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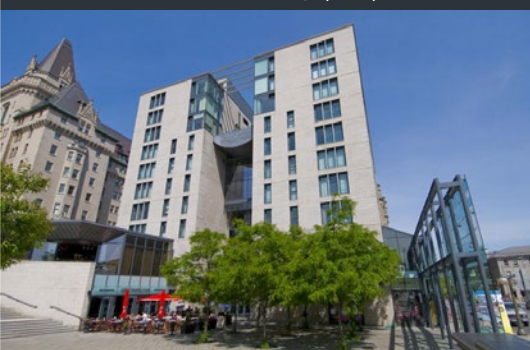
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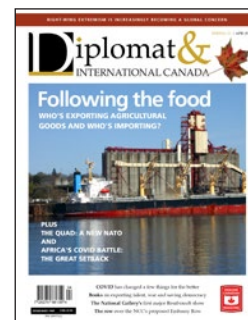


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Table of CONTENTS

DIPLomaticA |

Cartoons from around the world	8
Fen Hampson and Kevin Budning on right-wing extremism	16
Questions Asked of a Belarusian activist	22
Notes from the Field: The Madagascar School Project	28
Trade winds: Sweden and Canada	30
Trade winds: Greece and Canada	31
Diplomatic Agenda: Israel's détentés with neighbours	32

DISPATCHES |

Where the food goes

The world's top exporters and importers of agricultural products	34
A few of COVID's silver linings	44
The Quad: Could this alliance be a new NATO?	48
COVID is Africa's apocalypse	54

DELIGHTS |

Books on famous Canadians, conflict, pestilence and populism	58
Art: What's in store for Ottawa galleries this spring	64
Entertaining: Three recipes that signify spring	70
Proposed Embassy Row causes row	76
Wine: Restaurants become bottle shops in pandemic	78
Envoy's Album	80
Photo Finish: An Arctic squirrel in Nunavut	94

DIGNITARIES |

New arrivals in the diplomatic corps	80
------------------------------------------------	----

DIPLomatic LISTINGS 86

DESTINATIONS |

Patrick Langston on spring adventures around Ottawa	90
---------------------------------------------------------------	----

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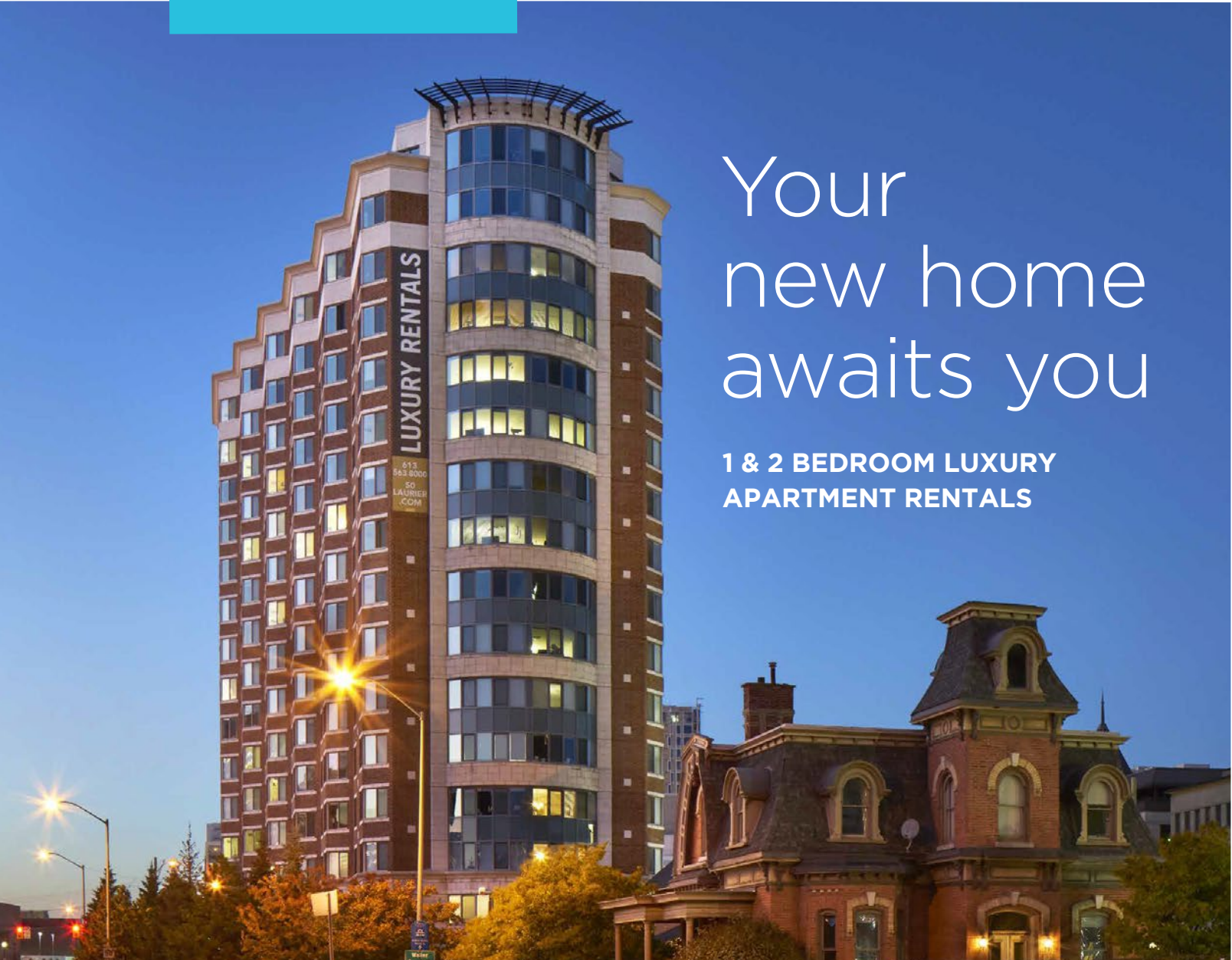
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Jennifer Campbell

Following the food

We're one year into the COVID-19 pandemic and while cities in the Western world saw brief shortages of toilet paper and baking goods, supply chains did a relatively good job of making sure food continued to arrive in countries such as Canada, which can't grow things in the winter months. That's not the case, however, for every country. Yemen, for example, is in the throes of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world right now, with more than 20 million people — or 66 per cent of its population — in need.

As the World Food Programme puts it, "years of conflict, economic decline and institutional collapse have created enormous humanitarian needs in all sectors. The risk of large-scale famine has never been more acute. Assessments confirm that more than 16 million people will go hungry this year, and nearly 50,000 are already living in famine-like conditions."

Yemen, sadly, would already find itself on our list of top food importers as food insecurity was an issue for the Middle East's poorest country even before the start of the ongoing war in 2015. Other countries that import food include Comoros, Benin, Sao Tome and Principe and The Gambia.

On the prolific exporters' side, writer Wolfgang Depner cites the U.S., China, Germany and Brazil as four of the five. The missing country on the list, which is actually ranked No. 2 and is a small country in Europe that outstrips China in food exports, might surprise you.

Our Dispatches section also includes a story from Laura Neilson Bonikowsky

on the silver linings that COVID has wrought. They are few, but worth celebrating even if they're fleeting.

Meanwhile, Joe Varner shines a spotlight on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of India, Australia, Japan and the United States — or, the "Quad" for short.

Africa columnist Robert I. Rotberg writes about how COVID is taking a heavy long-term toll on daily life for Africans. Leadership on the pandemic has ranged from autocratic rulers such as the now-late president of Tanzania, who said his country would cure COVID with prayer, refused to allow testing and may have succumbed to the disease himself, to South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, who imposed effective measures early on, had his own vaccine in public and was making good headway against the virus until the country fell victim to a virulent variant.

Up front, Fen Hampson and Kevin Budning write about extremism — mostly right-wing. One researcher found that right-wing extremists have committed more violent attacks on Canadian soil than have left-wing or religious extremists.

We also have my interview with Alena Liavonchanka, chairwoman of the Belarusian Canadian Alliance. She discusses the push for democracy in her native country and talks about Russia's meddling.

Books columnist Christina Spencer writes about John Stackhouse's new book, *Planet Canada*, which talks about how Canada's ex-pats are shaping the future. She writes about Margaret MacMillan's new book, *War: How Conflict Shaped Us*, and Jonathan Manthorpe's latest, *Restoring Democracy in an Age of Populists and Pestilence*.

The Art World columnist Peter Simpson writes about an upcoming Rembrandt exhibit at the National Gallery of Canada — the institution's first on the artist — and about Queens of Egypt, which is finally coming to the Canadian Museum of History. Food columnist Margaret Dickenson offers three tasty recipes and Patrick Langston has ideas for spring outings, even if the lockdowns continue.

Jennifer Campbell is editor of *Diplomat*.

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Kevin Budning



Kevin Budning is a PhD candidate at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA). His research focuses predominantly on political decision-making, counter-terrorism resource allocation and right-wing extremism in Canada and the United States. He is also the lead researcher in an academia-industry project that is exploring the impacts of emerging technology on Canadian defence policy. Budning is a graduate of the University of Ottawa and the University of Toronto, holding degrees in conflict studies and human rights, and political science.

Warren Everson



Warren Everson is an Ottawa-based consultant with extensive experience in and around the Canadian federal government. He began his career with a decade in politics, then started Saramac Consulting, a management advisory firm. Working for government departments as well as private clients, he is active on a wide range of subjects, from transportation to innovation financing.

He has interrupted his consulting practice periodically to work at the Air Transport Association of Canada, Bell Canada, Strategycorp and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Everson has served on the boards of various charitable organizations and is currently a mentor with Futurpreneur Canada.

