

Analysis

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Washington Watch

On the edge?

By Dr James J Zogby

I don't know which metaphor to use to describe the current crisis in our politics because so many come to mind. Are we at a tipping point? The edge of a cliff? Or sitting on a volcano waiting for it to explode? You can choose one or all, because we are in a place we've never been before and it's dangerous.

The problem didn't start with the election of Donald Trump. Nor did it begin with the Democrats launching an impeachment inquiry against Trump. This is a developing crisis that has been growing like a cancer within our polity for at least the past 25 years. Its main symptoms are a lack of civility in our political discourse, a "take no prisoners" mindset, and a denial of the very legitimacy of "the other side." Trump didn't create this crisis; he was the result of it.

When Newt Gingrich took the helm of Congress in 1995, unlike previous Republican leaders, he embarked on a campaign not only to obstruct the efforts of then President Clinton, but to destroy him. Congress launched a series of investigations accusing Clinton of everything from corruption to obstruction of justice – with hints of even more nefarious plots to assassinate those who might pose a problem to his presidency.

They finally settled on Clinton's lying about an embarrassing sexual dalliance as the grounds for impeachment. What was most notable about this entire sordid affair was the total contempt demonstrated by this new breed of Republicans for Clinton. It wasn't political. It was personal. They weren't out to defeat his proposed legislation. They didn't see him as a legitimate president and sought to destroy him.

Later, during the months' long standoff that accompanied the 2000 election, culminating in the Supreme Court decision that George Bush should be the winner, my brother John Zogby conducted poll in which he asked Democratic and Republican voters whether or not, should the other side win, would they feel that new president be considered a "legitimate president."

The results were disturbing: despite the fact that Al Gore had won the popular vote and the outcome was still being decided, a significant majority of Republicans said they would not accept Gore as a legitimate president. A majority of Democrats, on the other hand, said that should Bush be declared the winner, they would respect the outcome.

Bush, unlike Clinton, did not face retribution from the Democratic controlled Senate. They passed his tax cuts, compromised on a series of domestic initiatives, and rallied behind him after 9/11, giving him the authorization to make war and unprecedented powers of intrusive domestic surveillance. It wasn't Democrats who sunk Bush's presidency, it was his failed war in Iraq, his disastrous mishandling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the 2008 economic collapse.

Within weeks of Barack Obama's inauguration, Republicans stepped up efforts to obstruct and delegitimize his presidency. The GOP's minority leadership in the House and Senate boldly declared that their intention was not to work with him but "to bring him down" by funding outside and organizing outside groups, like the Tea Party and the "birther movement."

Never before had leaders in one major party been engaged in such a campaign to question whether the president was even a legal US citizen. And their efforts took a toll. In polling conducted back then, well over 60 percent of Republicans stated that they believed the Obama was not born in the US – and therefore was not a legitimate president (the same number also said they believed that Obama was secretly a Muslim, therefore lying about being a Christian).

While Obama's presidency was above reproach in that he was never charged with any wrongdoing. His first Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was hounded by Republican Congressional committees who accusing her of concealing and deleting her private email account hide it from investigators. She was subjected to hours of interrogated by Congressmen who charged that she failed to protect the US Ambassador to Libya, contributing to his death.

While one might say that the email inquiry was a legitimate concern – despite the fact that several of Clinton's predecessors also had such personal accounts – the contempt Congress demonstrated in charging her with contributing to the death of the Ambassador was clearly an effort to harass, humiliate, and degrade her service.

This lack of respect and civility brought us to the 2016 presidential campaign and the election of Donald Trump. During the primary, Trump demeaned his opponents, railed against the media, insulted the courts, preyed on xenophobic fears, and incited his supporters to use violence against protesters.

His behavior was so outrageous that pundits declared him to be "unpresidential" and unelectable. They failed to recognize that the political well had been so poisoned that what they found unacceptable was well received by many Republican voters were fed a steady diet of incivility and contempt for "the other" over two decades. The beast spawned by the GOP in the 1990s had come of age and was now devouring them.

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

All articles appearing on this page are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein.



This photo taken on Aug 18, 2019 shows empty streets around the Software Technology Parks of India area in the Rangreth industrial estate in Srinagar. — AFP

India clampdown hits Kashmir's Silicon Valley

The coffee machines have been cold, computer screens blank and work stations empty for two months in Kashmir's Silicon Valley as an Indian communications blockade on the troubled region takes a growing toll on business. The dozen software development companies in the Rangreth industrial estate on the edge of Srinagar bring tens of millions of dollars of crucial revenue into the region each year.

But the cutting of Internet and mobile phone links on August 5, when the New Delhi government ended Kashmir's semi-autonomous status, has crippled business. Rangreth has become a ghost town, a symbol of suffering across the region. The government said the crackdown, backed by the presence of hundreds of thousands of security forces, was needed to head off trouble by militants in the Muslim-majority territory.

