

## Analysis

Kuwait Times  
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher  
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief  
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24835619  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.netHow democracy's  
spread dashed  
liberalism dreams

South Africa's Zuma is out" was the Washington Post's headline on Thursday morning. "Will things actually get better?" The question signifies more than journalistic skepticism. It points to a shift in the liberal worldview.

Over more than a quarter of a century, that view - triumphant as, in 1991, both Soviet communism and South African apartheid were swept away - has been knocked hard. Interventions in Iraq and Libya, undertaken in part on the liberal grounds of a "responsibility to protect" a population from its murderous leaders, are now viewed as having produced more chaos than liberation. The struggle to keep the Taliban at bay in Afghanistan is increasingly regarded through a similar prism: the American journalist Steve Coll wrote last month that US war aims are "riddled with contradictions and illusions."

There was no larger figure in the optimistic canon than Nelson Mandela. After 27 years of imprisonment, he emerged to both broker the end of institutionalized servile status for South Africa's black majority and to make the case for his country's central role in a larger liberation. In a speech to the Organization of African Unity in June 1994, he claimed that "Africa cries out for a new birth."

But in South Africa, the material conditions for freedom were stillborn. Mandela's successor to the presidency, Thabo Mbeki, ended his term in office having done little to raise the living standards of the majority. Corruption became more evident in his time; under Jacob Zuma, who followed him, it became the governing principle of one whom the country's Daily Maverick has called "the most disastrous of post-apartheid presidents."

The harsh fact of a brutalized society was that the overwhelming majority saw democracy not as a vehicle for the exercise of considered choice but as one of exclusion and oppression. It has meant that a newly enfranchised electorate was wooed more by the spectacle of power and - especially in Zuma's case - the ties of tribalism. These have proved, till now, more persuasive than considerations of the increasing evidence of Zuma's looting of state resources. Whether Cyril Ramaphosa, who had been Mandela's choice as his successor, can bring clean(er) government to the people and a culture of accountability to the ruling African National Congress is the reason for the Washington Post's question mark.

Everywhere, below the over-facile assumptions of radical, even revolutionary, change in the eighties and nineties lay harsh facts. One is that the exercise of democracy is a hard-won, long-haul phenomenon. A central tenet - that those in power are themselves subject to the greater power of laws - is hardest won of all, and hardest to police, since power will usually seek to grow.

In Europe, the collapse of the Communist bloc meant a joyously-celebrated "return to Europe" of the Central European and Baltic states which had been part of the Soviet world. The European Union saw itself as the medium through which these countries would ease themselves into the exercise of democratic norms. In part, that has happened: the EU insisted on institutional and legal change which reflected norms of equality, minority rights and freedoms of speech and the press.

## Jingoism

But change, supported and carried out by the liberal parties which were often the first beneficiaries of the post-communist era, did not capture the support of the majority. Institutional reform was not popular acceptance. In Poland and in Hungary, authoritarian rulers promote policies hostile to ideas of liberal morality and multicultural mixing.

Culture is now decreed to be patriotic. Poland's ruling Law and Justice Party has forced a patriotic agenda on a new museum, in the port city of Gdansk, which has commemorated the savage Nazi wartime occupation of the country by relating it to the experiences elsewhere, in Central Europe and in the Soviet Union. For the governing party this lacks, as the Law and Justice MP Jan Zaryn said, "features characteristic of Poles" such as "loving freedom, Catholicism, patriotism and especially being proud of their history." The museum will undergo changes in the direction of more evident patriotism.

In Hungary, the cultural battle focuses on the Central European University, funded by the liberal philanthropist George Soros and seen by the ruling Fidesz Party as a cosmopolitan institution at odds with Hungarian national values. Prime Minister Viktor Orban argues that the university must conform to rules regulating other universities: the European Union sees the application of the rules as an attempt to shut down the university. Both Poland and Hungary, along with other Central European states as Slovakia and the Czech Republic, have refused to take an EU-mandated quota of refugees; all reject the right of Brussels to dictate their policies. — Reuters



## Can resurgent Romney take on Trump?

By Finn McHugh

Mitt Romney's long-anticipated announcement that he will contest Utah's vacant Senate seat contained a veiled swipe at President Donald Trump's rhetoric on immigration, confirming his intention to offer a conservative contrast to the White House. But his broader ambitions will be constrained by a Republican base that remains fiercely loyal to the president. In a two-minute announcement video, Romney attempted to establish himself as a respectable conservative option, rejecting Washington's "message of exclusion" to immigrants and promising an administration which "treats one another with respect".