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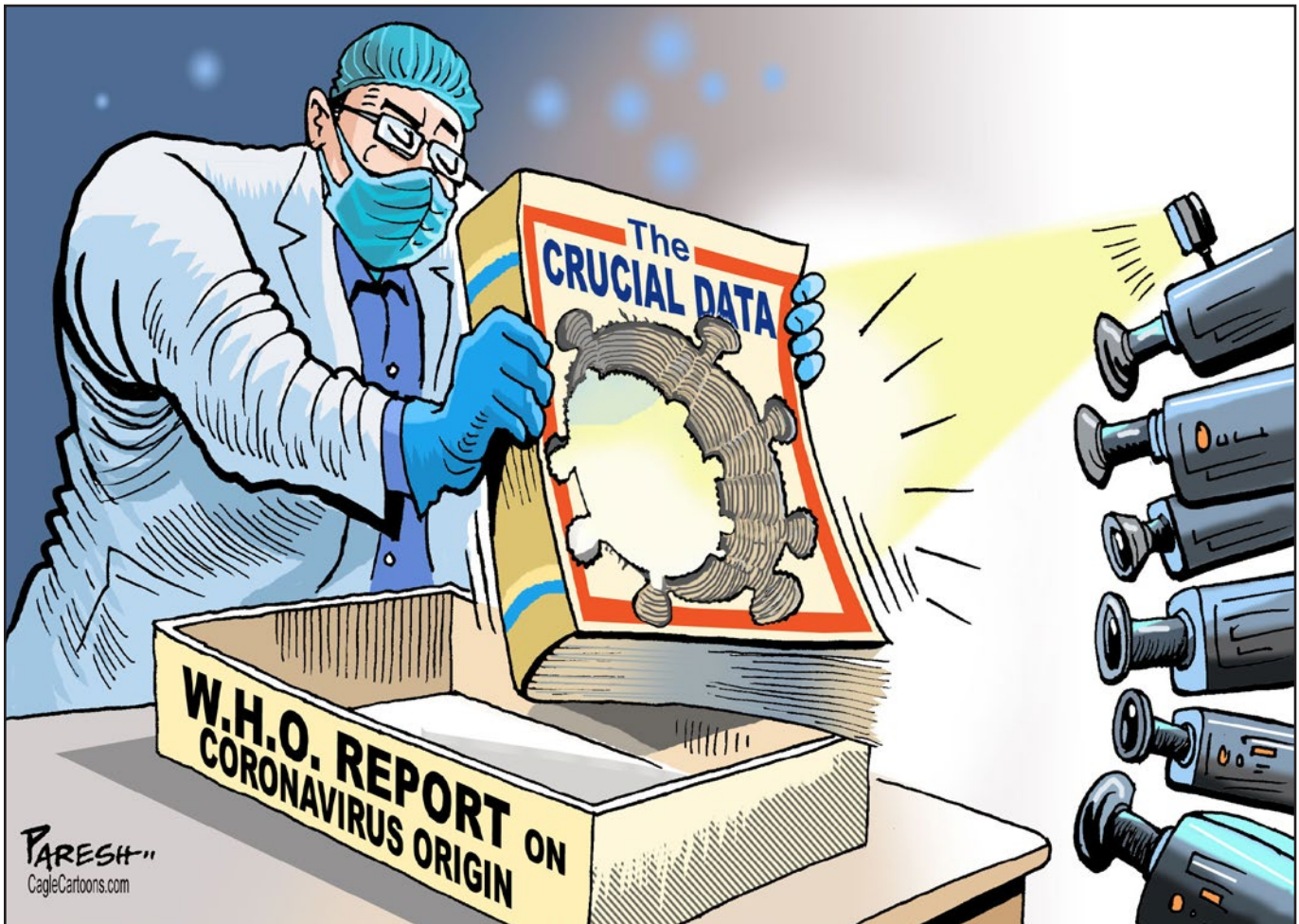
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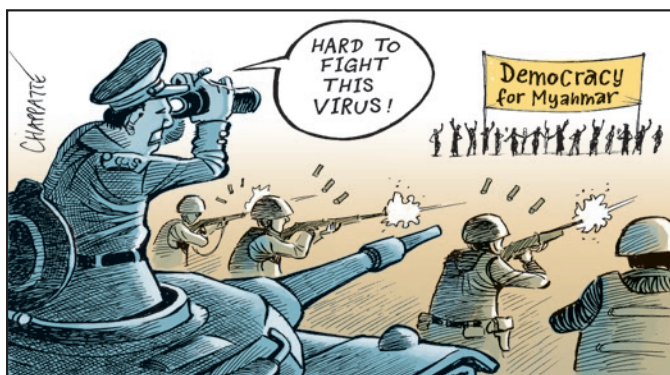
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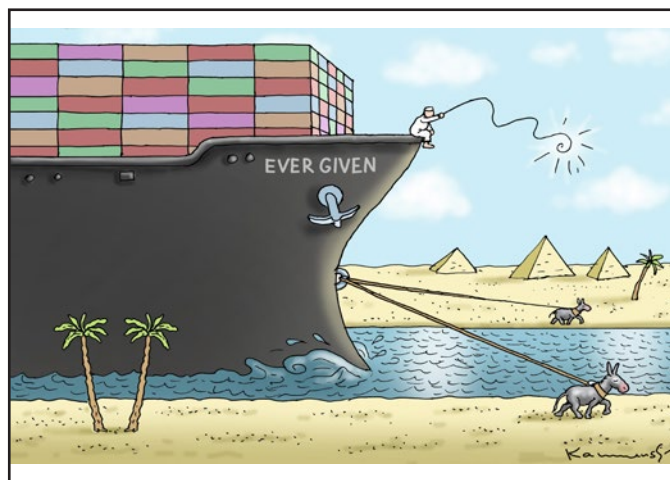
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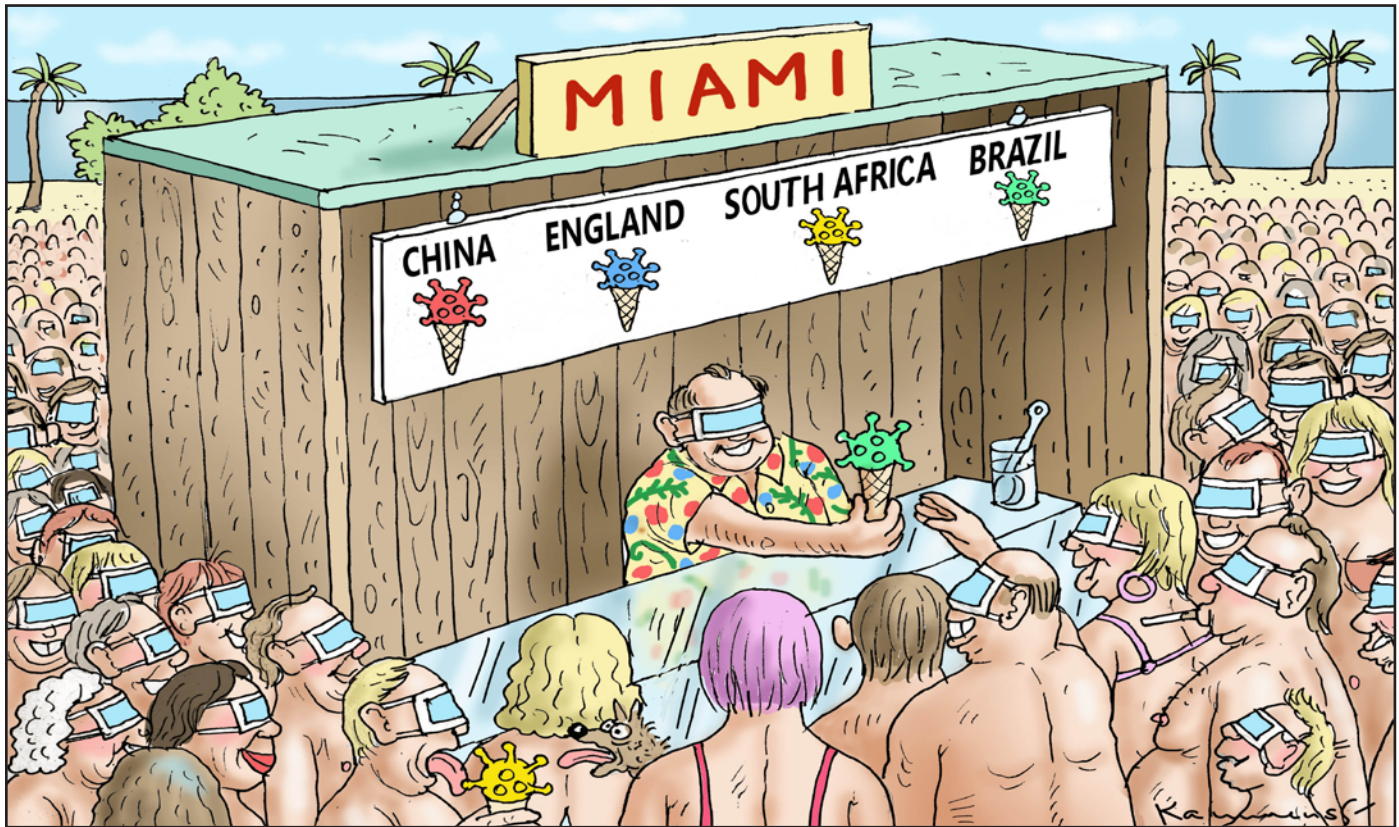
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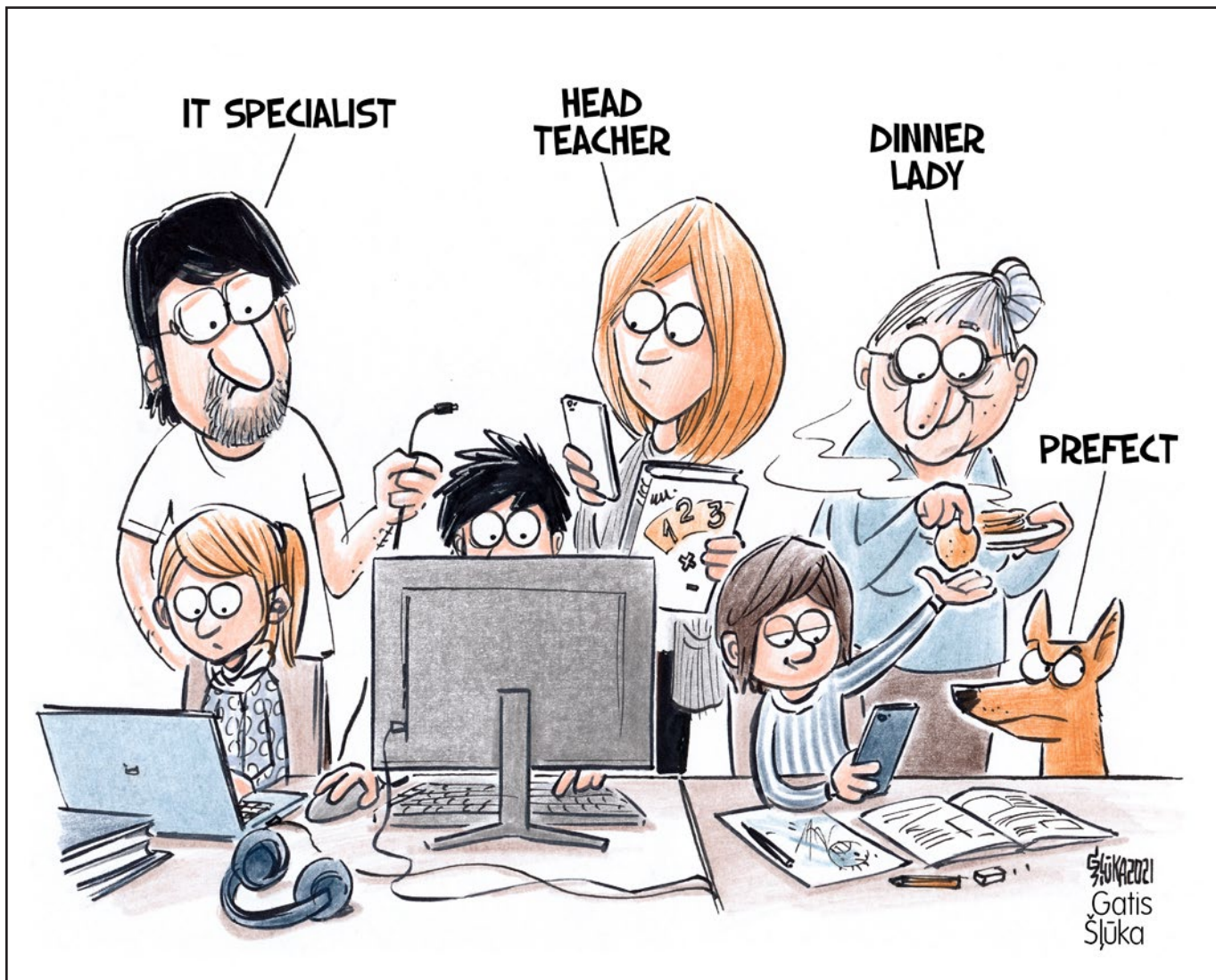
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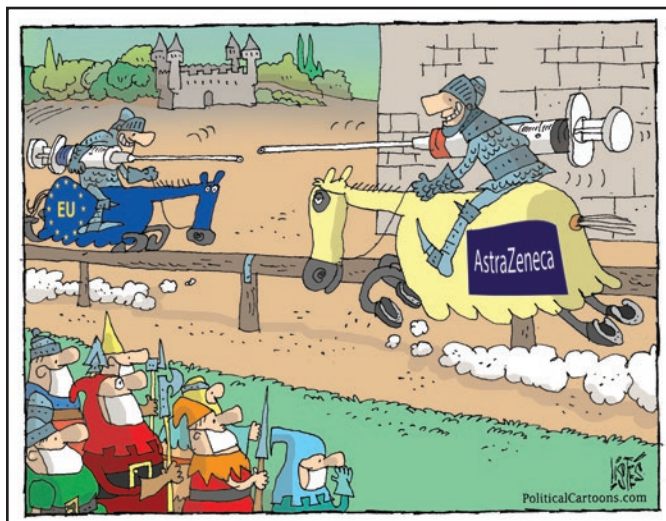
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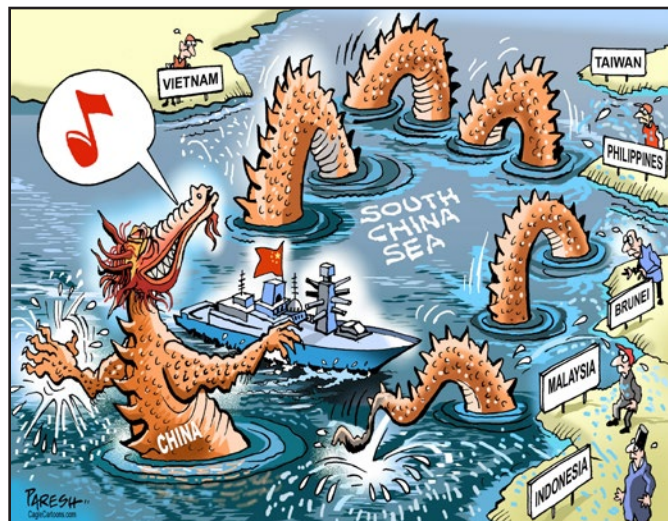
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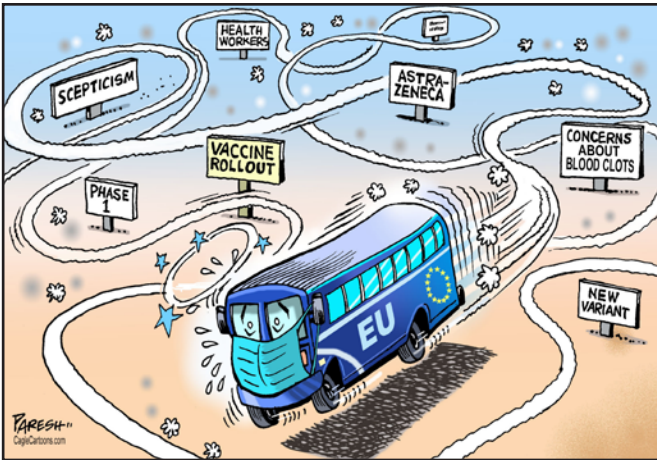
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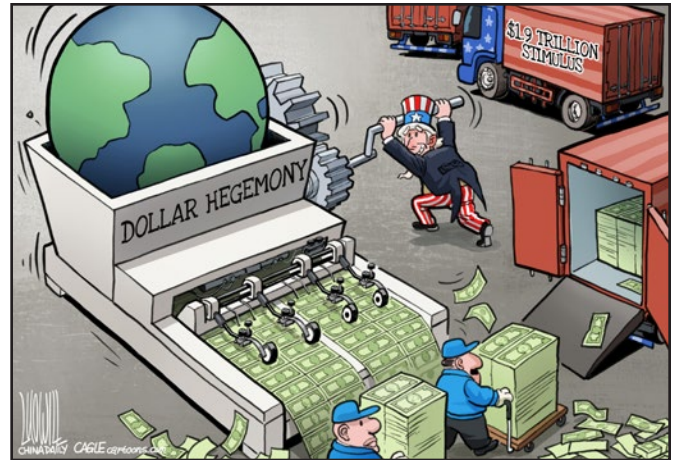
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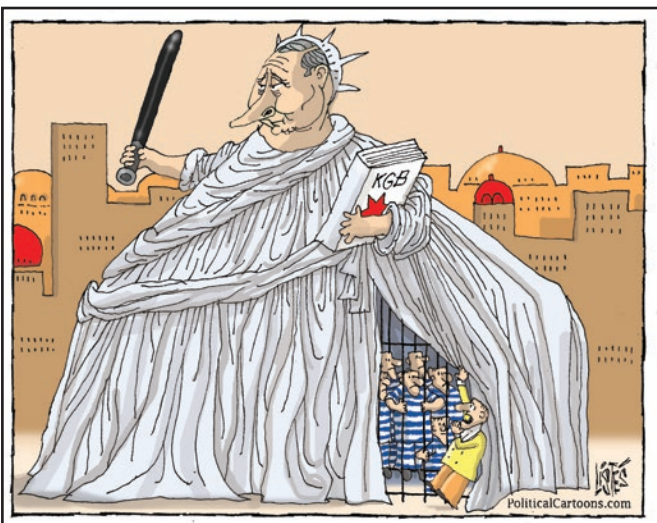
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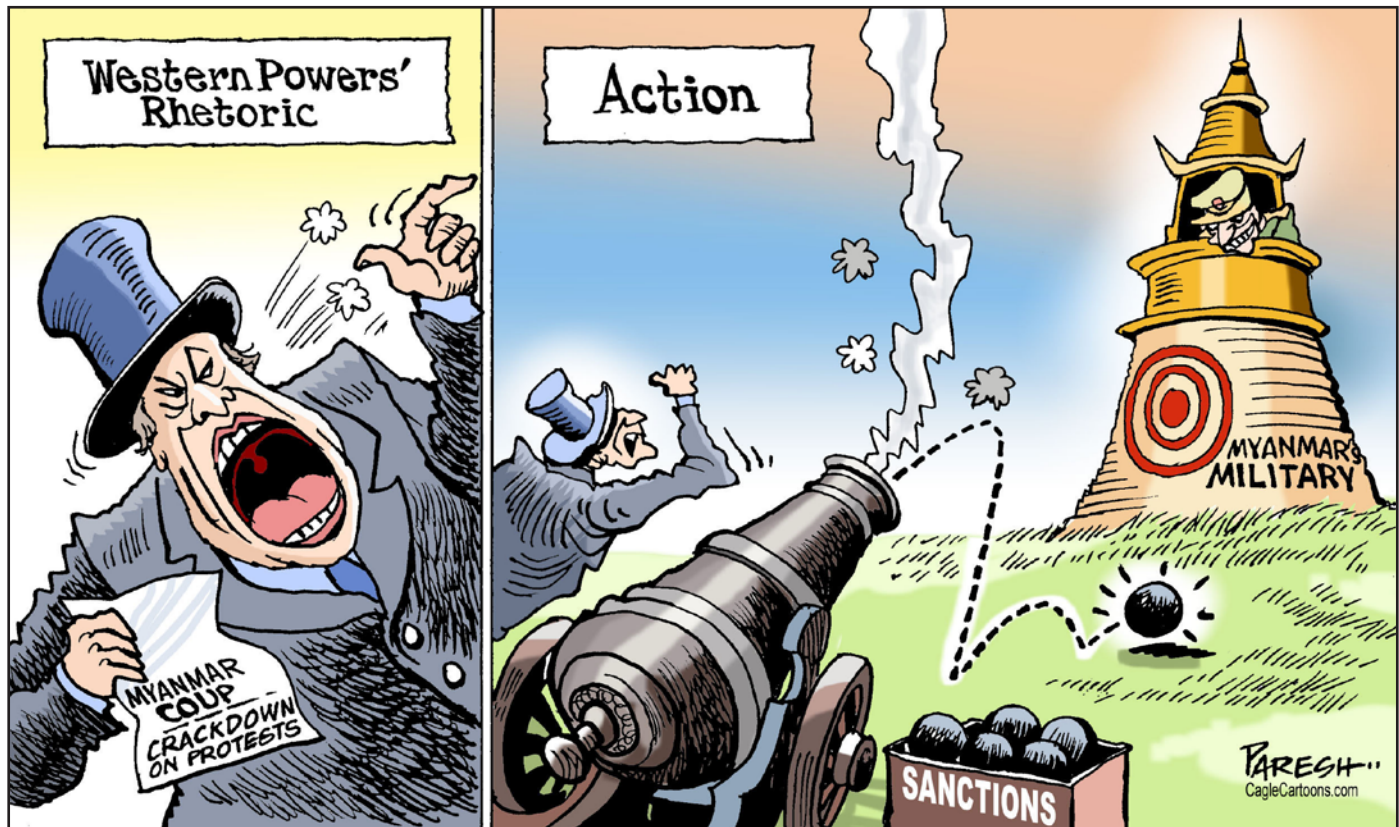
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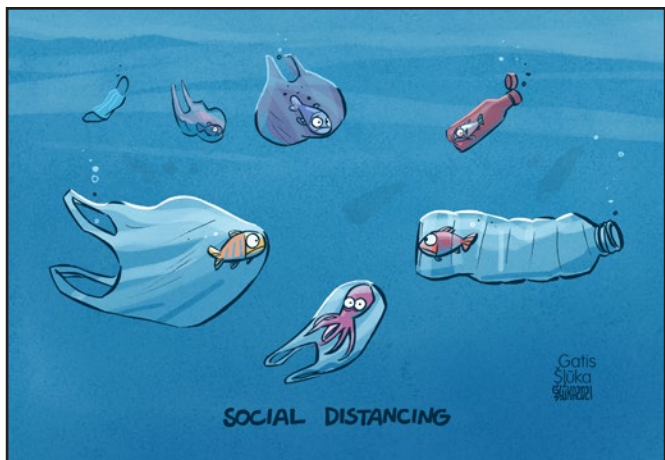
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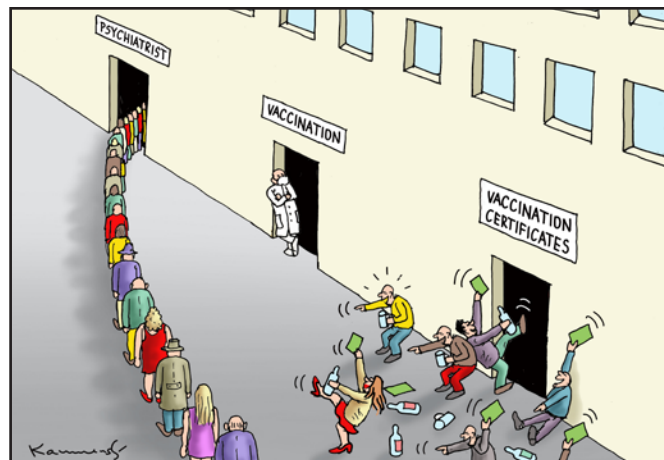
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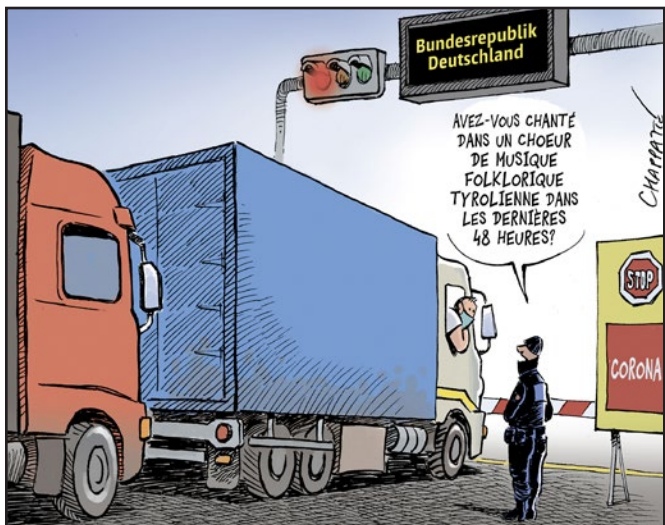
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Right-wing extremism and the global threat



