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Focus

BRITAIN'S FUTURE,
MIGRANT SPLIT
REVEAL EU DIVIDE

By Lorne Cook

Britain is thinking of leaving. Greece feels isolated. Austria and Denmark are pushing controversial measures for coping with asylum-seekers despite what their neighbors think. Tensions between European Union leaders at this week's summit in Brussels have highlighted a gnawing lack of confidence that the bloc of 28 nations can provide timely answers to Europe's challenges.

Rarely has the EU seemed as fragmented and impotent as on Friday, when leaders grappled with a possible British exit and tried to find a united response to the refugee emergency. "The fact that every policy being discussed is strongly contested is fueling doubts as to whether the EU and its members will be able to match their rhetoric with concrete actions by cooperating more closely," Janis Emmanouilidis at the European Policy Centre think-tank wrote in an analysis.

Still barely recovering from an economic crisis that rivaled the Great Depression, Europe is now struggling with its biggest refugee crisis in well over half a century. The arrival of more than 1 million people fleeing conflict or poverty for better lives in a far wealthier Europe has overwhelmed border authorities and reception capacities. It has stoked unfounded fears of a threat to Europe's cultural identity and even religion, the arrival of extremism or the theft of jobs.

As tens of thousands of people have packed into trains or hiked Europe's highways north from Greece toward their dream of having a home in Germany or Sweden, nations have erected fences or tightened border controls unilaterally, putting pressure on their EU partners. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are working together, pushing for a clamp-down on borders along the main migrant transit route through the Balkans. And even nations like Austria and Denmark are out of step with other EU nations.

Austria has surprised its partners by putting a cap on the number of asylum-seekers it will let in, a move the EU's Executive Commission maintains breaks European and international law. Denmark, meanwhile, has moved to take away some assets from asylum-seekers to help pay for their accommodations and food. "The problem is that everyone sees the situation from their individual standpoint and waits for the other to move first in implementing those necessary solutions," European Parliament President Martin Schulz told leaders in Brussels. "Lamentably, this crisis is exposing serious fault-lines within our union."

Values

The crisis is also hurting Europe on a psychological level, with the refugee response increasingly unworthy of Europe's proclaimed values and possibilities as a powerful, relatively prosperous world trading bloc. Professor Hendrik Vos of Belgium's University of Ghent, says EU migration policy is hardening along the lines of Hungary's populist leader, Viktor Orban, who has erected anti-migrant razor-wire fences. "The language may be a bit less aggressive, and there are humanitarian concerns, but the policy is really going in the direction of: How do we keep the refugees out?" he said.

The fear of EU migrant workers taking advantage of Britain's welfare system is partly driving Prime Minister David Cameron's push for a referendum this summer on whether his country should leave. On Friday, he won a hard-fought deal for a less intrusive EU after 31 hours of tense talks with EU partners. The summit was sent into overtime as Cameron pushed his partners for reforms that include limiting benefits to those migrant workers, ensuring that nations like Britain that are outside the euro currency union don't have to pay for euro needs, as well as simplifying EU bureaucracy. In exchange, he pledged to campaign for Britain to stay in the bloc.

Woes

But it doesn't stop with Britain's future or the refugee emergency. Italy's economic woes have seen Prime Minister Matteo Renzi aggressively take German Chancellor Angela Merkel to task in recent months on the economy, migration and energy policy. While ostensibly Europe's driving force, Merkel has also become synonymous with the austerity measures imposed on countries like Greece to meet fiscal targets and budget plans. Through it all the future of Greece, with a communist government elected a year ago, remaining in the euro single currency has been called into question. —AP

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Washington Watch

'META-ISSUES' BEHIND SANDERS-CLINTON CONTEST

By Dr James Zogby

The Democratic presidential primary race is shaping up to be a fascinating contest between the voters' views of two distinct political personalities. Some find this state of affairs confounding, believing that the election should have been a "slam-dunk" for Hillary Clinton—the former First Lady, twice elected Senator from New York, and former Secretary of State. That a 74-year-old socialist Senator from Vermont is giving her, quite literally, a "run for the money," is stunning.

Polls show the once cavernous gap that separated the two is closing. They tied in Iowa and Sanders defeated Clinton soundly in New Hampshire. He also raised more money than Clinton in January, all from small individual donors, putting an exclamation point on his fundraising ability with a stunning two day intake of eight million dollars following the New Hampshire victory—all from online contributors.