Pakistan also claims Kashmir which the two neighbors divided when they became independent in 1947 and have squabbled over ever since. Markets, banks, schools, clothes stores and the fledgling hi-tech industry have all been closed. Many locals say the shutdown is in protest at the government action. Authorities blame militant threats.

Rangreth's warehouse-style halls, normally packed with young T-shirted programmers, are empty. "It's a devastating blow to the software business in Kashmir. Internet is like oxygen to our business and it has been taken away,"

the owner of one company with clients all over the world told AFP on condition of anonymity.

No computers, no cars

The businessman said clients' patience was running out. "We're likely to lose them," Jahangir Rasool, chief executive of Internet provider STC, said he was detained by police for six days for keeping lines open for a few hours to help another company in his building that has clients in the United States. Rasool said his firm and others have the firewalls and protocols to block social media or "political propaganda" on the Internet. But he said Indian authorities would not listen.

"They sent police and intelligence agencies to inspect our systems. We told them that the IT sector will collapse (without the Internet). They said: 'Let it. We are not taking any risks,'" declared the director of another company with clients in the Middle East. Authorities have unblocked most landlines. But apart from 6,000 mobiles used by police and government officials, most of Kashmir's 880,000 mobile connections and Internet services remain suspended.

Some IT companies have already laid off workers, many are preparing to move their business away from Kashmir. Rasool at STC said his company had lost more than \$2.8 million in business since August 5 and has laid off two

thirds of its 370 employees. "We can't function in a total blackout," said STC's finance chief Abid Bhat who compared the shutdown to being "blind".

High-tech is not alone in its suffering. Not a single car or truck has been sold in two months by dealers across the Kashmir Valley, said Aawan Ahmad Narwaroo, head of one Srinagar car dealership. He reckoned about 5,000 vehicles and motorbikes were sold in the same two months last year. Official records show no new vehicles have been registered with the authorities since Aug 5. "It's a collapse of Kashmir's economy. It's not possible to calculate the snowballing losses," Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry vice president Nasir Hamid Khan told AFP. "About 1,200 trucks carrying Kashmiri produce used to ply daily on the main highway out. Today we hear not even 100 do," Khan said.

At least three top business leaders were among thousands arrested after the Aug 5 clampdown. The executives are still in detention. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a top police officer told AFP the decision to reopen mobile and Internet services would be taken by India's powerful Home Minister Amit Shah. "He (Shah) is asking for guarantees that no large scale protests will happen if the services are resumed. And there is no official here today confident enough to put his neck on the block," the police official said. — AFP

In northwest Spain, conservation efforts pay off as bears thrive

Daylight is only just breaking over Spain's Cantabrian Mountains and already a dozen enthusiasts are up and about in the hope of spotting a brown bear. Shy creatures which feature on the list of Spain's endangered species, Cantabrian brown bears have been growing in number in this mountainous north-western region after almost disappearing. Fernando Garitagoita has rented a house in La Peral, a hamlet in the Somiedo nature reserve in the Asturias region, to be first in line in the morning to film them with his telephoto lens.

On holiday with his family, the house is just metres from a hill where dozens of passionate bear watchers set up camp every day, equipped with powerful telescopes and expensive photography equipment. Silently they wait for a bear to emerge from the forest and clamber up rocky scree slopes to eat buckthorn berries which grow on a shrub that fruits in late August, says Garitagoita. A stir of excitement runs through the group when a bear is spotted pawing at a bush to get hold of the glossy black berries. "It's emotional, you feel joy, happiness. You get an adrenaline rush," admits the 53-year-old professor. "For me, it's a unique moment."

Regaining ground

In the 1980s, it was very rare to see a bear in the Cantabrian Mountains, a range stretching more than 400 km along Spain's northern coast, from the Pyrenees in the east to Portugal's northernmost tip in the west. Not only was their habitat under threat from the construction of roads and other infrastructure but the bears were still seen as dangerous pests, with their numbers reduced by both illegal hunting and people leaving out poisoned bait.

Down to just 60 or 70 in number, they became critically endangered, says Guillermo Palomero, president of the Fundacion Oso Pardo (Brown Bear Foundation), an NGO founded in 1992 to promote the peaceful co-existence of humans and bears. But following a dedicated campaign by conservationists, the population has grown steadily and the area now counts between 330 and 350 brown bears, among them more than 40 females who produce cubs every year.

Unlike in the Pyrenees, where the creatures had to be reintroduced after being hunted to extinction, the brown bears of Cantabria are gradually repopulating their own native territory. Big fruit lovers, they can even be seen venturing into the orchards around northern towns like Oviedo and Leon. And a young adventurous male was spotted in northern Portugal in May where bears have not been seen since the 19th century.