The unruly mob of “thugs, insurrectionists, political extremists and white supremacists,” as U.S. President Joe Biden referred to them, who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, is the latest manifestation of what some see as a growing global pattern.



Fen
Hampson



Kevin
Budning

A Maru Public Opinion poll taken earlier this year showed that an overwhelming majority of Canadians now believe that domestic extremists and terrorists are more threatening than foreign ones. The poll did not ask Canadians what kind of extremists or terrorists they are most worried about. But an earlier poll in 2018 conducted by Angus Reid did. It found that, on average,

Canadians were more concerned about “radical Islamic terrorism” (54 per cent) than “white supremacist terrorism” (44 per cent).

If the earlier poll is a bellwether of prevailing public sentiments, which admittedly may be changing in light of recent events, the attitudes of Canadians do not differ all that much from those of their own government. Public Safety’s 2018 *Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada* — the most recent publication of this sort — asserts that “the principal terrorist threat to Canada and Canadian interests continues to be that posed by individuals or groups who are inspired by violent ideologies and terrorist groups, such as Daesh or al-Qaida.” The report, however, runs counter to a growing body of scholarly literature and investigative reporting

that suggests otherwise. According to Barbara Perry and Ryan Scriven’s 2015 environmental scan, right-wing extremists have committed more violent attacks on Canadian soil than any other kind of terrorist. And since 2015, Perry has observed a 30-per-cent increase in right-wing extremist groups, totalling more than 130. The threat is real, rapidly evolving and relatively understudied.

The problem

In recent years, a series of attacks by right-wing extremists have dominated headlines. In June 2014, Justin Bourque killed three RCMP officers and injured two others in Moncton, N.B. Bourque was apparently motivated by extreme anti-law enforcement and anti-government beliefs. Hatred of Muslims led Alexandre Bis-

sonnette to shoot 6 worshippers, killing them instantly, and injure 19 others at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Quebec City in 2017. In 2018, 10 people were killed and another 16 wounded when a misogynistic, involuntary celibate (Incel) movement follower, Alek Minassian, deliberately plowed his van into a group of pedestrians on Yonge Street in Toronto. Another individual who took inspiration from Minassian's attack stabbed a woman 35 times and injured her baby in an unprovoked attack in June 2019 in downtown Sudbury. And most recently, a military reservist, Corey Hurren, rammed the gates of Rideau Hall with his weapon-loaded truck in an effort to arrest the prime minister during his daily pandemic briefing to Canadians. Hurren was angry about losing his job and worried that Canada was becoming a communist state. It was later discovered that he had an affinity for browsing and posting far-right content and perpetuating conspiracy theories about the Canadian government.

The unruly mob of "thugs, insurrectionists, political extremists and white supremacists," as U.S. President Joe Biden referred to them, who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in an attempt to reverse Donald Trump's defeat at the polls, is the latest manifestation of what some see as a growing global pattern. As United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned in February 2021, the threat is "transnational" and the "No. 1 internal security threat in several countries." He also urged a "global co-ordinated action to defeat this grave and growing danger."

Attacks by far-right extremists, however, are not a new phenomenon or limited to Canada and the United States. In August 1980, a splinter cell of far-right extremist group New Order set off a bomb in the train station in Bologna, which killed 85 people and injured hundreds more. The same year, neo-Nazis detonated a series of bombs at Oktoberfest celebrations in Munich, Germany, killing 13 people and wounding more than 2,000 others. The Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in 1995 killed 168 people and wounded 600 others.

In Norway on July 22, 2011, Anders Behring Breivik, a right-wing extremist, detonated a car bomb in Oslo's city centre, which killed 8 people. He then drove to the island of Utøya where a large group of young Norwegians was attending a summer Labour Party youth camp. Masquerading as a police officer, Breivik gunned down 69 of them during his rampage. The



Mourners and community members gathered at the Oslo Cathedral the day after Anders Behring Breivik, a right-wing extremist, detonated a car bomb in Oslo's city centre, killing eight people before posing as a police officer at a summer camp and gunning down 69 more young Norwegians.



The identification Anders Behring Breiviks used to pose as a police officer on the island of Utøya, where he killed 69 young campers.

mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019 by a self-styled white supremacist killed 51 people and injured 40 others. A far-rightist gunman killed 2 and seriously injured several in Halle, Germany in October 2019 and could have killed many others had law enforcement officers not intervened and prevented him from setting off bombs at a synagogue in the city. Swedish neo-Nazi, anti-racist groups have also carried out repeated bombing attacks against refugee shelters over the years in a country that has historically been viewed as a haven for refugees, with generous asylum and immigration policies.

Global trends suggest that the number of right-wing attacks is only rising. One study showed that from 2014-2019, there was a threefold increase in the number of attacks carried out by individuals associated with such groups or movements globally. And according to the 2020 *Global Terrorism Index*, far-right attacks in North America, Oceania and Western Europe have increased by 250 per cent since 2015. There is also disturbing evidence that some of these groups are forging



On Jan. 25, 2021, fewer than three weeks after the storming of the U.S. Capitol, members of Canada's parliament voted to label the Proud Boys, some of whom are shown here, a "terrorist entity."

transnational ties. American neo-Nazis have trained and fought in Ukraine and Russia. Likewise, "copycat" attacks and tactics have spiked. In 2019 alone, the perpetrators of three separate attacks, Christchurch, Halle and Poway (where a man entered a synagogue on the Jewish holiday of Passover and killed 1 congregant and injured another 3) videoed or livestreamed their assaults and uploaded them to social media platforms and extremist forums alike. Similarly, some right-wing extremists, such as Anders Breivik, have turned to penning a manifesto, which expert J.M. Berger explains is a "combination of terrorist how-to tactics with propaganda and incitement."

Like other radical groups, right-wing extremists use traditional social media outlets to recruit followers and promote violence, but also a variety of non-mainstream platforms such as Gab and Voat for communication and radicalization. They are also collaborating online to raise funds

**MANY OF THESE
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USING CHAT FORUMS
AND NETWORKS TO
EXCHANGE IDEAS,
RATHER THAN
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A SPECIFIC GROUP.**

and disseminate their literature. According to a 2020 report by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue, there are more than 6,600 online channels where Canadians were involved in spreading white supremacist, misogynistic and other radical views. This makes Canadians more active, on average, than users in the U.S. and the U.K.

Framing and responding to the threat

A global, co-ordinated international response has been urged by some, including Guterres, but that may be easier said than done as right-wing extremism lacks a global coherence and because the tactics, actors and motivations can range quite considerably depending on the country. According to Public Safety Canada, right-wing extremists have proven to be particularly difficult to thwart, largely because they are sporadic and opportunistic and because the perpetrators often do not have organizational ties. Many of these extremists are active online, using chat

forums and networks to exchange ideas, rather than promoting open violence towards a specific group. And when violent attacks do occur, they appear largely to be unplanned and carried out by individuals of their own volition rather than being instructed by a foreign-based organization.

Other shared characteristics of these groups include identity narratives that stress the survival of the nation, subjugation of and violence against women and the promotion of traditional stereotypical gender roles (that is, women as mothers and housewives). They also can have a strong anti-refugee and anti-immigrant orientation. As the Anti-Defamation League points out, “There is a robust symbiosis between misogyny and white supremacy; the two ideologies are powerfully intertwined. While not all misogynists are racists, and not every white supremacist is a misogynist, a deep-seated loathing of women acts as a connective tissue between many white supremacists, especially those in the alt right, and their lesser-known brothers in hate such as Incels, MRAs (Men’s Rights Activists) and PUAs (Pick Up Artists).”

The loose nature of right-wing extremism has opened a debate on how to properly define and respond to these challenges. The UN counter-terrorism committee suggests that “far-right or racially and ethnically motivated terrorism” has “fluid boundaries between hate crime and organized terrorism.” It is “not a coherently or easily defined movement, but rather a shifting, complex and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups and movements (online and offline) espousing different but related ideologies, often linked by hatred and racism toward minorities, xenophobia, Islamophobia or anti-Semitism.”

Similarly, the London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue identifies a wide range of different categories of right-wing extremists that include white supremacists and neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, anti-authority activists, lone actors and what they refer to as “ideologues” or “gurus,” the “alt-right,” the “manosphere” and anti-Muslim groups. The latter category is characterized by groups that exude an obsessive disdain towards Islam.

Daniel Kohler, director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., points out that “One problematic issue connected to identifying and adequately classifying right-wing terrorism is the lack of clarity among the different concepts used to describe this form of political violence. In



U.S. Air Force personnel work alongside civilian firefighters to remove rubble from the explosion site of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Anti-government extremist Timothy McVeigh carried out the bombing that killed 168 and injured 680 others.



This vigil took place in Toronto's Mel Lastman Square, after Alek Minassian drove his van onto a busy Toronto sidewalk, killing 10 and injuring 16, some critically.



New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern visited members of the Muslim community at the Phillipstown Community Centre in March 2019, after a terror attack on two mosques left 50 people dead and dozens seriously injured in Christchurch.

fact, many incidents of right-wing terrorism have been analyzed under the concept of “hate crime,” which does share a number of similar characteristics with terrorism. A hate crime — defined as “a criminal act that is motivated by a bias toward the victim or victims’ real or perceived identity group”— can include, for example, the desire to “terrorize a broader group” or to create a specific intimidation, including through hate speech, which has been described as simply another manifestation of terrorism.” In Canada, for example, 2,073 criminal incidents motivated by hate, a 60 per cent increase, were recorded between 2014 and 2017. With more than 780 of these incidents being violent, it is likely, according to the University of Calgary’s Michael Nesbitt, that the severity of Canada’s right-wing extremism problem is much greater than what is being reported.

During the Trump administration, efforts to promote transatlantic co-operation floundered on definitional issues because

U.S. officials refused to use the term “right wing terrorism.” Instead, they preferred “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism” (the term used by the FBI and Homeland Security) or the State Department’s favoured “racially or ethnically motivated terrorism.”

The response of many countries to the problem has also been patchy, uncoordinated and increasingly politicized. Law enforcement officials and the intelligence community have been accused of not paying sufficient attention to the threat posed by white supremacist and other racially motivated extremist groups. In response, some officials have argued that terms such as “right-wing terrorism” legitimize these groups by placing them on the political spectrum while further polarizing political attitudes in a highly charged domestic political environment. This has been especially true in the U.S., where any kind of crackdown through the introduction of new laws and regulations

collides with the constitutional protection of free speech under the First Amendment and curbing civil liberties, a concern that was repeatedly and vigorously raised by Muslim and human rights groups in the “war on terror” during the Bush administration. In Canada, the challenge is further compounded by the tendency of federal officials to view the actions of such groups through the prism of hate crimes and as a local or provincial policing responsibility.

Looking ahead

Despite the growing need for a co-ordinated national and international effort to confront right-wing extremism, other threats in Canada, the U.S., and much of the world persist. According to the Global Terrorism Database, 95 per cent of the terrorist incidents in South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa remain religious-based. And despite a recent and precipitous decline in terror attacks due to recent gains in the

war against ISIL and Boko Haram, the situation remains volatile. Like right-wing extremists, foreign-based terrorist organizations have become master recruiters. The latter are usually more organized, and have the institutional and financial might to support large transitional attacks.