In an effort to understand the Sanders phenomenon I have identified several factors that appear to be defining this contest. Some are issue related, while others are driven more by, for lack of a better term, "meta-issues".

On one level, Clinton is running on a rather traditional liberal/moderate platform. She emphasizes her experience and her record of "getting things done". Her speeches include a litany of programs she proposes to implement and causes she will champion. She will fight for women and children, working families, immigrants, health care, civil rights, etc - offering to make incremental but real change. At the same time, she insists that she will be fiscally responsible. And she will support a muscular foreign policy that will defend American interests and allies.

Sanders' stump speech, on the other hand, drives home a single theme - the fact that the American economy and politics are dominated by a handful of billionaires who have "rigged" the system to support their interests at the expense of the majority. With this foundation laid, Sanders calls for a political "revolution" that will mobilize voters to demand a leveling of the playing field, offering such expansive programs as universal health care and free college education. He proposes paying for these by imposing taxes

on the very wealthy and on excessive Wall Street behavior. And he emphasizes a more restrained foreign policy that avoids irresponsible, costly, unwinnable wars.

Clarity

Sanders' edge is that he offers "bumper sticker" clarity. Because his programs and proposals all flow from a coherent economic and political philosophy, his message more easily resonates with many voters. This clarity is something that Republicans have long owned and Democrats have missed. While Republicans could speak of "small government and individual freedom", Democrats could only respond with a bewildering array of causes and programs that lacked a central over-arching theme. With Sanders, Democrats can respond with theme like "a government that cares" and "we all matter".

Clinton criticizes Sanders' program as unachievable "pie in the sky", countering that her approach is incrementalist and real. But Democrats and independents who may not agree with Sanders' philosophy or even believe that his far-reaching proposals will be implemented, share his anger at the corrosive effects of inequality and have been captivated by his campaign.

More significant still is the important fact that voters, whether or not they agree with Sanders program, appear to trust him more, believe that he means what he says, and feel that he really does care about their concerns. This comes through quite clearly from my discussions with a wide range of voters I've met in several states and from letters I've received from others who have expressed their views on the two candidates. Their reactions and the attitudes that come through in national polls need to be understood.

In this regard, the entrance/exit polls from Iowa and New Hampshire are instructive in that they help delineate the attitudes of the constituencies supporting each of the candidates. Clinton wins easily in two areas - "the right experience to be president" and "can win in November". On the other hand, Sanders overwhelmingly dominates in two other areas - "is honest and trustworthy" and "cares about the needs of people like me". These are the "meta-issues" that have worked to Sanders advantage.

Young Voters

The Sanders support base overlaps, to some degree, with what was called the "Obama coalition" in that it includes young voters. In his insightful book, "The Way We'll Be: The Transformation of the American Dream", my brother John Zogby, defines the value orientation and world-view of the distinct age groupings that make up the American electorate. The youngest of these, he calls the "First Globals". They are the first generation of Americans who are global in their worldview and accepting of all forms of diversity. They are willing to learn from others and see themselves as citizens of the world. They are open to other religions and define "spirituality" not in terms of an organized church, but values that connect them to others and to the planet.

And, most importantly, they are attracted to qualities like openness, authenticity, and integrity. These are the "meta-issues" that have attracted young voters to Sanders and may not be transferable to Clinton should she emerge victorious in the primaries. The exit polls, for example, show Sanders beating Clinton by a margin of six to one among young voters.

There is an intriguing subtext to John's study that is also worth considering. While, in the past, younger generations looked to older generations for guidance, today, that process has been reversed. Increasingly, older generations are learning values from their children. As was the case in the Obama campaign in 2008, many older folks I've met this year tell me that they have been inspired to support Sanders because of the enthusiasm he has created among their children or younger voters, in general.

And so, as this drama plays out, it will be important to see how this generational and values driven struggle plays out. Will voters opt for experience and the perceived "ability to win" or will they gravitate toward a candidate they trust who they perceive cares for them? From what we have seen so far, it is these "meta-issues", more than anything else, that may decide the outcome.

