20 Summit in Toronto, 27 June 2010; Crown copyright.



(Photo: Center for Strategic and International Studies)

Season's Greetings!

We're winding down activities at the AIIA Queensland ahead of our short annual break during the festive season. In that same spirit, this will be the last issue of *The Transnational Review* until after the New Year. I'm delighted to showcase two very talented writers from the Motherland in this issue.

James Snell is a contributing editor for *The Libertarian*, a columnist for *DL Magazine*, and a blogger for the *Huffington Post* (UK), who has this issue's cover story regarding a new strand of isolationism within British politics.

Kyle W. Orton writes about allies in Syria that he argues require our support. In a very in-depth and analytical piece, Kyle helps us to differentiate between the plethora of various Salafi-jihadist organisations operating on the ground in Syria, and rebel groups who he argues require our support.

If anyone fears that I was leading a chauvinistic putsch against Australians in this magazine, then never fear! Aydon Edwards writes that the crisis in the Central African Republic is a forgotten one, and begs the very

simple question: why does no one seem to care?

Managing Editor and bearded-intern James Turner brings two pieces to this issue, one is an opinion article on the recent moves to recognise Palestine as a state by Sweden and the U.K. James also reviews *The Food Wars*, by Walden Bello, which examines the problem of food security.

Our biggest name on the cover is that of Tom Switzer, editor of *American Review* at the University of Sydney's U.S. Studies Centre on the outcomes of the recent U.S. mid-term elections. Mr Switzer is incisive as always, and I'm delighted that I received permission to poach an excerpt of his recent presentation he made to our sister branch in Victoria.

Lastly, my own modest contribution critically examined Turkey's role in the war against transnational jihadism. I was not kind. Enjoy the magazine; see you in 2015!

Joseph Power | Editor-in-Chief | Executive Council

CONTENT

Britain's New Isolationists	5
Our Allies in Syria	6
The Forgotten Crisis	9
Turkey's Terror Problem	11
Recognise Palestine	12
The meaning of the U.S. midterm elections	14
Book review: The Food Wars	16

Britain's New Isolationists

By James Snell

The United Kingdom is no stranger to isolation. Cut off by the ocean on all sides and possessing a formidable navy, Britain was so safe from outside interference in the 19th century that Admiral of the Fleet John Jervis, Earl St. Vincent, could say of the Napoleonic threat: 'I do not say, my Lords, that the French will not come. I say only they will not come by sea.' This attitude – predominantly defensive – was succeeded by the accumulation of a vast intercontinental empire, an enterprise which involved a great deal of action, military and commercial, in the affairs of other nations.

After that, though, when Africa and the Far East were successfully divided up between rapacious European powers, Britain retreated into what was known as 'Splendid Isolation'. According to this doctrine, Britain's status as the pre-eminent imperial power made it unwise to associate with other nations; becoming unnecessarily entangled in the affairs of others, it was suggested, was a threat to the empire – and to British pre-eminence.

This school of thought came to an end in the course of the long, bloody 20th century. When confronted with the prospect of an expansionist Wilhelmine regime, or the triple threat of fascist Italy, National Socialist Germany, and militarist Japan, British politicians saw

“The motion against Assad was defeated; Britain's new isolationists had won.”

necessity in abandoning the stance which characterised an earlier era.

Yet it appears that the doctrine of Splendid Isolation – long consigned by some to the dusty pages of the past – is reasserting itself in some corners of modern Britain. And I can assure you, there is nothing splendid about it.

Today, the isolationist position does not stem from a Pax Britannica; instead, it finds its strongest proponents in those who know nothing or care nothing for the outside world, and are very happy for this state of affairs to feature centre stage in pursuit of political power.

The easy populism of Nigel Farage, the leader of Ukip, a political party which has gained new prominence of late, seemingly rests on three planks: Immigration is bad, international bodies are bad, and the concerns of foreigners are none of our business.

BRITAIN'S NEW ISOLATIONISTS

This translates into myopic thinking on world issues, as well as over-simplified takes on domestic ones. In this case, the term 'domestic politics' ought to contain some element of the derogatory.

Farage and his party don't like the European Union. They think it hurts Britain's interests by opening her up to globalisation, immigration, and other assorted examples of internationalist nastiness. The constraints of this position are immediately easy to see: First, the European Union has had its share of positive effects on Britain – and indeed on the world. Second, the need to find negatives with which to associate the EU can leave 'kippers – for that is what some have taken to calling Ukip acolytes – looking rather silly as they scrabble for recent examples; in a recent televised debate, for example, Farage declared that the EU had 'blood on its hands' for the role it supposedly played in precipitating the removal of former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich early this year.