Furthermore, left-wing extremism is another threat that has garnered considerable attention as of late, especially with mass protests and riots that have turned violent in the U.S. Usually centred around an opposition toward imperialism, colonialism and capitalism; support for communism, anarchism and animal and environmental rights; and proponents of black nationalism, the number of left-wing extremist attacks has ebbed and flowed since the 1960s. In Canada, one infamous example is the Front de libération du Québec, a Marxist-Leninist terrorist group that promoted — through violence — social insurrection and Quebec independence throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In the U.S., the threat of left-wing extremism remains lower than the right, but higher than that of religious-based groups. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in 2019, far-left terrorists committed 20 per cent of attacks

IN THE U.S., THE THREAT OF LEFT-WING EXTREMISM REMAINS LOWER THAN THE RIGHT, BUT HIGHER THAN THAT OF RELIGIOUS- BASED GROUPS.

and plots in the U.S., compared to 67 per cent by right-wing extremists, and 7 per cent by Salafi-Jihadists. As they have with the threat faced by the right, Canada and the United States have struggled to adequately define the problem, target the necessary actors and co-ordinate an all-encompassing national and international response. Contemporary left-wing extremist groups are less organized than their counterparts, but it would be a grave mistake for decision-makers in any country to overlook the potential of future violence.

On Jan. 25, 2021, fewer than three weeks after the storming of the U.S. Capitol, members of Canada's Parliament voted to label the Proud Boys, along with three other extremist groups, a "terrorist entity." Adding these groups to Canada's official terror list, joining the ranks of Al Qaeda, Boko Haram and the Taliban, among others, is a significant step in the right direction. In addition to the criminal and financial sanctions these groups may face, the move sends a signal that official attitudes may be shifting, although Canada's Public Safety Minister Bill Blair was himself at pains to deny that the decision was politically motivated. Canadian officials have also gone out of their way to eschew the political labelling of such organizations — both on the left and the right — by referring to them as "ideologically motivated violent extremist groups." In the disruptive temper of our times, that may indeed be the wisest course.

Fen Osler Hampson is Chancellor's Professor at Carleton University and president of the World Refugee & Migration Council. Kevin Budning is a PhD candidate at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs.



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Alena Liavonchanka, chair of the Belarusian Canadian Alliance 'Lukashenko is one of the worst COVID [deniers] on the planet'



Alena Liavonchanka became the chairwoman of the Belarusian Canadian Alliance in Toronto in 2017. In that capacity, she works with fellow Belarusians in Canada and worldwide to promote its culture, language, arts and to raise awareness about the political situation in Belarus. She studied biochemistry in Belarus and came to Canada as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Toronto in 2008. In her day job, she works as a deputy director at Sanofi Pasteur, a company that makes vaccines. She did this interview with Diplomat editor Jennifer Campbell by Zoom.

Diplomat magazine: Tell me first about your organization.

Alena Liavonchanka: I'm the chair of the Belarusian Canadian Alliance. It was formed in 1948 by post-war immigrants who escaped the Soviet Union because they were not wanted there. The main mission was to preserve the spirit of independent Belarus. They were hoping that one day Belarus would become independent and [worked hard on that]. They spoke to politicians and rallied and did the research and published widely on culture, language and political history. And their dream came true in 1991. Many of them actually saw the end of the Soviet Empire. They were pretty [elderly] people at that point, but they were able to go back and see the country and see their relatives, so that was really inspirational.

Then a lot of new people came after President Alexander Lukashenko's repression started to happen in the 1990s. This was the second wave of immigration and a lot of these people have the same values. They are pro-democracy, they want a free Belarus, and they want to see Belarus as a national state. So basically, they picked up the mission and the mission continues to this day, unfortunately.

DM: Yes, I guess it would be nice not to have that mission, wouldn't it?

AL: Yes, I would very much rather focus on arts and culture and language. This is where my heart is. And I still do a lot in this domain, but [lately] it [requires] a lot of political activism.

DM: Indeed. So what kind of things does your group do?

AL: Politically, last year was quite heavy. We had to petition, we had to organize rallies, we spoke to many MPs. We sent letters to Mr. [Prime Minister Justin] Trudeau and [former foreign minister François-Philippe] Champagne. We're working right now with Democratic leaders in Belarus. They're all in exile, but we call them Belarusians. With the offices of [Opposition leader] Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, we try to do a lot of co-ordination between the leaders in Europe and Canadian members of Parliament, trying to organize meetings and deliver messages. Canada [gave] two large grants to support Belarus. And we're hoping there will be more support and the support could be directed to people who are in need because now there are a lot of immigrants who are fleeing Belarus, and they're settling in the Baltic states, in Ukraine and Poland. So [groups like ours] are working with MPs at the Canadian embassies in these countries, to see if they can offer direct support to journalists, IT professionals, women leaders who are settling there. They are also starting to organize charities to support people who were prosecuted and injured, and so on. That's our mission right now. And, of course, we do lots of arts and cultural things. But unfortunately, recently, it's been a little bit on the back burner.

DM: How long have you been in Canada?

AL: I came in 2008. And I came as a post-doctoral scientist to the University of Toronto. And then two years later, I joined the Belarusian Canadian Alliance. And in 2017, I was elected chair. Staying in

Canada was a very conscious choice because I knew Canada was really great at welcoming new immigrants and providing opportunities. I always thought it was going to be temporary, but here I am 13 years later, and I have no plans to leave.

DM: Would you return to Belarus if it again became liberated?

AL: I think yes. This is where my heart still is and my family and my husband's

was saying there were no viruses there and my mom was calling me every day and was saying 'OK, I hear sirens of ambulances every day.' As soon as flights [were available] in May, I bought her a ticket, literally on the second flight that was available from Minsk, and she's been staying with us for the last year. I'm happy to say that this week, literally yesterday, I signed her up for vaccination, because they opened the vaccination for

last year when we've been protesting, it's amazing how many people support you on the streets. Elderly people and people of different nationalities come and say 'Yes, guys, you are standing for the right thing.' For example, in our protests, there are people from Iran and Venezuela protesting with us and the Ukrainian community as well. [Our] flags and colours became really recognized on the streets. And our chapter in Ottawa saw the same



Belarusians have been taking to the streets — at their peril as protesting can result in fines and arrests — since the lead-up to the August 2020 election. This protest took place a couple of weeks after the highly questioned re-election of autocratic President Alexander Lukashenko.

family. So we pretty much are still tied to the country and a lot of people with European education in the sciences left, and a lot of them are [thinking] we should go back because they will need our skills to rebuild the country, kickstart the economy and minimize the damage that has been done over the last year.

DM: Are your parents and your siblings there?

AL: My mother is in Canada. She came last year because she was very anxious about COVID. Because Belarus was the only country [in Europe] where there were no measures and Lukashenko is one of the worst COVID [deniers] on the planet. You probably saw that he

people her age. Hopefully with this, she can go back.

DM: Is vaccination happening in Belarus?

AL: Right now, only for frontline workers, and it depends on how fast they can get a supply of the Russian vaccine.

DM: Can you tell me a little bit about how you find Canadians' knowledge of Belarus? Do they know anything? And are they interested in the country?

AL: Surprisingly, they know a lot because of hockey and sports. Unfortunately, a lot of them know about Lukashenko, because he's been in the news for a lot of bad reasons. So that's negative, but it's still publicity. What's been amazing in the

— really a lot of reaction from people because of what's been in the news recently. And I think also [because of] Chernobyl.

I am a Chernobyl kid myself. I was seven when it happened and my village was evacuated within the first few months. So then, actually, partially I'm here because of this, because I was travelling as a kid on the Chernobyl Kids Assistance Program. They would take us to summer vacation in Europe. I was in Spain, Belgium, France. And I think that opened a lot of perspectives for me. Then I naturally went and studied in Europe after I graduated from university in Belarus. And I know, when I came to Canada, I was really touched because our Belarusian Canadian Alliance chapter in Ottawa was

running a children's foundation. Families would save up and invite kids for the summer to spend time in Canada. And they operated for almost 10 years and they brought about 5,000 kids to Canada. So, we are always grateful to Canada for this.

DM: Moving to politics, what do you think Lukashenko will do next?

AL: I think he will continue to increase the level of repression, and he will continue to prosecute people and do all he can to

And that is growing. Reuters now places Belarus in the same bucket as such vulnerable countries as Sri Lanka, Jamaica and so on. They expect [it to] default anytime in 2021 because there is no money and Lukashenko destroyed businesses. He destroyed the IT sector, which was very profitable and was growing rapidly. The only thing that can stop him is if people go back to the street and there's an economic crisis. He will not listen to any reason or to any attempts to diplomatically solve this crisis.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko have had an up-and-down relationship over the years. Belarusian citizens would like Putin to stop dealing with Lukashenko, whom they see as an illegitimate president.

shut down the protests. And this trend we already see, you know, the numbers, we know that more than 36,000 people have been arrested and penalized. We know that right now we have 302 political prisoners [as of March 28, 2021]. And there are more than 2,300 cases still in court. More than 1,000 cases of torture have been documented by human rights NGOs. And we don't see any lighter sentences or dropping cases, so it means he will keep pressuring those people and, potentially, we will see thousands of political prisoners. And the only thing that can stop him, I think, is an economic crisis, which is also looming. There's a very high rate of inflation.

DM: You don't really want to hope for an economic crisis though, right?

AL: No, but so far, I think there are signs that maybe someone in his entourage is listening, and he keeps shuffling the ministers responsible for the army and internal police forces. There is probably very little trust inside of the system and he's trying to prevent a police or military coup.

DM: I've read about the termination of jobs, the university expulsions, politically motivated tax inspections. It sounds a lot like what Recep Erdogan is doing in Turkey against the members of the Hizmet (Gülen) movement. Do you see compari-

sons there?

AL: I don't think it's racial or nationality based. It's really based on people's activism. So if you even dare to walk on the street wearing national colours, you can get arrested. An 87-year-old Holocaust survivor was fined then arrested for holding a protest on her balcony by holding white and red balloons. [The fine totalled nearly a month's worth of her pension.] And there was a senior woman who was fined for holding red and white marshmallows on the street. She was in court for that and she was fined.

DM: [In March,] the crisis was entering its eighth month. And now Russia seems to be actively involved in Belarusian affairs. What can the pro-democracy activists do about that?

AL: So that's a really interesting question. As you know, the relationship with Russia has been long and not always friendly. So basically, for 200 years, we've been under the Russian protectorate, in one or another form. People tried to break free and they were not successful until 1991 when the Soviet Union broke apart. At that point, we took it for granted and didn't seriously reflect on the crimes of Communism and how bad Stalin was.

Now we have basically reflected and we're doing our homework. What activists are doing now is trying to send signals to Russia that it's not OK to support Lukashenko. And just before [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and Lukashenko met last time, there was a wave of bloggers and articles saying that 'No, you should listen to the Belarusian people, we don't want Lukashenko. We don't like the fact the Russian regime financially supports Lukashenko. And basically, you're paying for beatings and shootings on the streets.' That's the only thing people can do publicly — voice the concern and make it loud and visible.

DM: Will the Kremlin listen to them?

AL: I think there are signs now that they're in a tight spot, they don't have much space to manoeuvre. At the same time, they are scared by the fact that there will be a free democratic country next to the Russian border. And if the revolution is a success, it's going to set a very good example for Russian democratic activists. I think the Kremlin and Russia are two different things. And I strongly believe the Russian people are normal people. Like anyone else on the planet, they want to have basic rights and they want to live prosperously. They want to do business.

But unfortunately, what unites Russia and Belarus is autocratic leaders who do not listen to the people. What I admire is how persistent our protests are and how consolidated people are — and with very limited means — there is still a very loud voice that is saying ‘No, we don’t want Russia to support Lukashenko.’

DM: Does it worry you that they’ve held back-to-back military exercises that were just announced?

AL: It does, because it seems like too many coincidences. The national traditional celebration of freedom was on the 25th of March so I don’t think it’s a coincidence they planned it around that date [because they expected] major protests to be back on the streets. But at the same time, it’s going to be very dangerous for the reputations of Putin and Lukashenko. People still remember the [Second World War] and I think in Belarus, the reason the protest is peaceful has to do with war memories, like how bad it was then, and how many people were dying in concentration camps and just in mass killings. I think the association is very strong and if there is any military action, people will not tolerate it. It’s just dangerous for the reputation of politicians because of our history.

DM: How would you describe what happened in your country on Freedom Day (March 25)?

AL: Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya called for a renewal of mass demonstrations in Belarus. On March 24, Minsk saw celebratory fireworks set up by the opposition to the regime in different parts of the city. “The winter is yours, but the spring will be ours” became a popular [slogan.] Police preventively detained at least 42 people in 10 Belarusian cities on March 24, according to the Viasna Human Rights Centre. There were multiple detentions on March 25 and the centre of Minsk was completely blocked off by police forces. The government took extreme measures to prevent any protest activity, including massive fear-mongering campaigns in universities and enterprises. Despite these measures, freedom marches popped up in different parts of Belarus, even though, due to a heavy police and military presence, they could not be centralized.

The same day, Belarusian Canadians marched in socially distanced columns on the streets of Canadian cities carrying historic Belarusian national flags in solidarity with the protesters in Belarus. There was

a particularly large gathering in Toronto.

DM: In early 2021, your group stated that Belarusians have not seen this level of repression since the Second World War. Is it worse now or about the same?

AL: It’s worse in the sense that you really cannot do even minor things. First, they took people from the streets, then they banned gatherings in [their own] yards, or in front of buildings and now they even fine individuals on the street. Peo-

ple the spot and then you can get either fined or 15 days in jail for a violation of the administrative code.

What breaks my heart is a group of seniors wrote a letter saying that it’s unbearable for them to see this level of repression. They see their kids and grand-kids going to jail for nothing. And, many of them are survivors of the Second World War. They were concentration camp survivors and they still remember fascism. And they’re saying ‘We never thought we



Belarusian officials have cracked down on protesters who are demanding democracy in Belarus and, according to observers, protesting the neither free nor fair election of Alexander Lukashenko.

ple are afraid to wear red coats or white scarves. If you’re wearing any national colours, you can get arrested. On International Women’s Day, my friend couldn’t buy white or red flowers because the vendors would refuse to sell the combination of flowers. You could buy red or white, but not red and white together. It’s literally shutting down every possible channel of even the slightest dissent.

DM: And people are being detained for displaying these colours?

AL: Yes, they can just stop you on the street and bring you to a police [precinct] and interrogate you and search through your phone without anything like court orders or permissions. They can do it on

would [see] this again in our lifetime, but here it is.’ I can give you citations of many women who were detained or fined, and it just breaks my heart. They built this country, they invested in it and now they see this.

DM: Many international reports are citing murder, rape and torture in detention centres, crimes that do not result in police investigations. Do these persist? What do you know about these?

AL: Yes, one man was shot in August in Brest. He had five children. So his wife is now alone. And in the trial, there were witnesses, the soldiers. And these guys on the streets were not in the military uniforms. The orders came from the de-



Belarusian officials have cracked down on pro-democracy protests to the point where anyone showing the white and red colours of the revolution can be fined or jailed. So far, 36,000 Belarusians have been arrested and penalized, according to the Belarusian Canadian Alliance.

fence minister — that was stated in court. Sending regular army on the streets to deal with protests is forbidden because the army is strictly for dealing with external enemies. But they admitted that and still nothing happened. There was no action. Actually, the person who was a friend of [the man who was shot], who was the witness of this, he was sentenced to 10 years in jail. But nothing was done [to] those soldiers and the military commanders who actually did that. And I think the other big case was the death of Roman Bondarenko, who was beaten to death. He died within 24 hours. He was captured in his car and then brought to police and he was dead next day in the hospital. [A doctor] reported that he had zero alcohol in his blood because officials were trying to say that he was drunk. It's not OK to kill drunk people either, but it was an excuse. And so [the doctor] was jailed. And then the journalist who was reporting on this was also jailed. They both were sentenced.