Speculation is rife that Romney will use the Senate as a launchpad for a tilt at the Republican nomination in 2020, entrenching a civil war that has raged since Donald Trump seized the nomination and the White House. What's clear is that Romney, former Massachusetts governor, presidential nominee and elder statesman in the Republican Party, has no intention of being merely a junior senator. He will re-enter American politics with more clout than his role suggests and wield significant influence within the party.

Utah is a deeply red state, having last voted for a Democratic nominee in 1964. In 2012, Romney carried the state with 72.8 percent of the vote. While in line with much of the president's platform, many Utahans held their nose as they voted for Trump, a man starkly at odds with the state's religious conservatism. A brash, thrice-married admitted adulterer and recent convert to many conservative principles, Trump bled votes to third-party candidate Evan McMullin to finish with just 45.5 percent in 2016.

Romney, by contrast, is tailor-made for politics in the majority-Mormon state. The first of the faith to secure a major party nomination, he boasts executive experience and is credited with saving the 2002 Salt Lake Olympics after a corruption scandal, a point emphasized during his announcement. Even should Trump plump for another primary candidate, a Romney victory looks a forgone conclusion.

China's next  
ideological front

Back in 2014, in statements by its leadership and in government media outlets, Beijing began to express its desire for a "new type of Great Power relations" with Washington. This bold, if vaguely-defined, ambition was among the first indications that China was beginning to re-conceive its global role. The phrase was clunky, and China finally dropped it with little fanfare. Nevertheless, a new kind of US-China relationship has indeed begun to emerge.

A relationship that has, in recent decades, been organized around the pursuit of shared interests appears to be reverting to one increasingly defined by differences in worldview. Beijing is tightening the screws on internal political dissent, and Americans are growing more uneasy about the nature of Chinese influence abroad. Ideology once again defines the terms of the US-China relationship.

It has become fashionable to point to Trump's election win as the inflection point for any number of global trends. But, in this case, the shift owes more to Chinese than to American leadership. Since his accession to the Party Secretary position in 2012, Xi Jinping has consistently taken an ideological line stronger than any party leader since Mao.

Under pressure from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), WeChat, the chat and social networking app, has agreed to censor "distorted" versions of Chinese history that appear in private conversations on its service. Given the app's global reach, this decision has implications far

beyond China's borders.

Beijing's renewed commitment to ideological control also manifests itself in new rules for foreign universities operating in China: Institutions like New York University and Duke that were enticed to China with promises of academic freedom have now been forced to establish Communist party units on their campuses and to give high-level decision-making powers to party officials. Last month, Beijing demanded a public apology from Marriott after the company listed Taiwan as an independent country on one of its customer surveys; Beijing's reaction was volcanic. Marriott said it was sorry.

Though Beijing's efforts to project ideology overseas aren't confined to the United States, the American response has grown more forceful. In late January, Trump announced substantially increased tariffs on Chinese solar panels and washing machines in response to Beijing's "unfair" trade practices. The tariffs might or might not achieve their objectives, but their symbolic value is great. They signal that the United States is no longer as willing to bear the costs of its openness to support a global trading system.

The last few months have seen increasing hostility to Chinese projects and influence in the United States. Surveying the CCP's growing ideological control of university education at home, many American universities are raising public doubts about the viability of Beijing's network of "Confucius Institutes" across US campuses. And American political scientists who until recently touted the benefits of incorporating China into the global system are criticizing Beijing's behavior and its motives and values. — Reuters

Romney will need  
to re-establish  
himself in  
complete contrast  
to Trump

from the threat Trump's base poses to establishment Republicans, but would not be so immune should he move against the incumbent in 2020. The challenge he faces on a national level will be translating the security of Utah into votes in areas where adoration for the president remains strong. Indeed, many of the factors that make him a fit for Utah - his religious credentials, executive experience, and temperament - may hinder him in areas disillusioned with business-as-usual Washington politics.