Another unfortunate consequence of this particular mode of thinking is a tendency towards international callousness. After the Assad regime used chemical weapons against the Syrian people in August 2013, the British Parliament was recalled to debate the possibility of military action in response to Assad's war crimes. Ukip was at the forefront of efforts to deflect what many – myself included – believed to be Britain's internationalist responsibilities towards the victims of chemical attacks, government repression, and the crushing of peaceful protests against an ossified regime.

To his shame, Ed Miliband, leader of the

opposition Labour Party, apparently bowed to the pressure exerted by the populist Right as represented by Ukip. He claimed to be acting prudently, and urged superficial caution. Any prudence he exerted during that debate was likely directed more in aid of his electoral chances than the people of Syria.

The motion against Assad was defeated; Britain's new isolationists had won.

This modern isolationism comes from a similar place than its 19th century predecessor. Like Salisbury's vision, isolationists today want Britain to be free from entanglement in the messiness of foreign affairs. But this is not all: isolationism today represents a coalition between the radical Right – intent on protecting the nation from all things foreign, including efforts to improve the lot or to protect the lives of those who were unfortunate enough to be born abroad – and the cynical centre-Left. Miliband wants to achieve office, and is very happy to bow to the pressure exerted by Farage in order to meet his goal.

This marriage of convenience hurts those in need of support or protection in the face of tyranny just as surely as it damages Britain's standing in other climes. For both of those reasons, it must be first identified as what it is, then opposed.

James Snell is a British writer. He is a Contributing Editor for *The Libertarian*, a columnist for *DL Magazine*, and a blogger for the *Huffington Post* (UK).

Our Allies in Syria

By Kyle W. Orton

At the end of May, I [argued](#) for conceptualising the Syrian war as having six sides:

1. The Islamic State
2. Jabhat an-Nusra (al-Qaeda)
3. Salafist/Islamist rebels
4. Nationalist rebels
5. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed People's Protection Units (YPG)
6. The Assad regime, comprised of the army, various sectarian militias, Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Lebanese Hizballah, and Iraqi Shi'a jihadists.

The obvious “good guys” were the nationalist and moderate rebels, who had collectively gathered under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which “[should be understood as a synonym for ‘the resistance,’ similar to la resistance in France during WWI,](#)” not a unified national army.

Syria analyst [Hasan Mustafa](#) has compiled the [definitive list](#) of moderate Syrian rebel groups. Harakat Hazm (the Steadfastness Movement) is probably the most important of these groups. Containing 5,000 men, mostly military defectors, Hazm has shown [military effectiveness](#) and been free of the taint of corruption that has dogged a group like Jabhat Thuwar as-Suriya (the Syrian Revolutionaries' Front, SRF).

SRF is led by Jamal Marouf. Marouf is not technically a military defector but as Frederic Hof, the former leader of the Syrian desk at Hillary Clinton's State Department has pointed out, there have been “[decades of universal conscription](#)” in Syria and after three-and-a-half years of war [it is wrong to characterise the rebellion, as President Obama has done, as a gang of hopeless civilians](#). Marouf had about [7,000 fighters](#) at his command late last year.

“The most important unit in southern Syria is Liwa al-Yarmouk, now ostensibly the Southern Front, which is led by Bashar az-Zoubi, a former businessman who has at least [10,000 men under his command](#). .”

Jaysh al-Mujahideen (JM) was formed in Aleppo the day before the anti-ISIS revolt erupted on January 3. Its [first act was to declare war on what is now the Islamic State \(I.S.\)](#), vowing to fight on “until it announces its dissolution,” and “get[s] the hell out of Syria.” JM [claimed to have 5,000 fighters](#). An important breakaway from JM is Kataib Nouredin az-Zengi.

Zengi is led by Shaykh Tawfiq Shahabuddin, who has proven something of a chameleon, able to play the Salafist when that was what the donors wanted to hear in late 2013. As a reaction to the emergence of the I.S., the insurgents tried, [as Hassan Hassan put it](#), to “out-Muslim each other to either neutralise radical fighters or to get them to side with them.” Zengi was not immune from this temptation. But the truth is that JM was a [merger of local units in western Aleppo](#) against the menace of the jihadists.

These groups are all from northern Syria.

The most important unit in southern Syria is Liwa al-Yarmouk, now [ostensibly the Southern Front](#), which is led by Bashar az-Zoubi, a [former businessman](#) who has [at least 10,000 men](#) under his command. Zoubi has [never even flirted with Islamist rhetoric](#), and his power-base is a much older force than religion: tribalism.

All of these units have received (minimal) Western support—some money and some [TOW anti-tank missiles](#).