DM: What about the treatment of people in detention centres? Is there really rape and murder and torture?

AL: Yes, and we have a lot of witnesses. Now there are actually several initiatives to collect witnesses' reports. I think the

UN investigation officially recognized 450 such reports.

DM: You said a lot of your fellow pro-democracy activists are in exile. Where are they?

AL: They're mainly in the Baltic states, because Belarus has a direct border with Lithuania and Latvia, and also Poland and Ukraine. Those are the main places now. Some people fled to Russia, but there have been a couple of cases where Russian authorities deported Belarusian activists.

DM: What do you expect from the new Biden administration?

AL: Hopefully more co-ordinated action with European leaders because I think the U.S. can apply its weight and image as a pro-democracy country and act in co-ordination with European countries to put more pressure on the economic front and also on the political front. I think it's important to have the U.S. as a voice in this, because it has a reputation for democratic change worldwide. If the U.S. is on our side, it's going to send a very strong signal.

DM: It has a reputation for that, but have you seen it over the last four years?

AL: I think they were focused mainly on U.S. domestic affairs, and not so much on external affairs. Also, Belarus was relatively quiet and stable until 2020. And then what happened with COVID and then the elections — basically two campaigns — Belarus' election and then the U.S. elections. I think when you are in an election year, you focus on your home situation, and you don't focus much on outside situations.

DM: That said, it didn't seem as though Lukashenko was that concerned about COVID.

AL: He is one of the worst. There were no measures. I think Belarus was the only country in Europe where there was no lockdown, ever. There were no mask requirements, there was nothing in place and there were mass gatherings with no restrictions, full steam ahead. The rationale was that [lockdowns] would do economic damage.

DM: If you were an adviser to opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, what would you tell her?

AL: She and her office are doing a good job of co-ordinating all the politicians and delivering news and [making requests for help from] people and political leaders.

The only thing I could add to that is to create a structure that would co-ordinate all the Belarusian diasporas abroad. We have probably between one to two million very active, very educated people, and that's a great resource that could help influence the situation in many, many ways.

DM: In what ways do you think they could help influence it?

AL: In the U.S., Canadian and European diasporas, you can call your MP and discuss the situation. We've called many MPs and organized the parliamentary group for democracy in Belarus. I know similar consultations were done in the U.S. There, the diaspora spoke to senators, and they pushed for approval of this bill on democracy dollars that happened late last year. And this kind of political action is happening pretty much in every country. I think there is a little bit of centralized support, because the asks, at least, are co-ordinated. We always ask for tougher sanctions, for international criminal prosecution of all the violence and all cases of killing and torture, and also call them to influence the new election. So, [we ask them] to mediate the conflict and insist that new elections should be held

and Lukashenko should resign. That's been very consistent, and everybody knows what to do.

Diasporas can also create awareness. People are posting videos; they're organizing video conferences. Many diasporas



Opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is leading the resistance. She's shown here at a rally in 2020.

also run direct support projects. We collect money and buy food and necessities for people and families. The situation is now pretty dire in Belarus. Many men, for example, have been arrested and their wives

are left with children and with no means. And they have to pay for the husband's necessities in prison, because the Belarusian system is pretty awful. They give you food, but they don't give you clothes. You have to bring vitamins and fruits, because the food is terrible. It's just oats every day. Basically, it's a double burden [on these women.]

DM: What would you ask Trudeau to do if you spoke to him today?

AL: I would ask him to be more direct in his condemnation of what's happening in Belarus and I would also ask him to be more serious about sanctions. I know Canada has a limited economic relationship with Belarus, but still, it's important to show your position. And I would also ask him to, as much as possible, work with Canadian embassies in the European countries around Belarus, such as the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine, to deliver direct help for people who are fleeing. I know Canada has done a great job of accepting refugees from different crisis zones before, but now, with COVID, we cannot. So if you cannot bring them to Canada, at least please help those countries that are taking the heat and do something for those people. ■

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School teacher leaves education legacy in Madagascar

By Warren Everson



A grant from CFLI (Canadian Funds for Local Initiatives) allowed Madagascar School Project to purchase computers and run seminars, opening the world of technology to these senior students.

When Kathy Lucking was visiting a village in central Madagascar, it was the children she noticed the most. “They would be there in the morning, just sitting under the trees. Sometimes you could see flies crawling on them — they didn’t even bother to brush them off. At the end of the day, they’d still be sitting there.”

A Canadian teacher, Lucking soon learned the youngsters had no access to schooling. “The children had no chance in life without some kind of education, so I decided to build a new school.”

It was an improbable plan. Lucking, a mother of four, lived in Eastern Ontario. Finding funds for a school on the other

side of the world, in a country many Canadians have never heard of, might be difficult.

Nonetheless, she began. Through the fall of 2006, Lucking established a charity based in Cornwall, Ont., and found enthusiastic volunteers to staff it, all of them fundraising to finance the construction. Not long after she got back to Canada, she sent a message: She had the money, the locals could start baking the bricks to make the school.

A Montreal-based foundation, “Tenaquip,” later became a major funding source for what Lucking dubbed the Madagascar School Project (MSP); in its honour, the school is called “Sekoy Tenaquip.”

In the autumn of 2007, she watched proudly as the first 65 students filed into the school. Since then, the Madagascar School Project volunteers have learned a critical reality: a school doesn’t sit apart in a place as poor as this. Much of its work now targets community issues that affect the students.

The first reality is food. The children Lucking saw sitting all day weren’t lazy, they were malnourished. Madagascar is ninth on the World Bank’s list of the planet’s poorest nations.

As one cannot effectively teach a child who is starving, the MSP feeds every student lunch and eventually also began a breakfast program for those who were



Fitiavana, her name carefully embroidered on her frayed uniform by her mother, is proud to be a student.



Grade 1 students who are part of the Madagascar School Project imitate animal walks in class. This year, 803 students are attending Tenaquip School.

truly destitute. From there, it was a logical step to provide high-protein porridge to area infants once a day, to ensure they would develop sufficiently to be the next generation of students.

Deforestation has devastated Madagascar, so the school is keenly planting trees whose fruit adds to the school meals. Gardens around the school produce vegetables for the students. Parents unable to afford the tuition can earn it by working alongside the school's gardening team, who are getting training in permaculture — sustainable, ecosystem-supporting and productive organic farming.

They needed staff. That was the second reality: To grow and sustain the school, they needed a cadre of local educators. Lucking and her colleagues have since been obsessed with recruiting and training. They proudly point to one of their own graduates now studying at the university to become a teacher — she's al-

ready given some classes at the school she once attended.

Progress has been astounding. This year, 803 students settle into their classes every day, supervised by 43 teachers and 35 other staff, including cooks and gardeners. About 40 students come early for breakfast and everyone eats at lunchtime. Students come to the school from 18 different villages in the Ambohiborosy region, some walking 90 minutes each way (even in the rainy season.) Families move into the community simply to allow their children to attend the school.

Regular doctor and ophthalmologist visits have helped alleviate chronic health problems. The project has provided eyeglasses and has sponsored dozens of people to get more serious medical help, even sending one child to Nairobi for facial reconstruction surgery. MSP is building a medical clinic and looking for dental equipment too.

A stream of Canadian volunteer visitors maintains the charity's presence. One, Carolyn Tropea, is amazed at the changing attitudes. This is the third reality: young minds can open to possibilities.

"When I first went, it was limited ambitions. Kids would say 'I'm going to plant rice' or 'I'll be a taxi driver.' No one dreamed of anything bigger. But the last time I was there, the kids were saying: 'I'm going to be a doctor.' Lots of girls are asking about the teacher scholarships. We've financed two doctors through medical school."

"Those kids who sat all day... they aren't sitting anymore. They play soccer, they're always singing, constantly running. Lots of laughing. They love school. It's a gift to them."

Warren Everson is an Ottawa-based writer and a contributor to the Madagascar School Project.

Sweden: From IKEA to hockey and beyond

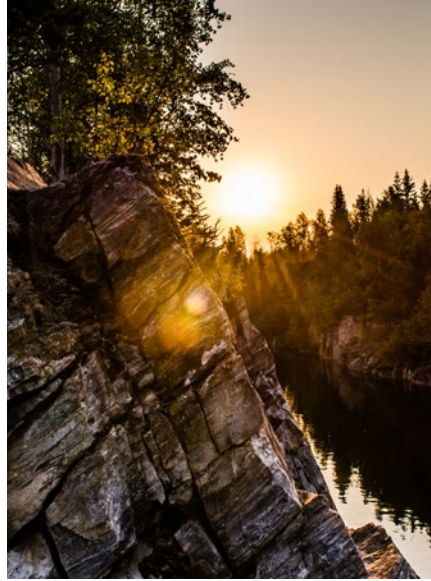


By Urban Ahlin

Sweden, like Canada, is a country heavily dependent on international trade. In fact, every third job in Sweden relies on its trade with the rest of the world. Canada is an important and like-minded partner to Sweden, not only in our common pursuit of free, inclusive and fair trade. Canada is also an important partner in promoting democracy and showcasing the success of liberal market economies, not only to our own citizens, but also to the rest of the world. Speaking of citizens, you may not know that in 1985 Canada made Swedish citizen, humanitarian and diplomat Raoul Wallenberg its very first honorary citizen.

Canada and Sweden have much in common: similar cultures and values, including the love of hockey; resource-based economies; stable and supportive political environments with a feminist foreign policy; world-leading academia and extremely advanced innovation ecosystems that together represent opportunities to work even closer together and advance solutions in a number of industry segments that could scale globally. In parallel, Sweden and Canada recently joined forces in discussing the important topic of attracting more women to the mining industry and also held a ministerial roundtable event featuring extraordinary Canadian and Swedish women entrepreneurs.

In the spirit of Alfred Nobel and his famous prizes, the links between innovation, academic research and entrepreneurship are strong in Sweden. There are approximately 130 Swedish subsidiaries in Canada and even more Swedish brands represented through distributors. Several companies have been established in Canada for a very long time as suppliers of machinery and equipment to Canada's



Rich in forest, minerals and green energy, Skellefteå is home to Northvolt, Europe's greenest battery factory.

natural resource industry. Swedish brands such as Saab, IKEA, H&M, Ericsson, Volvo, Epiroc, Securitas, Atlas Copco, SKF, Sandvik, Alfa Laval, ABB, Fjällräven and Syntronic, to name a few, probably sound familiar and can all be found here in Canada.

When it comes to trade numbers, Sweden exported \$1.5 billion worth of goods to Canada in 2020. The top export products include medicine and pharmaceuticals, vehicles, alcoholic beverages, iron and steel as well as metal products. Canadian exports to Sweden totalled \$583 million in 2020 and consisted primarily of copper, machines and appliances, chemical products, fish and crustaceans and scientific instruments. It is worth noting that during 2020, despite the pandemic, Canada's import of services from Sweden increased by 18.2 per cent.

As part of the green recovery, there are many interesting opportunities for Canadian companies in Sweden. With a strong industrial base and an innovative digital economy, Sweden offers an excellent place for testing, optimizing and commercializing smart industry solutions for global tech companies and startups alike. Sweden is one of Europe's most mature markets for mobile solutions, data analytics, 5G and AI with a diverse network of sub-

suppliers for machinery, tools and parts.

In the area of smart and sustainable transportation, my country has a goal of zero-carbon vehicles by 2030, making Sweden a natural choice for green vehicle development. In order to supply Europe and the world with the green vehicle batteries required, a large-scale lithium ion battery manufacturing industry is forming in the northern city of Skellefteå. The area is of great interest to international tech firms due to the large amounts of available clean energy, coupled with a cool climate and a highly skilled workforce. With the battery manufacturing comes the increasing need for critical minerals and rare earth metals. Sweden has large deposits not only of base metals such as copper, zinc and iron, but also of cobalt, lithium and graphite. Discoveries of yttrium, terbium and cerium, all required for high-tech products, have also been made in Sweden. The mining industry is one of the most advanced in the world, leading the way in sustainable practices and meeting the strictest environmental regulations.

Moving towards a circular and bio-based economy is a critical step on the road to a fossil-free society and sustainable utilization of natural resources. The Swedish forest industry is transforming from bulk orientation to high value-added bio-based materials. A number of innovative companies are using Swedish wood to develop new bio-based materials for barrier films, chemicals, carbon fibre and other applications with industry-changing potential. Swedish research institutions and companies are open to collaboration with international companies in the area of advanced biomaterials research. Opportunities also exist to acquire or work with startups in the bioenergy and biochemical research and business fields.

I welcome Canadian companies to explore the many opportunities Sweden has to offer, and I encourage you to take advantage of the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. Do not hesitate to contact the embassy if we can assist you.

Urban Ahlin is Sweden's ambassador to Canada. Reach him at sweden.ottawa@gov.se or at (613) 244-8200.

Greece has a 'steady entrepreneurial environment'



By *Konstantina Athanassiadou*

In 2020, the resilience of all economies around the world was put to the test by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Greek economy was no exception. A swift and effective handling of the situation was mandatory to safeguard the trends of recovery after a long-lasting economic crisis in the country and to empower the national economy in spite of the instability caused by the pandemic.

The government proceeded with targeted fiscal and liquidity measures and a series of reforms to create a solid basis for an overall recovery. To name a few, by December 2020, a new insolvency code had been brought in by Parliament and "Hercules" — Greece's asset-protection scheme, had already been adopted by most banks, and additional securitization projects were in the pipeline. In addition, the institutional framework for corporate governance has been modernized, the asset development plan has been boosted, plans to address long-standing weaknesses of certain state-owned enterprises have been put into action. Good progress was also being recorded in key policy areas, such as public administration, digital governance, justice, energy, labour, health and fiscal policy. Last year's advocates for a diversification of the Greek economy proved right.

Meanwhile, Canada, with which we share excellent bilateral relations, is a long-standing ally and friend of Greece. Canada has been home to hundreds of thousands of Greeks for many generations and Canadian tourists always have been welcomed to Greece and we hope to see them soon again in my country. Synergies between universities and bilateral and multilateral agreements are already in place. Given that, I believe the full potential of economic



Canada is one of the most important investors in Greece, whose Acropolis is shown here.

partnership needs to be further explored.

More particularly, Canada is already one of the most important investors in Greece and there are promising trends in our bilateral trade as well. Overall, trade increased by 3.1 per cent in 2020, with Greek exports increasing by 8.38 per cent. The main Greek products exported to Canada are prepared foodstuffs, beverages and spirits, plastering material, lime and cement, mineral fuels, oils and products of distillation, bituminous subs and mineral waxes, base metals and articles of base metal, live animals and animal products and vegetable products. The main Canadian products exported to Greece are base metals, namely aluminum and copper, edible vegetables and roots, oil seeds, oleaginous fruits (such as nuts), grains and seeds, paper or paperboard, machinery and mechanical appliances, pharmaceutical and miscellaneous chemical products.

In looking ahead, the post-COVID era will call for a renewed approach in the economy. Our own national recovery and resilience plan foresees public investments through private-public partnerships, energy-efficiency projects in the public sector, as well as eligible private investments through co-financing and using financial instruments to leverage additional private resources. The Greek economy needs to show a new dynamic in restructuring and upgrading its competitiveness.