Involving the public

The spectacular recovery is the result of efforts to protect the environment as well as to educate people

about the importance of bear populations, says Palomero. The entire mountain range is today a protected conservation zone, and a project to connect the area's two main populations has seen the creation of "bear corridors" that enable those living in the west to safely reconnect with those in the east.

For decades, bears living in the two territories had been separated by new roads. "Involving the public was key to shifting in a very short time between a negative image of bears to one which was neutral or even largely positive," Palomero says. Not only did that involve dispelling the myth that bears attack humans, but they also erected more than 1,500 electric fences to cordon off hives and orchards, ran an information campaign in schools and the media, and staged a crackdown on poaching. "Before, a poacher who killed was a local hero, but now if someone boasts in a bar about killing a bear, one of his neighbors will likely report him," he adds.

And any harm or damage caused by the bears, be it to livestock, beehives or fruit trees, is fully compensated, thanks to funding from the European Union as part of its efforts to protect threatened species. "It shouldn't cost anyone a single euro to live side-by-side with a bear," insists Palomero.

The bears have become a magnet for tourists in the Somiedo nature reserve, says local mayor Belarmino Fernandez. When he first became mayor 25 years ago, the area didn't attract any tourism, he says. Today, however, this community of 1,300 people boasts 90 tourist shops and hotels that count around 1,400 beds. — AFP

Scientists fight to save unique Guiana coral reef

Off the coast of Guiana, a French overseas department perched on the north coast of South America, scientists scour the choppy waters for signs of life. From the deck of a Greenpeace ship, they take photos and keep meticulous notes – compiling a catalogue of sea creatures sustained by a coral reef only recently discovered but already threatened, activists say, by mankind's hunger for oil. Near the mouth of the Amazon river in the Atlantic Ocean, the Amazon Reef is one of the world's largest but its existence became known only in 2016.

"We are talking about a unique ecosystem not seen anywhere else in the world and that we barely know, and it is already under threat from oil," says Thiago Almeida of Greenpeace Brazil, on board the Esperanza – a former Russian fire-fighting vessel-turned environmental ship. At the moment, the ship is home to experts from Greenpeace and France's CNRS research institute – participants in a special mission to document the wildlife in an uncharted region. Their goal: To make a case for keeping the area off-limits to fossil fuel hunters.

Just last year, Greenpeace revealed that the reef stretched into French Guiana waters. French Guiana's offshore area is off limits to prospectors under French law but campaigners say it would be threatened by any explo-

ration or drilling off neighboring Brazil. "A lot of oil would come to French Guiana" in the event of a leak, said Almeida. "If we look at the oil spill modelling done by the companies themselves, you can see that the threat is real."

Not only the water and reef, but also the land is at risk, with mangrove forests stretching all along Guiana's coast serving as crucial fish nurseries. British oil giant BP, French company Total and Brazil's Petrobras joined forces in 2013 to buy exploration blocks in the region in Brazilian waters. But they needed permission to search and last December, Brazil's Ibama environmental regulator denied Total a licence to drill citing "deep uncertainties" in emergency plans, "aggravated by the possibility of an oil spill that may affect the coral reef present in the region and by extension marine biodiversity." BP is still trying for a drilling license in the area, a move campaigners say could endanger the reef.

Not just passing through

Earlier this month, a team of six experts braved the muddy water and strong currents to scrutinize the reef's corals, sponges and calcified algae, taking photos and samples. So far, the mission has identified several species of dolphin, killer whales, sailfish and several marine birds. But Olivier Van Canneyt, a scientist with the CNRS-aligned Pelagis observatory, is quick to stress the reef represents "more than a migratory route."

"We also observed humpback whales with their young; their presence confirms that it is also a vital place of breeding and (nurturing). French Guiana waters are a crucial place for the survival of many cetacean species," he explained. For Edina Ifticene of Greenpeace's Protect the Oceans campaign, the discovery of these creatures



This picture taken on Sept 3, 2019 shows a dolphin with a remora on its back swimming with Esperanza, the environmentalist organization Greenpeace's boat sailing on the Amazon reef off the French Guiana coast. — AFP

showed "it doesn't make sense to drill for oil in such a critical environment; an oil spill could have irreversible consequences for the entire area." Not only that but exploiting oil deposits threatens to undermine the fight against climate change caused by planet-warming gases emitted as humanity burns fossil fuels for energy.

Brazil's ANP petroleum agency has estimated the area may hold as much as 14 billion barrels of oil – a quantity scientists say could release 5.2 gigatonnes (Gt) of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. According to the International Energy Agency, global energy-related CO2 emissions rose to a historic high of 33.1 Gt last year. Scientists say we need to leave at least 80 percent of the world's known remaining fossil fuel reserves in the ground to prevent runaway climate change. — AFP