OUR ALLIES IN SYRIA

This makes nonsense of the argument so often heard against intervention that we do not know who these forces are. As Robert Ford, the former U.S. ambassador to Syria explained when he left the Obama administration in June, [“We know \[the Syrian rebels\] quite well. We’ve worked with them for years.”](#)

I noted in May, however, that the raw balance-of-forces argued for supporting sections of the Islamist rebels, too. The Salafist and other large Islamist rebels had grouped together in November 2013 under the banner of the Islamic Front (I.F.), which was supposed to be a [“full fusion”](#) rather than just another rebel coalition. In the above-described context of late 2013, after President Obama had stood back from the strikes to punish the Assad regime for the massive chemical weapons attack in Damascus, which had a [“devastating”](#) effect on the moderate rebels, the I.F. issued a [nasty, sectarian document](#) as its foundational statement.

By March 2014, the I.F. had [broken down](#) and was, like the FSA, a brand rather than a command structure. In May, the rebels issued a Revolutionary Covenant that the I.F. signed onto that [“might as well be issued by a secular group”](#). In other words, the incentive structure had reversed, with the Saudis taking serious steps to marginalise the [ruinous role of Qatar](#) and the U.S. hinting (however mendaciously) at a larger role in Syria.

Within the I.F., a group like Liwa at-Tawhid, the largest group in Aleppo Province, is one that can be supported with few qualms, especially at this late stage. Tawhid’s much-missed late leader, Abdulqadeer as-Saleh had declared for a [“Civil State”](#) where Islam had pride of place. Saleh had advocated for democratic rule while saying vaguely that the shari’a would be *a* source of law.

Jaysh al-Islam (JAI) led by Zahran Alloush is also an I.F.-branded group that could be supported. More hardline than Tawhid, JAI is the largest rebel group in the eastern Damascus stronghold of the rebellion, thus it is strategically placed for a campaign to dislodge the regime. JAI is also [close to Saudi Arabia](#). The irony of Syria is that the Saudi-Qatar rivalry has left the Saudis, the patrons of Wahhabism, as the backer of the moderates. JAI is a slight exception to this rule, but only a slight one. Some Saudi elements, for example, regard Alloush as [“Sururi,”](#) a politico-religious faction not smiled upon by the Wahhabi *ulema* in Arabia—an endorsement of sorts.

The only red line within the I.F. is Ahrar a-Sham, which has flirted with globalist Salafi-jihadism and [had Qaeda-connected fighters within its leadership](#). Always more

ideological than the mainstream rebellion, [Ahrar never accepted the FSA label](#). The recent destruction of Ahrar’s leadership has left the group somewhat adrift, though early indications of the direction of its new leaders are [not encouraging](#). There is a [good case](#) for not designating Ahrar a terrorist organisation, but the intention should be—not unlike with Jabhat an-Nusra, which has attracted a lot of recruits because of its resources and military prowess—to isolate the leadership and pull away the rank-and-file to the mainstream.

The main change since May is that it is now clear the Kurdish PYD/YPG should be supported. This does not involve unsaying any of the negative things about the PYD’s leadership. The [PYD at least had links to the regime](#), being called the [“Shabiha of the Kurds”](#)—[attacking Kurdish anti-PKK demonstrations](#) and being accused of the murder of [popular Kurdish activist Mishal Tammo](#). While the PYD might not be the [“extension of the regime militias”](#) some oppositionists claim, it is in military terms more closely aligned with the regime than the rebellion—despite [local exceptions](#)—and there is no excuse for the [PYD’s leader, Saleh Muslim, blaming the rebellion for the Ghouta chemical weapons atrocity](#). But while the leadership of the PYD is an authoritarian force to be weakened, the rank-and-file of the YPG consists of Syrian Kurds who are fighting for their lives, and deserve support in doing so.

The regime and its Iranian and Russian supporters sought from the beginning of the uprising to defeat it by painting it as a jihadist conspiracy. In service of this strategy, [the regime has done everything it can to weaken the moderates and strengthen the extremists](#), to face the population and the outside world with a binary choice between the dictatorship and the jihadists in the hope they will choose the former. The Assad regime (Iran) has also been hopeful of drawing in the West to put down the insurgency by projecting this image; [they have more or less succeeded](#). Still, the fatalism that has attended the Syrian war—that it is too late, that jihadists are sure to run away with the country if Assad falls—should be eschewed. *All* the consequences predicted by the anti-interventionists have come about because their policy was followed. The West does have allies in Syria, and late in the hour as it is, it is time they received proper support to save the Syrian population, the region, and ourselves from this horrible and ultimately false choice between Assad and the takfiris.