We certainly advertise to Canada that Greece is presenting a steady fiscal, legal and entrepreneurial environment ideal

for mutually beneficial synergies, and businesses can flourish in sectors such as energy and clean technology, health and high-value export-oriented manufacturing, but also tourism, real estate and food and beverage. The concurrence of our bilateral interests in the above creates clear opportunities for both parties, with tailored co-operation. Our common priorities on innovation, green economy, digital transformation and a focus on infrastructure planning are indicative of what may be achieved in the years to come.

I will conclude with a recent quote by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis describing the new opportunities presented to foreign investors: "People are looking at Greece for investment, not necessarily just in those sectors where they always wanted to invest in Greece, such as tourism. Look at the Pfizer example; they set up a big data centre in Thessaloniki. And it's not the only example of companies that are looking to invest in data science, employ talented Greeks and pay good salaries.

In year 2021, Greece is celebrating 200 years since the beginning of the Greek Revolution. We are adamant that independence, courage and democratic values may serve humanity, forge the various aspects of co-operation between countries and nations and build upon a prosperous future for all.

Konstantina Athanassiadou is the ambassador of Greece to Canada. Reach her at sec-gremb.otv@mfa.gr or by calling 613-238-6271.

The value of the Abraham Accords



FIRST NAME: Marco

LAST NAME: Sermoneta

CITIZENSHIP: Israeli

NAMED AS CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES:
Feb. 17, 2021

PREVIOUS POSITIONS: Colombia,
Dominican Republic, Japan,
United Nations (New York),
Ireland and India.

Since Israel's establishment, the United States has been a steadfast and invaluable ally. Americans and Israelis are united by their shared values and commitment to democracy, peace and security. The American administration under the leadership of then-president Donald Trump fostered unparalleled opportunities for Israel. By moving its embassy to Jerusalem, the U.S. officially recognized it as Israel's capital, while the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords — marking Israel's first deal with an Arab country in 25 years — laid the groundwork for the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states.

For several decades, the prevailing assumption was that peace with the Palestinians would precede peace with the rest of the Arab world. This put Palestinians in a position to negatively impact, to some extent, the nature of Israeli-Arab relations. The Abraham Accords created a paradigm shift by turning this assumption on its head. In September 2020, joined by UAE and Bahrain's foreign ministers, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed the first deal between Israel and an Arab country in decades. Soon enough, Sudan and Morocco followed suit. In March 2021, the first Emirati ambassador, Muhammad Mahmoud Al Khaja, arrived in Israel.

The value of peaceful relations in the Middle East cannot be overstated. The sight of the three leaders signing the Abraham Accords is reminiscent of Israeli leaders shaking hands with their Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts when peace with these countries was established. While peace has not been as warm as we would expect, Israel's relationships with Egypt

and Jordan have withstood the test of time and are integral to stability and security in the region. The Israel-Egypt peace agreement emerged out of the Camp David Accords and ended the 30-year war between the two countries. The

peace agreement with Jordan ended the state of war that had existed since 1948 and settled land and water disputes. These agreements have transformed the Sinai and Jordan River borders into peaceful areas and have allowed us to focus on other security concerns, such as Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The Abraham Accords established the foundation for a warm peace that centres on people-to-people and business-to-business relations. This type of collaboration will help further shared priorities in economic, social and security spheres. The combination of Israeli technologies and UAE financial capabilities has the potential to create new routes through the Middle East's old roadblocks. The power

of investments in the Emirates coupled with Israeli innovations will create countless opportunities for economic co-operation. From just September 2020 to January 2021, 130,000 Israelis travelled to the UAE, eager to experience Emirati culture. The upcoming World Expo, set to be hosted in Dubai in October 2021, promises another opportunity to bring together Israelis and Emiratis.

The Abraham Accords have positively impacted cultural exchanges at the local level as Emiratis' desire to experience Israeli culture and access its markets has already gained momentum. A new Hebrew language school that holds classes in four locations in Dubai and Abu Dhabi has been overwhelmed by Emiratis wanting to study or conduct business in Israel. Now local chefs in Dubai are preparing kosher Emirati cuisine and Jewish-Emirati dishes to feed Israeli tourists when they visit the UAE. These examples demonstrate the economic and cultural co-operation possible between Israel and Arab states.

In addition, the Abraham Accords are conducive to creating a broader front against Iran, a regime avowedly seeking Israel's destruction and Middle Eastern disruption. Strong co-operation with moderate Arab states is crucial in containing Iran through a co-ordinated effort and ensuring it does not fulfil its bellicose nuclear



Then-Bahraini foreign minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, then-U.S. president Donald Trump and UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyani take part in the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020.

aspirations. It is no wonder, therefore, that Iran understands the potential of co-operation and has been condemning these accords. In this context, it is important to mention the U.S.'s withdrawal from the fundamentally flawed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The deal was condemned by Israel and some Arab states and by withdrawing, the U.S. has moved away from giving concessions to Iran.

The Middle East is undergoing a positive change. By signing the Abraham Accords, Arab countries have affirmed their desire to move forward with relations with Israel. These countries are signalling that they have grown weary of Palestinian intransigence and refusal to negotiate with Israel in good faith. The accords have begun a new era of Arab-Israeli relations and co-operation. Let us hope that more countries in the region will follow the courageous leadership of the Arab states and see the value of tight and friendly relations with Israel. We are thankful to our American ally for its work in facilitating the accords and challenging past foreign policy. These new alliances and friendships forged by the Abraham Accords will undoubtedly offer new opportunities not only for Israel, but also for its long-time and historic allies, including Canada. ▣



Former U.S. president Donald Trump moved the American Embassy from Tel Aviv, where all international delegations choose to situate their missions, to Jerusalem. In doing so, the U.S. officially recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

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The Netherlands is the world's second largest agricultural exporter. Climate and geography both play roles in the country's productivity. Shown here is a tomato nursery and greenhouse in Harmelen.



Food trade: Who's buying, who's selling

As COVID further impacts the problems of malnutrition and hunger worldwide, *Diplomat* takes a look at what countries export the most agricultural products and what countries import the biggest number.

By Wolfgang Depner

Mid 18th-Century France witnessed the emergence of an eclectic group of economists. They sought to challenge the prevailing mercantilism, favouring high tariffs, subsidies and physical gold supplies as the ultimate measures of wealth of the period.

Led by François Quesnay, an ambitious autodidact who had escaped poverty to become surgeon at the court of Louis XV before turning to economics, these physiocrats (as the school would be known) stigmatized inequality and luxuries, while arguing for measures to improve agriculture through better public infrastructure, lower taxes and support for small cultivators (rather than their landlords).

In fact, physiocracy considered agriculture the roots of a state, as if it were a tree, with the population its trunk, and arts and commerce its leaves. This analogy points to the central argument of physiocracy: The wealth of any nation lies in its land and what grows from it. Physiocracy lost its influence in the 1770s, but endeared itself to one prominent thinker of the period: Adam Smith. While Smith rejected the physiocrats' arguments that agriculture is the sole source of wealth and land is more valuable than labour, he agreed with the school's emphasis on efficient regulations and free trade.

It is easy to dismiss physiocracy by virtue of the fact that it emerged during a period when agriculture was the primary source of employment and income. But its endorsement of free trade gives it relevance.

Physiocracy also draws our attention to the value of agriculture. It supplies nourishment — and then some — in that it mirrors prevailing property relations, the state of the environment and political relations. In short, what lies on our plates (or not, in the case of hundreds of millions) is far from a mere personal choice.

As humanity prepares to feed its expected 10 billion members by 2050, in the face of anthropogenic climate change, *Diplomat* takes a look at two related categories: the five largest exporters of agricultural and food products (as measured by their annual value in 2019, all figures U.S. dollars) and the five countries that imported the most food as a percentage share of their imports.

Top-5 largest food and agricultural product exporting countries

1. United States

To appreciate the awesome productivity of American agriculture, consider the following numbers: American farms contributed about 0.6 per cent to overall gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019, while direct on-farm employment accounted for 1.3 per cent of U.S. employment, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). And yet, the United States led the world in the export of food and agricultural

products with a total value of \$103.4 billion, according to figures from the United Nations, with figures from the USDA pegging the figure even higher at \$140 billion for 2018. (The World Bank puts the 2019 figure at \$136 billion.)

tion to the changing state of U.S.-China relations, with agriculture one of the few areas where the U.S. has been running trade surpluses. Recent American exports to China peaked at almost \$21.4 billion in 2016 before dropping slightly to \$19.4



The U.S. is the largest exporter of food on the planet. American farms contributed about 0.6 per cent to overall gross domestic product in 2019, while direct on-farm employment accounted for 1.3 per cent of U.S. employment. This farm is in Illinois.

True, the first two numbers (farm contributions to GDP and direct employment) downplay, even hide, the broader contributions of agriculture to the American economy-at-large. According to the USDA, agriculture, food and related industries contributed \$1.109 trillion to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States in 2019, a share of 5.2 per cent. Full- and part-time jobs in the agricultural and food sectors totalled 22.2 million, or 10.9 per cent of total employment — not insignificant figures by any measure.

The U.S. agricultural influence is appreciable on dinner tables around the world, whether it's the developed or developing world. In 2019, the five largest export markets for American food were Canada (\$20.7 billion), Mexico (\$19.1 billion), China (\$13.8 billion), the European Union (\$11.74 billion) and Japan (\$11.72 billion). These figures also draw atten-

tion in 2017, then drastically to \$9.14 billion in 2018 against the backdrop of Sino-American trade tensions. Chinese food purchases have since gone up again, but remain below previous levels, where they may remain for some time.

The United States is also the “food bank of the world,” as *Foreign Policy* put it, providing half of all global food aid as the single largest supplier. Since 1954, more than four billion people in more than 150 countries have received food assistance through formal American aid, a practice dating back to 1921-22, when Herbert Hoover — not yet president of the United States — organized a famine-relief campaign that saved 20 million from starvation in the former Soviet Union.

A distant echo of this American aid campaign appeared during the Cold War when the former Soviet Union procured — many say stole — vast quantities of grain from the U.S. at low prices (with

American loans, no less) to compensate for domestic crop failures. This Great Grain Robbery of 1973 caused havoc on global markets and preceded the partial grain embargo that the U.S. imposed on the former U.S.S.R. as a response to its invasion of Afghanistan. It was a move many have blamed for the decline of U.S. family-owned farms to the benefit of large, corporate-controlled factory farms that now characterize American agriculture.

This development has not been without benefits, as scale has brought down costs. The share of disposable income spent on food has been dropping from 17 per cent in 1960 to just under 10 per cent in 2019. Whether American farmers can ensure their own survival is another question.

2. The Netherlands

The smallest of the world's largest agricultural exporters by area (41,543 square kilometres) and population (17.3 million), the Netherlands exported agricultural and food products worth \$87.7 billion in 2019. This figure becomes even more impressive when compared to the United States, whose area is about 200 times larger with a far lower population density as compared to the Netherlands' more than 500 people per square kilometre.

Several factors account for the country's agricultural productivity relative to size, starting with climate and geography. A temperate climate characterized by fair rainfall distribution and relatively fertile soils in a flat landscape favour what the United Nations calls a "varied and productive agriculture."

The Netherlands' access to the North Sea as well as to several major European rivers enhanced over time through excellent, evolving infrastructure has also long given the country easy access to the European hinterland and beyond. It's a fact that government officials are quick to promote in their pitch to foreign investors.

But these excellent starting conditions tell only part of the story. One defining moment in the country's emergence as an agricultural superpower was the tragic effect of the Hongerwinter (Hunger Winter) as 1944 turned into 1945, with Nazi Germany still occupying much of the country.

German retaliation for a Dutch railway strike in the fall, designed to assist the advancing Allies, severely disrupted food transportation. This disruption, coupled with local hoarding and a cold winter, caused food shortages in major urban areas, with 20,000 dying of starvation. Millions more suffered long-term effects.



Wageningen University in the Netherlands may be the best agricultural university in the world. It is focused on developing high value-added products for export.

This famine, which Canadian troops helped alleviate with 1,000 tonnes of food, inspired far-ranging efforts to increase agricultural production. First, they moved to large-scale mechanized farming, generously subsidized. Then, the Dutch increasingly shifted toward high value-added products developed by the country's agriculture-focused research sector, its crown jewel being Wageningen University and Research, one of — and possibly the best — agricultural university in the world.

Scientists in the Netherlands are currently working on a number of ideas that could help square the circle of raising agricultural output without further straining the natural environment in the face of climate change. They include autonomous greenhouses based on artificial intelligence, vertical farming techniques that lower the use of pesticides and water, and robots programmed to harvest or spray a drop of herbicide at the right time.

In 2019, a dairy cow farm opened in Rotterdam, where three robots outnumber the two humans looking after the animals, with other cities around the world paying attention to the concept.

This level of innovation responds to necessity as Ad van Adrichem, managing director at Duijvestijn Tomatoes, told the World Economic Forum.

"Holland is pretty crowded," he said. "Our land is quite expensive and labour is expensive, so we have to be more efficient than others to compete. And that competition drives innovation and technology."

But if the Netherlands is shaping the future of farming, it is also still dealing with the legacy of its past. That includes excessive levels of nitrogen, partially

caused by the country's highly productive livestock (especially dairy) farms as well as harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

3. China

China's presence among the world's largest agricultural exporters appears obvious on the surface. Like the United States, Russia, India and Brazil, China has a large land mass.

It also boasts the world's largest population, with about 1.43 billion people or 18.5 per cent of the global population. So the trajectory of Chinese agriculture is of significant importance to the global population at large, especially as the country continues its rise toward possibly supplanting the United States as the world's leading power. This said, the status of agriculture in the world's most populous and fourth-largest country by area differs in several ways. Comparing China with its main global rival — the United States — Wendong Zhang of Iowa State University of Science and Technology has argued that key differences separate the countries. Writing in the Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development's *Agricultural Policy Review*, he notes that while agriculture in both countries might be big business and be deeply integrated into global markets, American agriculture is more productive.

Far more Chinese — by one account, 33 per cent of the population or more than the entire population of the U.S. — work in agriculture. But China has less than half the arable land available for farming compared to the United States and 7 per cent of all arable land in the world.

Zhang also finds that the Chinese



By one account, 33 per cent of China's population — or more than the entire population of the U.S. — works in agriculture. Shown here are tea harvesters in Muyu Town in Hubei province.

government views national food security as a much more important goal in making agricultural food-policy decisions. By way of background, a 1995 white paper established a 95 per cent self-sufficiency target for grains, including rice, wheat and corn, goals that have become increasingly ambitious over time. Many older Chinese still remember China's Great Famine, which killed an estimated 20 million people between 1959 and 1962, during the Great Leap Forward.

Political statements and policy decisions point to this agenda. China's 14th five-year plan also speaks of boosting the country's self-sufficiency in agriculture along with other fields, including energy, technology and industry.

Within this context, the government is drafting a food security plan, improving grain security measures, increasing domestic capabilities and diversifying sources of agricultural imports, according to an analysis by the Congressional Research Service.

This reality responds to China's high reliance on food imports. China might have exported agricultural and food products valued at \$70.3 billion in 2019, according to figures from the United Nations, but imports far outstripped them, a reflection of the country's growing demand for food as its wealth has grown and tastes are more discriminating, a key inflection point being the country's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001.

Imports amounted to \$142 billion in

2019 (or 6.4 per cent of global imports), according to IHS Market, a research firm.

This said, the world's largest importer of food (according to the USDA) is becoming an increasingly important player in several agricultural sectors, including animal products (dominated by marine and aquatic products), beverages and oil.