## Inconsistent relationship

Romney himself has had an inconsistent relationship with Trump, labelling him a "fraud" during the primaries before flirting with the secretary of state role during the

transition. He will need to re-establish himself in complete contrast to Trump to stand any chance in a presidential challenge. It is a risky move in a party that, for now at least, remains in the grip of the president. How firm that grip will remain long-term may become clear after this year's midterm elections, where Republicans fear a voter backlash after a chaotic beginning to the Trump administration.

Romney's best move may be a push to replace Mitch McConnell as Senate majority leader, teaming up with former running-mate Ryan to form an establishment bloc seeking to reign in Trump's impulsiveness. But how willing Ryan, a man with possible presidential ambitions himself, would be to anger the base remains unclear. Of course, this is a crisis of the establishment's own making. Republicans were content to stoke conspiracy theories about Barack Obama's birth, fears on border security and terrorism, to ride a Tea Party wave that wiped out the Democrat majority in 2010.

The problem with stoking such anger is that eventually it needs to be matched with action. It is one thing to imply that the man in the White House is a potentially Muslim, anti-American socialist allowing Muslims and Hispanics to take American jobs and attack American civilians. But to use that sentiment to push tax cuts for the top earners was never a long-term strategy to placate the base.

They had delivered a terminal diagnosis, but offered an insipid remedy. When Trump arrived on the scene, Republican voters were primed for drastic solutions. Taking the Tea Party template, he offered sweeping, simple ones: A border wall and a ban Muslims entering the country. Establishment Republicans watched in horror as Trump hijacked their base and drove off with their party. Now Romney, so long the embodiment of the Republican insider, will re-enter the party as an outsider, chipping away at its leader. Utah's unique makeup will offer him a safe haven for the role, but the threat of Trump's base lurks beyond its borders.

NOTE: McHugh is an Australian journalist and writer

China's Hui Muslims  
fearful education ban  
sign of curbs to come

For some in China's ethnic Hui Muslim minority here, a recent ban on young people engaging in religious education in mosques is an unwelcome interference in how they lead their lives. Their big fear is the Chinese government may be bringing in measures in this northwestern province of Gansu that are similar to some of those used in the crackdown on Uighur Muslims in the giant Xinjiang region further to the west.

Well-integrated into society and accustomed to decades of smooth relations with the government, many Hui have watched with detachment as authorities have subjected Xinjiang to near-martial law, with armed police checkpoints, reeducation centres, and mass DNA collection.

But in January, education officials from the local government in Guanghe county, which is a heavily-Muslim area, banned children from attending religious education during the Lunar New Year break. That lasts for several weeks around the week-long public holiday period that started on Thursday. It is unclear if the ban, similar to those used by the authorities in the Uighur communities, will continue after the holiday, but it appears to conform to new national regulations that took effect on Feb. 1 aiming to increase oversight over religion.

Residents in the city of Linxia, the capital of Gansu's so-called "autonomous" prefecture for the Hui people, about 50 km to the west of Guanghe, told Reuters that similar restrictions were in place there. "We feel it is ridiculous and were astonished," said Li Haiyang, a Hui imam from the eastern province of Henan who in a widely circulated online article denounced the policy as violating China's constitution.

Such bans had been conveyed verbally in recent years, Li told Reuters, but implementation was uneven and often ignored. The more forceful rollout this year shows authorities are serious about enforcement, he said. The Linxia prefecture government, which oversees Linxia city and Guanghe, did not provide details of the policy, but said China's constitution required separation of religion and education. "Religious affairs management ... adheres to the direction of the Sinoification of religion, and firmly resists and guards against the spread and infiltration of extremist religious ideology," the Linxia government's publicity department said in a fax in response to questions from Reuters. "Maintaining legal management is the greatest concept in the protection of religion," it said in a statement that stressed stability. — Reuters