Kyle Orton is a Middle East analyst. Follow him on Twitter at [@KyleWOrton](#)

The Forgotten Crisis

Why does no one seem to care about the Central African Republic?

By Aydon Edwards

The Central African Republic (CAR) is one of the world's poorest states, with the UN's Human Development Index ranking it 180 out of 186. Its economic demise and longstanding instability have received minimal, if any, exposure internationally. An unfortunate consequence of this minimal exposure is that it has not only prolonged the current conflict but also allowed it to escalate.

Since late 2012, the CAR has been engulfed by a devastating internal conflict. After the Bozize Government was overthrown in March 2013 by the Seleka Muslim rebel group, the CAR suffered from an enduring political struggle between religious-ethnic groups. The scale and longevity of this particular conflict should have warranted an international response more fitting with its dynamics. The international community pledged to prevent future tragedies like Rwanda and Somalia, having learnt the consequences of inaction. However, unfortunately for those in the CAR, the promises of the past have failed to materialise. This conflict has not received the kind of public exposure and call to action that it should have.

To provide some perspective:

- The conflict has caused more deaths than the Ebola virus, falling somewhere between 6,000–10,000 casualties.
- Approximately half the population (approximately 2 million people) has been either internally displaced, is seeking refuge in neighbouring states, or is in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Percentage

“The conflict has caused more deaths than the Ebola virus, falling somewhere between 6,000–10,000 casualties.”

wise, these figures are comparable with, if not worse, than the Syrian crisis.

- The UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilizing Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA) is predicted to be one the most expensive, making it third behind longstanding missions in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

With figures such as these, it begs the question: why does no one seem to care?

The severity of the crisis has not been lost on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has repeatedly urged that greater international scrutiny and meaningful attention be paid towards the CAR. Regional and neighbouring actors have reiterated the Secretary-General's warnings as they appreciate how close the CAR is approaching collapse, which would further destabilise Central Africa. However, these concerns pale in comparison to those of the CAR's first female President, Ms. Samba-Panza, who stated that ‘without massive support and assistance from the international community ... we will not meet our goal of stabilising the country and restoring constitutional order ...’

THE FORGOTTEN CRISIS

One major problem is the delay in response. After much pleading with UN members by CAR officials and the Secretary-General, on 10 April 2014, the UN Security Council (UNSC) authorised and assembled the international community's response in the form of MINUSCA. It deployed on 15 September 2014, with the mandate to protect civilians and restore the country to rule of law in partnership with the Samba-Panza Interim Government.

However, there are two problems with this response. Firstly, it is too late. The most severe fighting occurred over a year ago, when the Christian 'anti-Balaka' militia group reacted in overwhelming fashion against the Seleka. By the end of 2013, only a small number of Muslims remained in the capital, Bangui, a place where religious bipartisanship was the norm. Secondly, the military commitment and makeup of MINUSCA is a damning representation of the international community's commitment, or interest, in rescuing the CAR.

Apart from France, who feel somewhat responsible for the collapse of their former colony, the peacekeeping contingent is made up of developing states, which do not have the same resources and level of military proficiency as the developed states. These include: Rwanda, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Morocco, DR Congo, Congo, and Pakistan. This lacklustre response is nothing new, and only adds to a history of ill-equipped strategies for the CAR.

Before the agreement to initiate the MINUSCA peacekeeping mission, France deployed under 3,000 peacekeepers to assist the 6,000 African Union (AU) peacekeepers that were operating in the CAR. However, the combined force proved largely ineffective due to a limited mandate and subsequent rules of engagement. Criticism was directed at the combined force's decision to centralise their position in the capital Bangui, abandoning the rest of the country to anarchy. Consequently, their presence was considered more as a way to deter rebel groups from seizing complete control of the

CAR, as opposed to a comprehensive strategy to rescue the state from complete collapse.

The international community is too often caught up in the hype of events that receive extensive media exposure. For example, a European Union (EU) diplomat explained that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia '... has impacted on the willingness of some of the likely contributors both in the EU and outside the EU to be necessarily ready to deploy to Central African Republic'.

In recent years, conflicts such as Syria and Afghanistan have dominated world attention due to their economic and politically strategic value to the world's superpowers. In addition, the threat of a nuclear North Korea, and the potential spread of Ebola outside the African continent have saturated international media because of their impact on the developed world. These examples have one thing in common — strategic value. The CAR offers minimal economic and geo-political value. This is, unfortunately, a contributing factor when formulating an effective solution for the CAR.