The country is also positioning itself as a major player in research and development of agricultural technology. Chinese public- and private-sector spending in agricultural R&D eclipsed that of the United States toward the end of the first decade of the new millennium, according to the U.S.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, with China's commitment to a more efficient, productive use of agricultural resources. These moves respond to broader trends: the country's ongoing urbanization, which has caused a population exodus from rural, agricultural regions.

4. Germany

Pork and Porsches. This shorthand captures two central components of Germany's global export portfolio: high-volume food products and high-end automobiles, among other items, of course.

This duality becomes especially apparent when considering German exports to China. Chinese buyers purchase one in three German-made cars, with the trend line pointing up as the total value of car exports topped \$27 billion in 2019, just

behind exports to the United States at \$28.3 billion. The growing importance of the Chinese market for German exports, cars or otherwise, has raised questions about Germany's dependency on Chinese customers, a point that hit home in the fall of 2020 when China, along with South Korea and Japan, embargoed German pork imports after African swine flu was found in wild boar.

The embargo upset global markets generally and German producers specifically. German pork exports topped \$5 billion in 2019, third-best in the world just behind Spain (\$5.218 billion) and the United States (\$5.21 billion), with 40 per cent of German pork production going abroad. China, in turn, has become increasingly important as Germany's largest customer apart from its immediate neighbours in the European Union.

During the first five months of 2020, China alone absorbed 30 per cent of all German exports and the Chinese pork ban upset an industry already rocked by the COVID-19 pandemic. While this un-



A full 40 per cent of German pork goes abroad. Shown here are young pigs on an organic farm in Dresden.

precedented health crisis has ruthlessly exposed many lingering flaws in Germany — from its creaky digital infrastructure to its complex administrative state hampered by competitive, even confrontational federalism — it has also shone a harsh light on its pork industry, itself a representative example of much of what ails German agriculture.

The country's level of agricultural exports may be high at \$65 billion in 2019, but producers, especially large ones, rely on imported eastern European workers hired as sub-contractors. These outsourced workers must hand over a share of their relatively meagre earnings for equipment and sub-standard accommodations, to which they return after long hours of la-

bour in slaughterhouses or fields.

These facts are not new, but the large COVID-19 outbreaks that flared up in those accommodations sparked public outrage and some sensible, albeit incomplete, reforms.

Much of the discourse dissected the responsibility of Clemens Tönnies, Germany's Kotelett-Kaiser, literally translated as pork chop-emperor, with many blaming him directly for the unappetizing state of the industry. Others coolly retort that he only delivers what the people want: affordable meat.

This pervasive "discount" mentality has had disastrous consequences in the minds of many. Facing pressure from larger discounters and tight profit margins, small- to medium-sized farmers have gone for volume, a development that has drawn the ire of animal rights supporters and environmentalists concerned about the ethics and ecological effects of such economics.

Farmers, for their part, resent being exploited while being held responsible for environmental problems.

This said, Germany also has a long tradition of favouring organically grown food and has become one of the world's largest markets for such products, with the Netherlands as the dominant supplier.

These points highlight another duality. Some Germans will only consume the best; everyone else will have to settle for the worst.

5. Brazil

The cynical appeal to never waste a serious crisis has perhaps never been more apparent in recent times than in Brazil, as the country seeks to expand its agricultural production, with exports valued at \$46.3 billion in 2019, according to figures from the United Nations.

Various groups, including farmers, have used the authorities' preoccupation with the COVID-19 pandemic to illegally cut down large swaths of land in the Amazon, clearing the way for the type of fires that outraged the global community in 2019, many of them connected to illegal land use.

Once put out, fires set during the drier months between August and October help prepare the newly cleared land for grazing by cattle, one of the country's most important agricultural exports.

Brazil was the second-largest producer of beef, behind the United States, in 2020 and the largest global exporter, exporting approximately one-fifth of its production.

While the industry provides nourishment, economic development and foreign currency for Brazil, it is also a "major driver of deforestation," according to a 2020 paper from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

According to the paper, two thirds of cleared land in the Amazon and Cerrado biomes has been converted to cattle pasture, thereby making the Brazilian cattle sector responsible for one fifth of all emissions from commodity-driven deforestation across the entire tropics.

These facts on the ground and balance sheets respond to signals from the coun-

rainforest.

Backed by Brazil's agri-business, Bolsonaro did not wait to fulfil those promises by granting the country's agriculture ministry control over key rules concerning Indigenous reserves, many of them located in the Amazon. Critics have since accused Bolsonaro's administration of further hollowing out environmental protection for the benefit of farming interests and to the detriment of Indigenous communities, now appealing to the International Criminal Court for assistance.

Brazilian authorities, starting with Bolsonaro, have responded to these charges with appeals to patriotism, indignation



Brazil was the second-largest producer of beef behind the United States in 2020, and the largest global exporter, exporting approximately one fifth of its production.

try's political leadership, as was in the case in April 2020 when the country's environment minister, Ricardo Salles, urged state governors to use the media's attention on the pandemic to get to work in *passando a boiada* (pushing through the cattle) — a metaphorical and literal appeal to circumvent regulations to the benefit of the cattle industry.

As such, Salles was only following his boss, President Jair Bolsonaro, who assumed office in January 2019 in part on the promise of allowing more mining, logging and agriculture in the Amazon

and gaslighting, with Bolsonaro claiming in 2019 that the Amazon was "practically untouched."

Yet at the same time, official figures confirm the critics' charges.

According to figures supplied by the government's environment agency, the number of fines for illegal deforestation and damage to vegetation has fallen by 42 per cent from August 2019 to July 2020, while deforestation rates — already on the rise before Bolsonaro's ascent to office — reached their highest point in 12 years at the end of 2020.

Top 5 largest food and agricultural product importing countries

1. Comoros

This tropical archipelago of four islands in the Indian Ocean, located at equal distance between Madagascar and the African continent, captures many of the complexities that confront poor nations looking to feed themselves.

While primary industries, including agriculture, account for about 50 per cent of Comoros' gross domestic product with three crops — vanilla, ylang-ylang flower extracts and cloves — adding up to a disproportionate share of total exports. Food imports added up to 42.9 per cent of all imports in 2019, according to the World



Comoros produces and exports vanilla, ylang ylang flower extracts and cloves, but spends the proceeds from those to feed its population with imports from abroad.

Bank. Comoros, in other words, earns international currency through a handful of cash crops, then spends a significant share of it on food from abroad to feed its population of just under 864,000.

True, several factors stack against Comoros. As with neighbouring Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Reunion, Comoros appears distant from foreign markets, has a limited natural resource base for local food production and experiences climatic volatility, as evident in April 2019 when Tropical Cyclone Kenneth caused some parts of the country to lose up to 80 per cent of agricultural capabilities.

These factors have made domestic food production a costly, unpredictable undertaking. Comoros' agriculture and fishery sectors have potential, but face several ob-

stacles, some of them by choice. A history of deforestation has left more than half of the country's land degraded and erosion affects the "vast majority" of the country's arable land, according to an assessment by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Current agricultural practices such as slash-and-burn cultivation have only worsened the degradation of soil, said to be "extremely fragile" because of the islands' geological youth, according to an assessment by the United Nations. This same assessment also finds Comoros' complex land-tenure system, caused by the co-existence of colonial, traditional and Islamic tradition, constitutes a "major obstacle" to the reclaiming of land. Areas under production also suffer from lack of modern farm-management methods.

These issues compound increasingly irreversible natural realities in the face of climate change. Experts fear that Comoros' forecast for higher temperatures, heavier rainfall and rising sea levels will simultaneously speed up soil erosion while increasing the salinity of aquifers as seawater seeps into the ground. Prolonged periods of drought during the dry season, the emergence of new pests and the acidification of oceans caused by climate change also loom.

These threats may appear abstract, but Comoros' population is already facing significant food supply problems. A 2017 FAO report finds that under-nourishment affects 65 per cent of the population.

2. Yemen

The high-level donor conference for Yemen hosted by the United Nations along with the governments of Sweden and Switzerland on March 1, 2021, was in many ways depressingly familiar.

Officials, starting with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme (WFP), used stark, even severe language to press home the point that millions of Yemenis face the prospect of starving, unless governments step up with additional support.

According to UN figures, more than 16 million Yemenis (about half of the population) will face hunger this year as the proxy war in Yemen between Saudi Arabia, backing a multinational coalition of Sunni Islamic countries, and Shia Iran-backing local Houthis has entered its sixth year. Nearly 50,000 are already starving to death in famine-like conditions and another 400,000 children under the age of five could die from acute malnutrition.



A Yemeni child holds some food from a World Food Programme (WFP) at a WFP-supported nutrition clinic treating malnutrition among children.

But if this fifth donor conference since the start of the war in 2015 heard familiar, but no less serious, facts about the suffering of the country, such appeals did not loosen global purse strings as the donors pledged \$1.7 billion — less than half of the targeted amount of \$3.85 billion.

Guterres' response was one of disappointment and it remains uncertain whether the global community will heed his appeal to reassess their contributions to help resolve the world's worst humanitarian crisis as an unprecedented famine lies ahead.

While the sheer number of small and large actors on both sides of the conflict have stood in the way of a settlement easing the suffering, the war has exposed the country's reliance on food imports, casting Yemenis, especially blameless children, into a "special kind of hell," as Guterres said.

According to World Bank figures, food accounted for 39.1 per cent of the country's total imports in 2019 and an Oxfam report published in 2017 found 90 per cent of the country's food comes from abroad.

Food insecurity had been a fact of life for millions in the Middle East's poorest country before the war. Factors have included poverty (now gripping more than 80 per cent of Yemen's population) in the face of economic mismanagement and limited areas of cultivation — arable land accounts for 2.2 per cent of land use with 41.7 per cent used for permanent pasture — increasingly stressed by growing water scarcity and various pests such as desert locusts that have been destroying vast amounts of locally grown vegetation and crops.

The war has meant the strategic blocking, by both sides, of ports receiving foreign aid, which has worsened these conditions.

As former UN official Jan Egeland, now secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, told National Public Radio, hunger has become a weapon in Yemen.

3. Benin

This former French colony in West Africa demonstrates par excellence the many paradoxes that increasingly define the food situation in Africa. Agriculture accounts for up to 27 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and about 38 per cent of its total employment. This dependency on agriculture appears even more apparent when 70 per cent of the country's total employment depends on it, according the World Food



Agriculture accounts for up to 27 per cent of Benin's GDP, yet food is one of Benin's largest imports.

Programme (WFP.) And yet, in 2019, food accounted for 38.3 per cent of Benin's imports, as local agriculture is unproductive, with farmers working small plots.

The country also frequently loses crops and livestock through climate shocks and floods, as was the case in 2010, when Benin was perhaps the hardest-hit by flooding caused by heavy rains in the region. The floods destroyed or damaged an estimated 10,000 homes and impacted almost 700,000 people, while killing dozens. The country also experienced notable flooding in 2016, 2019 and 2020 with scientists warning of more frequent and severe flooding through the West African coastal area and its extensive network of rivers running through the multinational region.

These environmental effects have unfolded against steadily rising food prices that have forced families to cut the quantity and quality of food consumption, factors exacerbating food insecurity and malnutrition, according to the WFP, which finds that 9.6 per cent of all households are food insecure, with 32 per cent of children aged 5 and under suffering from chronic malnutrition.

Yet this existential scarcity coexists with

excessive caloric consumption as obesity (defined as body mass index of 30 or more) has been rising in Benin, as it has in many other African countries. Obesity among females reached 14.2 per cent in 2016, up from 9.5 per cent in 2005. Obesity among males is lower (4.7 per cent in 2016), but also rising. Reasons for this development include urbanization, cultural factors and rising middle-class wealth, but also the import of cheap, processed food from the developed world.

José Graziano da Silva, former director general of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), perhaps summed up this point best in 2019 during a forum held by the World Trade Organization: "Many countries depend heavily on food imports to guarantee the availability of food for their people," he said. "Unfortunately, unhealthy ultra-processed food fares better in international trade in terms of transportation and conservation than non-processed food."

Poverty, in other words, is pushing up the scales, without eliminating hunger itself, leaving millions trapped in a "double-burden of malnutrition," as experts have called it.



In spite of being one of the poorest, most densely populated countries on the African continent, 33.2 per cent of The Gambia's imports were food in 2019, and yet agriculture constitutes the country's primary economic activity.

4. The Gambia

Starting from its 80-kilometre-long Atlantic shoreline, this sliver of a state meanders along the Gambia River 338 kilometres deep into surrounding Senegal, with the river dividing the country into two narrow slices.

This peculiar geography, itself the product of colonial compromise between Britain (the country's former colonial master) and France (Senegal's former colonial master,) has complicated the country's social and economic development, a familiar aspect of the African experience.

One of the poorest, most densely populated countries on the African continent, with a population of 2.4 million, 33.2 per cent of The Gambia's imports were food in 2019, despite the fact that agriculture constitutes the country's primary economic activity, according to the FAO. But its analysis also found that The Gambia's agricultural performance has not been consistent, with production stagnating or even declining over the years. Factors have included lack of infrastructure, rising prices in the face of declining revenues from the sales of cash crops, changing climatic conditions responsible for eroding soil, fluctuating temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns.

These aspects become more apparent when taking a closer look at the nature of Gambian agriculture. It mixes low-

yield subsistence farming for domestic consumption with cash crop production for foreign export, but relies heavily on rainfall rather than modern irrigation techniques, which means agriculture is highly vulnerable to weather variability and climate change. Food self-sufficiency thus suffers, forcing the country to spend its precious foreign currency, earned through cash crops, on importing basic goods, such as rice, to fill local bellies. But fluctuating exchange rates create uncertainty and contribute to inflation on the domestic food market, eroding local purchasing, according to the FAO.

Proposed remedies for raising agricultural productivity include obvious measures such as improved irrigation and marketing as a part of a larger agenda to diversify the country's economy away from agriculture and tourism, its other main source of income.

The FAO's assessment also drew attention to what it calls "inadequate domestic policies," which observers can read as a charitable, perhaps diplomatic, nod to the country's domestic politics, dominated by former president Yahya Jammeh for more than two decades.

Jammeh's portly public demeanour and billowing white robes, signalling a combination of friendliness and Islamic devoutness, could not hide the ugly truths of his regime, which "ruthlessly repressed"

political opposition after gaining power through a military coup in 1994, in the words of Human Rights Watch.

Arbitrary detentions, disappearances and extrajudicial killings defined the rule of Jammeh, who stands accused of having stolen \$1 billion from public coffers and raping women while in office. His government also discriminated against homosexuals while Jammeh, like other African leaders, also promoted dangerous views about HIV/AIDS.

A foreign military intervention following his refusal to accept the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in favour of Adama Barrow eventually forced Jammeh to flee for Equatorial Guinea from where he has been plotting his return.

In the meantime, he has been seen working as a farmer in Equatorial Guinea.

5. Sao Tome and Principe

Two volcanic islands and several smaller islets constitute this African country in the Gulf of Guinea. Portugal first colonized Sao Tome in the late 1400s, using convicts and slaves from the African mainland to grow sugar as the archipelago emerged as the first plantation economy in the tropics during the 16th Century.

Coffee and cocoa — all grown with slave labour, a modified form of which lasted into the 20th Century — eventu-

ally supplanted sugar in the 19th Century. In fact, by the early 20th Century, Sao Tome and Principe was briefly the largest producer of cocoa in the world, before a boycott over labour practices had its effect. Portuguese control of the islands did not cease until independence in 1975.