NOTE: Dr James Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

WALESA SPY DRAMA REVIVES CONSPIRACY THEORY

By Michel Viatteau, and Stanislaw Waszak

Poland's new rightwing leaders are using fresh allegations about Solidarity hero Lech Walesa to revive conspiracy theories that the communist-era regime staged its own demise in 1989 to hold onto power behind the scenes. In claims that Polish EU leader Donald Tusk lamented as "unfortunate" for the country's image abroad, newly-released police files allege that Nobel Peace prize winner Walesa was in fact a paid communist spy. Walesa is renowned worldwide for negotiating a bloodless end to communism in Poland in 1989. The move triggered the country's first democratic elections since World War II, ushering Walesa into the presidency a year later. But rightwing politicians like Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the powerful leader of the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party, have long argued that Walesa was a regime spy and puppet whom communists used as a political fig-leaf while they held on to key military and economic sectors.

Centrists and liberals have repeatedly ridiculed the idea, arguing that Kaczynski - who was also a communist-era dissident - is being vengeful after falling out with Walesa during his presidency. Kaczynski also insists his late twin president Lech Kaczynski is the true hero of Poland's historic transition from communism to democracy. "In light of Walesa's complete disgrace, Lech Kaczynski will become the symbolic patron of the Solidarity movement," Kaczynski is quoted as having said in 2010, after his brother died in a jet crash in Russia.

Walesa a 'Paid Communist Spy'

Poland's Institute of National Remembrance, which is responsible for prosecuting communist-era crimes, on Thursday revealed a newfound 1970s secret police file showing Walesa was a paid collaborator codenamed "Bolek". Walesa

admitted Friday he had "made a mistake", but flatly denied he was ever a regime agent. He was cleared of suspicion by a special vetting court in 2000. The 72-year-old did not elaborate on what his mistake was, but pointed to a mystery person who "should reveal the truth" about the past.

Poland's new Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski says he is not convinced. Walesa was a regime "puppet" and the newfound secret police files can prove that "the project to free Poland was orchestrated by the regime," Waszczykowski told Poland's commercial TVN 24 news channel on Friday. "We must try to find out... whether decisions made at the time were independent and in line with national interests or whether they were concocted by foreign or

domestic secret services. "It can show us that we were wrong in thinking we made the revolution and that our decisions were independent," he added.

'Polish Hell'

Poland's TVP public broadcaster, which recently saw the PiS install loyalists in top management, aired interviews with several historians Friday who said the newfound files confirm their convictions that Walesa was indeed a regime collaborator. During the interviews, TVP also showed communist-era pictures of Solidarity leader Walesa engaging in friendly meetings with regime top brass. Walesa supporters have hailed his historic role in Poland's transition to democra-

cy, but admit he could have caved in to secret police pressure while still a young electrician at the Gdansk Shipyard, later the cradle of the Solidarity trade union.

Communist-era dissident Henryk Wujec insists Walesa "never betrayed" fellow anti-regime activists to the secret police. Grzegorz Schetyna, a former dissident and leader of the liberal Civic Platform (PO) official opposition, said the controversy surrounding Walesa was rooted in political "vengeance" and dubbed it a "real Polish hell". "It's a classic example of how Poles are able to bring out the worst in each other," he added.

'Unfortunate for Poland's Image

EU president Tusk, a communist-era dissident and former Polish premier, insisted that Walesa never hid the fact that he was questioned by the regime's secret police. "It's all very unfortunate for Poland's image, for its great traditions and the legend of Solidarity and Lech Walesa," he told Polish media on Friday in Brussels. Poland's image abroad has already suffered in recent months because of controversial reforms introduced by the right-wing government that critics say undermine the independence of state media and the constitutional court. In the Gazeta Wyborcza newspaper, editor-in-chief Jaroslaw Kurski traces the history of ill will between Kaczynski and Walesa, which goes back to 1991 after earlier friendlier ties. "To reduce Lech Walesa, victor over communism, our greatest contemporary historic symbol, to the level of secret agent? No one in the world will understand," Kurski wrote. "What are the Poles doing to their own history?" Walesa himself, on a trip to Venezuela and the United States, defended himself, saying: "On the path I chose, I had to hold all kinds of discussions. And in the end, those discussions led to victory. "If I had chosen another path, we would have ended up like Ukraine, or even worse," he told reporters in Caracas, Venezuela, on Thursday. —AFP



CARACAS: Former Poland President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Lech Walesa talks at the Venezuelan National Assembly during a special session in Caracas on Feb 18, 2017. —AFP