The untimely deployment of MINUSCA and the history of ineffective solutions for the CAR by the international community demonstrate how state-centric the international system is in reality. Despite the rise of regionalism and the purpose of international multilateral organisations, such as the UN, the CAR's lack of strategic value could be regarded as the reason why its conflict has continued. The escalation of the conflict in the CAR can be viewed as a symptom of the highly bureaucratic nature of the UN. The effectiveness of this multilateral body has, and still is, hamstrung by the individual needs of its members. If the international community is serious about preventing mass atrocities and humanitarian disasters, responses need to be formulated at the genesis of a problem, not in retrospect.

Aydon Edwards has an MA in International Studies from the University of Queensland and interned with AIIA Queensland in 2013.

Turkey's Terror Problem

By Joseph Power

Turkey is on a collision course with the United States and NATO, due to its border policies that a new report argues is actively enabling terrorist organisations like the Islamic State (IS) and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN).

The report ([PDF](#)), written by Dr. Jonathan Schanzer and Merve Tahiroglu of the Washington-based Foundation for Defence of Democracies, opens with the declaration that Southeastern Turkey has become, “a jurisdiction for terrorism finance, weapons smuggling, illegal oil sales, and the flow of fighters to Syria.”

Turkey has, to be blunt, ceased to be a reliable NATO ally in the fight against various jihadist organisations in Syria.

The reasons for this are many. One is simply that Ankara's eagerness to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria necessitates an air of ambiguity toward Salafi-jihadist organisations like Jabhat al-Nusra and IS, and turning a blind eye to the flow of weaponry and funds to such jihadist groups. Ankara, of course, initially opened their borders to militants to various militants seeking to fight Assad's forces. It's unclear, as Schanzer and Tahiroglu note, exactly *when* the AKP lost control of this process, but it was well before Caliph Ibrahim established his new *Khilafah*.

Numerous IS support networks and cells have developed within Turkey's borders, and Ankara fear (perhaps sensibly) retaliation by IS if it was to become more practically involved in the U.S.-led fight.

These porous borders have also granted a hitherto unseen number European foreign jihadists a painless entry into the Syrian Civil War, mainly bolstering the ranks of some of the most sadistic and bloodthirsty terror groups in the world, and ensuring the continuation of radicalised Islamist enclaves throughout the West for at least another generation. As Dr Thomas Hegghammer [proclaimed](#):

“Turkey is to Syria now what Pakistan was to Afghanistan in the 1990s. Antakya is the Peshawar of Syria. Turkey is the main passageway for fighters from the West, and from the rest of the region.”

However, Turkey's borders are just one aspect of another disturbing trend in their policies involving Bashar al-Assad and transnational jihadism.

“Turkey is to Syria now what Pakistan was to Afghanistan in the 1990s. Antakya is the Peshawar of Syria. Turkey is the main passageway for fighters from the West, and from the rest of the region.”

While actively trying to weaken al-Assad's hold on Syria, it was simultaneously [involved](#) in a sanctions-busting scheme with the Syrian tyrant's biggest state sponsor, the Islamic Republic of Iran. This “[gas-for-gold](#)” racket raised the Khomeinite state some \$13 billion (USD), while Turkey's NATO allies tried their utmost to pressure Tehran's illicit nuclear program with economic and political pressure. The cognitive dissonance in Ankara that their enemy, Assad, has benefited from support from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Iranian proxy militia of Hezbollah seems to pose no moral or logical qualms.

The presence of senior Hamas figure, Saleh al-Aruri, on Turkish soil is deeply troubling.

Not only is al-Aruri believed to be in charge of Hamas' military operations in the West Bank, but he continually calls for violent attacks against Israel.

Israel daily *Haaretz* [alleged](#) that al-Aruri has been involved in planning terror attacks in the West Bank. The Turkey-Hamas relationship becomes more complex when questions over direct financial support to Hamas in Gaza are raised. Both [Haaretz](#) and [Reuters](#) cited Ankara's alleged dealings with Gaza, despite Turkish and Hamas' denial.

While, admittedly, the situation regarding IS is not officially a NATO problem, Turkey has shown itself to be dreadfully inept in partnership in the fight against the Islamic State, as well as regional jihadism as a whole.

Nobody knows when this collision will happen, but the fallout certainly won't be pretty.

Joseph Power is Editor-In-Chief of *The Transnational Review* and a member of the Executive Council at the AIIA Queensland. Views are his own.



Recognise Palestine

By James Turner

Newly elected Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfvan said in his first address to the parliament on 3 October that his country would move towards [diplomatic recognition of Palestine](#), ultimately passing the motion on 30 October. In an unrelated move, the British parliament passed a non-binding vote in favour of [recognising Palestine as a state alongside Israel](#) on 13 October. Sweden and the UK have now been added to the list of 134 other countries that recognise Palestine adding considerable weight to the issue of Palestinian statehood, as two strong states now standing firm on the issue. (Ed: Britain's vote was whether the U.K. *should* recognise Palestine; it still doesn't).

The reaction of commentators and analysts has either praised the symbolism of the actions or has been sceptical of any practical benefits. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said this will hinder any future negotiations and make a political solution unlikely, while Palestinian sympathisers argue further recognition will force Israel to make more concessions for Palestine and achieve something. It seems hard to find any real joy in between either of the

claims, as Israel is clearly still in control of the situation.

The Middle East is currently at a crucial point in its history, with the conflicts in Syria and Iraq causing widespread security and humanitarian concerns, Iran remains as uncertain as ever, and Egypt stuck in a painful transition from authoritarian rule to some kind of new form of governance. Meanwhile, the Israel-Palestine conflict continues to play out with sporadic episodes of intense violence, such as the recent launch of Operation Protective Edge. The whole world's attention turned to Israel during this time, however, little attention has been paid to the conflict since the ceasefire in August.

Every flair up of violence in Gaza ends with Israel losing a little more public support from its Western allies. Europe in particular seems to be where public support is declining fastest, while governments may still support Israel, the public are getting tired of the violence and bloodshed. Israel has just shrugged off [Europe's negative public perception](#), because the United States is still standing firmly behind them. Even the UK's vote on recognising Palestine is non-binding for government policy, as Prime Minister

[David Cameroon remains committed to support Netanyahu.](#)

Sweden's decision to recognise Palestine is problematic for advancing the cause of statehood. Being the fifth largest contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Sweden has [tied itself into a contradiction](#) with its recognition of Palestine. UNRWA is accused of inflating the Palestinian refugee issue and gives them legitimacy for statehood through the aid they are provided with. The pro-Israel camp is accusing Sweden of perpetuating the problem at hand by recognising Palestine, claiming they have been given some kind of diplomatic immunity due to this recognition.

However, Israel is still obviously in control of the peace process, and as other events in the Middle East take the attention of the rest of the world, negotiations with the Palestinian Authority will remain on an uneven playing field. Netanyahu may have previously voiced his support for a two-state solution, but his conduct has provided little confidence in his commitment to providing the Palestinian people with a state. The Palestinian



(Photo: Jamie Lynn Ross)

Authority has constantly been [required to compromise](#) and acquiesce Israel in order to get anywhere with negotiations, only for Israel to remain unmoved.

Without question the Palestinian side has antagonised Israel in the past, the actions of Hamas are the most obvious examples. But even from a societal point of view, the Palestinian attitude towards Israel also prevents progressing towards peace. Public acts such as the [celebration of the deaths of Israeli citizens](#) show that Palestine itself still will not accommodate Israel. Nevertheless, Israel still has the legitimacy -- being a fully recognised state -- and so control the peace process, an opportunity that Palestine will never have.

This is where optimistic comments about recognising Palestine are brought out, claiming Sweden and the UK's newfound recognition will change the game. There has been a slow and quiet move towards recognising Palestine in Europe for several years, however, most of the time it was just government statements that were never followed up. Despite the UK and Sweden acting on the issue, Palestine's future will always sit in the hands of Israel, not Europe.

The issue of Palestinian recognition seems to be stemming from a conflation of issues across the Middle East that are not focussing on the real issues for Palestine. The Oslo Accords are

effectively redundant in the current political relationship between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities, much to the dismay of the rest of the world, including the US. Secretary of State John Kerry has tirelessly attempted to foster a reconciliatory environment between Israel and Palestine, but the breakdown in relations in April this year seems to have put Kerry off.

The resulting violence in Gaza and Operation Protective Edge further illustrated the end a diplomatic approach with the Oslo Accords. The media coverage definitely contributed to Israel's lowering support by Europeans, as well as the limited humanitarian assistance provided to the Palestinians. The ceasefire did little to win back any public support, considering the disproportionate number of casualties between the two sides.

And then the issue of the Islamic State seems to be thrown in with the Palestinian issue, mainly because of [Kerry's statement](#) linking his failure to work towards a two-state solution and the rise of the jihadist group. The rise of the Islamic State has more to do with sectarian violence in Syria and Iraq than anything else, it has nonetheless been lumped in with the Palestinian issue. Two Arab groups seeking nationhood, both for entirely different reasons, are seemingly mixed together in some sort of Pan-Arabist cause.

The result of all this confusion and anxiety over the Middle East is some degree of Western guilt for the Palestinians. The sincerity of Sweden and the UK's recognition of Palestine should not be seen so cynically, the frustration of public opinion and growing need to reach a political solution are laden with the guilt of inaction. Sweden and the UK have tried to put the peace settlement on the right path, but they have failed to get to the real heart of the issue.

International recognition of Palestine will benefit the cause in many ways, as Palestine will be able to take part in more international institutions and be able to pressure Israel further. Crucially, Palestine would be able to formalise their claims to the International Criminal Court against Israel for various mass atrocity crimes. The only problem is that Israel still holds the power in the situation no matter what kind of support Palestine gains. Until Israel recognises Palestine as a state, negotiations will always remain in their favour.

James Turner is managing editor of The Transnational Review and an intern at the AIIA Queensland. Views are his own.

The meaning of the U.S. mid-term elections

Republican victory? Or an American crisis of confidence?

By Tom Switzer

On November 4, 2014, the political pendulum in American politics swung away from the left. The midterm elections delivered the centre-right Republican Party a gain of between seven and nine seats to control the Senate for the first time in eight years, its largest House majority in more than 80 years and impressive governor victories in safe Democrat states.

True, these were merely congressional elections when the incumbent president's party usually loses seats (think Ronald Reagan 1986, Bill Clinton 1994, George W. Bush 2006 or Barack Obama 2010). And voter turnout was low even by midterm standards. But make no mistake: 2014 delivered a sharp rebuke to Barack Obama. The result was the equivalent in a parliamentary system of a vote of no confidence in the President.

They also reflect America's very serious crisis of confidence. All the available public opinion evidence shows that around three quarters of the American people believe their nation in heading in the wrong direction.

At one level, Americans should be upbeat. After all, since Obama came to power in 2009, unemployment has fallen from 10 per cent to less than 6 per cent. The federal budget deficit has shrunk to the lowest level as a share of the economy since 2007 – before the global financial crisis. And the economy could break the 3% annual growth rate for the first time in nearly a decade.

And yet President Obama's national approval ratings are in the low-40s and in some crucial battleground states they're in the low-30s. So unpopular is

“All the available public opinion evidence shows that around three quarters of the American people believe their nation in heading in the wrong direction..”

Obama that the President was largely absent from the campaign trail. Worse, Democrats were airing ads distancing themselves from his widely maligned presidency.

So where did it all go wrong? Why has the Obama phenomenon imploded with the force it has, just two years after the President's impressive re-election?

Start with Obama record. Certainly there have been widespread – and justified – criticisms of the President's ability to lead, persuade and influence, both at home and abroad. There also remains a widespread sense of economic angst under his watch. Most of the new jobs since 2009 are “McJobs”: low-paid and part-time work that don't make people feel better off. The Obama recovery has been the most sluggish in generations. Meanwhile, inequality has widened dramatically and medium-household income has declined by 4.4%.

Add to this the botched rollout of his administration's controversial health-care programs, the rise of the so-called Islamic State terrorists in Iraq and the arrival of Ebola virus in the US, and it is no wonder Americans were in no mood to re-elect incumbent politicians. As it happened, more Democratic senators were up

THE MEANING OF THE U.S. MIDTERMS

for re-election than Republicans and most of the competitive races were in Republican-leaning states. That meant Democrats were bound to struggle.

None of this should downplay the GOP's success. Republicans avoided mistakes that have plagued them in the past. For one thing, the party chose more sensible and mainstream candidates, whom the Democrats could not portray as extremists – as happened last time in previous (and winnable) congressional elections in Nevada, Indiana or Delaware where the Republicans nominated Tea-Party aligned candidates. For another thing, the voters went to the polls without fresh memories of the 2013 government shutdown that many blamed on the GOP.

And yet the Republican brand is damaged in Middle America. Like American conservatism itself, the GOP lacks a national leader, is riven by factionalism and displays a lack of intellectual self-consciousness and philosophical reflection.

Moreover, many seasoned observers of Washington politics believe that history and demography are on the Democrats' side. The election-winning coalitions – women, minorities, young people – are widely believed to reflect an enduring reality of the new era of American politics.

So, if neither Obama nor the Republicans fully explains the midterm results, what does?

A more plausible explanation for the rapid electoral mood swings, epitomised in Obama's fall from adulation to contempt, has to do with America's crisis of confidence. It's a cultural malaise that precedes his presidency.

For generations the American people have believed that the United States is the most powerful, most prosperous, culturally and economically the most influential nation in the world. In more recent times, however, they have been slowly and painfully coming to grips with the reality that the days of a Pax Americana or American Century are over.

Think about the sluggish growth, a debt larger than

gross national product, diminished net wealth, subprime mortgage crisis, crumbling infrastructure, a rising China and the decline of US uni-polarity, a polarised and dysfunctional political system beholden to special interests and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have cost the US dearly in blood and treasure as well as prestige and credibility.

The nation is badly off-track and there is a hemorrhage of confidence in America's future. There is also a widespread sense that Washington has become more dysfunctional than in the past. The causes are more deep-seated than any one president or party: a more polarising political culture; an unprecedented amount of money spent on campaigns; and the relentless 24-7 cable media, talk-radio and Internet environment.

To be sure, demographic trends work to America's advantage: it has moderately high immigration and fertility levels whereas China will grow old before it grows rich. Thanks to the shale gas revolution, the US is on the cusp of being energy independent, something every president since Nixon during the OPEC oil crisis has yearned for. It's also true the US has shown impressive capacity for change and renewal after past setbacks (think Civil War, Great Depression, Pearl Harbour, Vietnam, Watergate).

But one can appreciate the resilience of American society and believe that the famous ability to rebound from adversity will be put to a severe test in the coming decade. This is the background against which the midterm elections were being fought; and the anger and anxieties of the nation explain why neither major party is connecting with Middle America.

Tom Switzer, editor of the American Review, lectures and tutors in American diplomatic history and U.S. foreign policy at the University of Sydney's United States Studies Centre. He will host "Between The Lines with Tom Switzer" on ABC's Radio National in 2015. This is an extract from his address to the Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria in Melbourne on November 10. This originally appeared on [Australian Outlook](#) and has been cross-posted with permission.



(Photo: United Nations)

The Food Wars

By Walden Bello

Verso, \$16.95, pp. 176

ISBN: 9781844673315

Reviewed by James Turner

The World Food Programme estimates that 805 million people suffer from malnourishment, primarily in developing countries. These countries have also seen violent protests in recent years due to rising food prices, highlighting a massive disparity between access to food between developed and developing countries. The thought of resource conflict has become a prominent issue that the world will face in the future, and the issue of access to food is already causing tensions.

Walden Bello has addressed the growing problem of food security with his book *The Food Wars*, drawing on his experience as founding director of [Focus on the Global South](#) and working with advocacy groups, such as the food sovereignty movement *La Via Campesina*. His writing draws on examples from Africa, Latin America, China, and the Philippines to illustrate the inequity of the current global food regime and financial order.

Bello takes aim at liberal economics and multilateral institutions, primarily the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization. *The Food Wars* critiques the policies and treaties of these organisations that enforce liberal economic policies on developing countries, in order to show how they have contributed to the rise in food insecurity. The examples from

China, the Philippines, and Malawi provide compelling evidence on how the structure of these organisations creates a dependency on international markets, rather than self-sufficiency.

The scrutiny and criticism of these economic institutions is valid and necessary to spark debate about food security, however, Bello does not strongly ground the role these institutions, particularly the WTO, in a historical context. There is some mention of the Bretton Woods system that was established in the mid-twentieth century, yet misses out on their development into the twenty-first century. Moreover, the replacement of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade by the WTO is not discussed, missing some crucial context. The bias in Bello's writing is evident in his criticism of liberal economics and the current financial order. His alternative position on the world economic order is valid, however, the book does not acknowledge any benefits from the current system, coming across as one sided.

Despite this bias, it is helpful in demonstrating the commodification of food resources, a key contributor to food insecurity. Viewing food merely as items available in financial markets takes away from their necessity for human survival,

“Bello does present a rather one sided argument that thinks completely changing the global economic order is the answer to food insecurity, rather than addressing the problems in the current system.”

particularly in developing countries where there is mass inequity in market distribution. The idea of food as a commodity is a provocative thought but could only be brought to light with a scathing criticism of liberal economics. However, Bello's greatest achievement with *The Food Wars* is the way he recreates the perception of rural peasants in developing countries. The general image of a rural peasant by people in developing countries is of a group of helpless people and overly unaware of the structural reasons why they are poor. Instead, Bello uses examples from *La Via Campesina* to show how these rural peasants have a sense of agency to change their situation and circumstances. *The Food Wars* concludes with this reimagining of rural peasants, as well as an optimistic view of change for the global food and financial regimes to be more equitable.

Overall, *The Food Wars* is cautiously optimistic about the future for food security, however, this is based on an assumption that the liberal system will be overhauled. While provocative and interesting, Bello does present a rather one sided argument that thinks completely changing the global economic order is the answer to food insecurity, rather than addressing the problems in the current system.



Australian Institute
of International Affairs

Harris Terrace
46 George St
Brisbane, 4000

www.internationalaffairs.com.au
www.facebook.com/aiiaqld
[@aiia_qld](https://www.instagram.com/aiia_qld)