This long legacy of colonialism has remained apparent in the country's population of 215,000 — a multi-ethnic, multi-hued mix of people descended from six major groups — who have settled by choice, force or accident on these previously uninhabited islands and integrated into its agricultural system still dominated by plantation agriculture.

Consider the following: In 2018, the country's large cocoa plantations accounted for 90 per cent of the farmed land and two thirds of employment, according to the International Monetary Fund, which also found that cocoa exports accounted for 52.4 per cent of total goods exports and 1.6 per cent of GDP in 2019.

While a major land reform in the early 1990s divided up 15 large plantation enterprises among small holders and medium-sized enterprises, agriculture remains relatively unproductive for a litany



Sao Tome and Principe has fertile volcanic soils, but its lack of infrastructure and remoteness hamper access to markets and available labour.

of familiar reasons, despite the fact that growing conditions (fertile volcanic soils, abundant water and tropical temperatures) are excellent.

Such reasons include the country's infrastructure, its remoteness, which hampers access to markets, and the available

labour.

Contemporary political instability and corruption, coupled with the legacy of colonialism, have left this country poor (according to the World Food Programme, 66 per cent of the population lives on less than \$3.20 a day) and reliant on outside support, as food accounted for 30.9 per cent of all imports in 2019.

However, this story is not without its bright spots. The country's political system has a history of fair and competitive elections with peaceful transfers of power, and civil liberties enjoy a high degree of protection.

Tourism remains a largely untapped potential and the sale of offshore oil concessions holds promise, assuming the country can avoid the dreaded "resource curse" with all its consequences, such as political corruption.

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Five gains COVID has conferred

The pandemic has been devastating in many ways, but there have been some silver linings.

By Laura Neilson Bonikowsky



Working from home — a technological possibility for some time, but one employers were slow to adopt — became a necessity because of the pandemic. It's likely many workplaces will allow and even encourage it to continue.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Since then, we've endured lockdowns, restrictions, fear-mongering and business failures. Approximately 140 million people worldwide have had COVID and more than 3 million have died from it. While it may seem unlikely that anything good could come from the pandemic, there are changes to celebrate.

Work flexibility

The obvious change is the way many of us work; Statistics Canada reports that nearly 5 million people are working from home who don't usually. Roughly 10 million private-sector Americans work from home, double pre-pandemic numbers, excluding the country's 3 million federal civilian employees, according to the National Compensation Survey.

We've been freed from commuting

and cubicles to work, instead, against the background of home life. It's mostly been successful, with businesses taking advantage of technology that allows colleagues to see each other and share documents. Some organizations find the arrangement successful enough that they are making it permanent. Some have gone further; the Conference Board of Canada, after sending its staff home to work in March 2020, announced in July it would sell its

building in Ottawa. Although the sale was already being considered, it was impelled by the pandemic. Team productivity remains high and the situation has offered several efficiencies.

But flexibility isn't just about working from home. Cheryl Nichols, an executive assistant in a large Alberta organization that has embraced working remotely, points out that work flexibility also means people can remain in the office environment if they prefer, which affords more interaction with others, even physically distanced, and keeps work and home separate. Nichols acknowledges that having staff working from home regularly could become permanent, but it will require much consideration and could yield cost savings.

Amanda Joy, an anthropologist in Ottawa, predicts the "new understanding of how people can work productively outside the traditional office environment will change the workplace of the future." Employers will be forced to upgrade technology and revisit policies about workplace ergonomics, human resources and occupational health and safety. With remote work proving effective, it may become easier to make accommodations for workers with disabilities. Some envision fewer meetings, less business travel and more online conferences. Certainly, many people would be glad to see the end of cubicle farms and the open office layout.

Home and families

The other aspect of working from home is life at home. The picture of pandemic home life is somewhat unclear; the *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* states in its May 2020 edition that "reports of domestic abuse and family violence have increased around the world" due to exacerbated volatile family situations, citing anecdotal evidence from the U.S., China, Brazil and Australia. But in November 2020, the U.S. Census reported a decrease in divorces and marriages, trends that began before the pandemic. Statistics Canada has not released data for 2020, but it reports pre-pandemic increases in police-reported family violence between 2017 and 2019 after steady declines between 2009 and 2016.

University of Virginia professor Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, asserts that divorces actually declined during the pandemic, largely due to people being more cautious. He notes that the Institute for Family Studies surveys indicate people have reported struggling through lockdowns, financial stress and

unemployment, which has been interpreted by the media as a surge in divorces. Wilcox notes similarities with the Great Depression, when divorce rates also fell. When times get tough, he says, people lean on each other. He acknowledges that

Meanwhile, Joy recalls that when schools closed and her daughter Sadie, 7, needed home-schooling, it was stressful while they figured it out. But she gained insight into her daughter's learning style and how the school structure works for



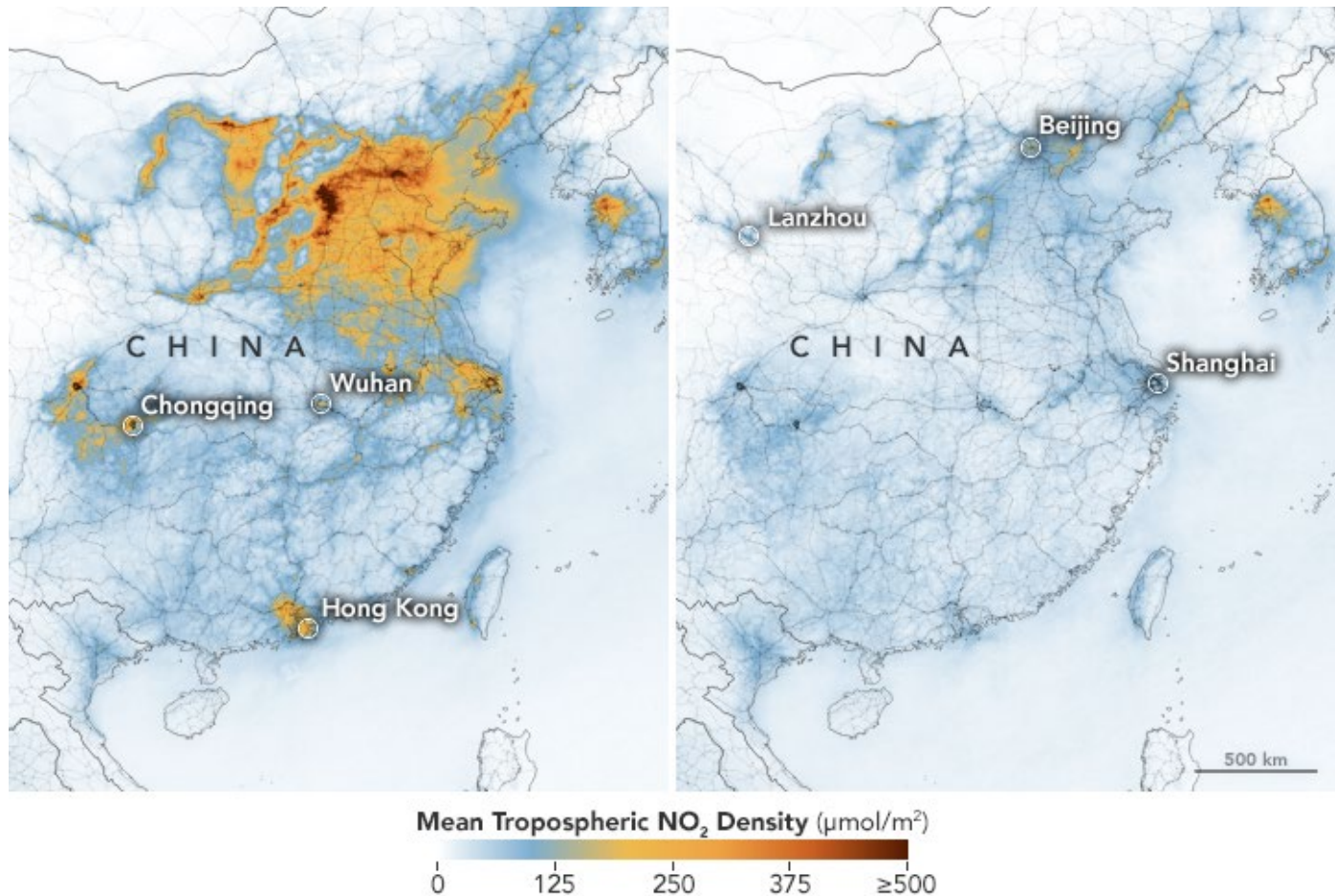
University of Virginia professor Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, asserts that divorces actually declined during the pandemic, largely due to people being more cautious.

access to services may play a role and predicts that, like the 1940s, our new normal will see the divorce rate spike.

For many, being at home has meant more focused time with children rather than frantic evenings of activities, homework and dinner. Instead, it's been a time for board games, puzzles, crafts, outdoor activities and reading. Candace Eng, a manager in the private sector in the Vancouver area, has seen her family grow closer. With everyone at home for school and work, her husband has been able to spend more time with their teen-aged daughters without the distractions of friends and activities.

her. Joy says she knows it's unlikely she'll have another opportunity to spend this much time with Sadie and is thankful her employer allowed the flexibility to work at odd hours when schools were closed and summer programs cancelled.

Social media have been awash in memes about how people now realize that teaching is difficult. Joy has gained appreciation for the effort of engaging students; Sadie's teachers have been "rock stars," she says, holding the attention of Grade 2 students who would rather be playing. In Calgary, a high school assistant principal adds that the pandemic has "definitely made parents and kids value the physical



This image shows the nitrogen dioxide density change in China, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

institution of the school and most now realize teaching is a big job and more complex than they thought.”

Many people have discovered — or rediscovered — homey and gratifying activities such as sewing, crafting, cooking and baking. Etsy reported a 64 per cent increase in searches for crafting supplies and tools, a 221 per cent increase in searches for DIY kits and a jump of 138 per cent in craft sales in the third quarter of 2020. The company’s earnings increased such that 2020 may prove to be its biggest.

Cleaner air

The European Space Agency in April 2020 and NASA in November reported a significant decline in air pollutants in Earth’s atmosphere during the pandemic. Researchers compared actual readings with predictive models and determined global concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) decreased nearly 20 per cent. (Vehicles, power plants and industrial processes produce NO₂, which is not a greenhouse gas. This highly reactive gas does cause haze,

breathing problems, acid rain and nutrient pollution of coastal waters.) Researchers examined hourly data from 5,756 sites in 46 countries, learning that 50 of the 61 cities analyzed showed reductions of up to 50 per cent. Paris had a drop of 54 per cent by April; by November, in Wuhan, China, and Milan, emissions dropped 60 per cent and in New York City, 45 per cent.

Carbon concentrations have also slowed. In China, carbon emissions dropped 25 per cent in March 2020, representing 200 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Globally, CO₂ emissions dropped 17 per cent by the end of November, according to the World Meteorological Organization, a reduction of between 4.2 per cent and 7.5 per cent compared to the previous year. It’s not a significant drop, but it’s still a drop.

Science and medicine

Sequencing the virus’s genome and, within a year, creating a vaccine that promises to be highly effective has been an extraordinary and unprecedented accom-

plishment. Scientists around the world worked across borders with private and public backing, using super-computers and technologies not available to their predecessors, but drawing on past work to develop RNA vaccines. By using the genetic sequence of the novel coronavirus, researchers were able to package bits of the RNA code of the spike protein that allows the virus to enter the body’s cells. These bits of RNA injected into the human body trigger the body to produce antibodies. Professor Peter Openshaw of Imperial College London, describes it as a “novel technology but... also a very simple one.” It holds promise to be exploited for other uses fairly easily.

Among the many things we’ve learned to do differently during the pandemic is seeing our doctors. Telemedicine — using technology to communicate — has proven its benefit. Although telemedicine has been around since the 1950s, it isn’t mainstream. But during the pandemic, the need for physical distancing has seen patients consult doctors by phone, video



Sequencing the virus's genome and, within a year, creating a vaccine that promises to be highly effective have been extraordinary and unprecedented accomplishments.

chats and emails for wellness visits, advice, non-emergency illnesses, prescriptions, testing recommendations and a range of counselling. The evidence of how well telemedicine can be incorporated into routine medical care may become a boon for all patients, but particularly the elderly,

people with mobility issues and those in rural and remote locations.

Awareness

Advice from governments and the World Health Organization has been inconsistent and contradictory, especially about the

nature of the virus (is it airborne?) and whether we should wear masks or not (or wear two at a time or masks with three layers). Conflicting information has fostered confusion and cynicism, spawning conspiracy theories that have been weaponized to destabilize trust in government and science. But conspiracists didn't spring up out of nowhere. Anxiety, fear and distrust have been under the surface for some time, fomenting ugly social upheaval through fake news in a melange of QAnon, the New World Order, the Great Reset and the "plandemic." With COVID rallies and protests, conspiracists have popped their heads up out of their rabbit holes, demonstrating the breadth of misinformation they've absorbed. Finally, we're paying attention.

Timothy Caulfield, Canada research chair in health law and policy and a professor of law and public health at the University of Alberta, asserts that pandemic misinformation risks our trust in science. Since early 2020, 60,000 peer-reviewed academic articles about COVID-19 have been published. The average three-month publishing timeframe was condensed to six days, resulting in a flood of retractions. Caulfield told the *Globe and Mail* that the research community's quick response to the pandemic has "created a churning sea of bad data, conflicting results and hyped headlines." He also told *Healthy Debate* that, "aggressively fighting the spread of misinformation has emerged as a top public-health priority."

Montreal clinical psychologist and Université du Québec à Montréal professor Ghayda Hassan, who studies radicalization and extreme violence, told CTV's *W5* in February that education and socio-economic status are not factors in believing conspiracy theories. Distress is the greater indicator. When combined with other issues, such as a pandemic, it can trigger a person's desire to believe in something offering convenient answers. They become easy targets to exploit for fostering anger against government. Social media support their self-identification as both victim and hero.

Hassan says we "need to strongly rethink the internet and the social-media space." She says it is not too late to combat conspiracy, but we need to educate people in media literacy and critical thinking, without limiting freedom of speech.

Awareness of a problem is always the first step in addressing it.

Laura Neilson Bonikowsky is an Alberta writer eagerly awaiting the opportunity



U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams urges citizens to wear masks in public at a coronavirus briefing in April 2020 at the White House. Mixed messages continued through the pandemic as officials educated themselves on the virus and the best ways to contain it.

The Quad: A new NATO?

By Joe Varner



The Quad: Ships from the Australian Navy, Indian Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the U.S. Navy participate in Malabar 2020. Malabar 2020 was part of a continuing series of exercises that has grown in scope and complexity over the years to address the variety of shared threats to maritime security in the Indo-Asia Pacific.

The “Quad,” short for Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of India, Australia, Japan and the United States, recently held its first major summit to address mutual concerns about Beijing’s behaviour in the Indo-Pacific. The summit’s result could set the stage for a future mutual defence alliance, perhaps akin to NATO.

The Quad first met in 2004 to co-ordinate relief in the aftermath of an earthquake and tsunami in the Indonesian islands. The tsunami killed 200,000 people, mostly in Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. The Quad met again in 2007 and later that year, the group held joint military exercises with Singapore. After that, things went quiet until 2017, when the group was informally restarted by the Trump administration at the working level. It quickly expanded to the ministerial level of interaction and discussion and just a few weeks ago, held its first Quad Leaders’ Summit, opened by U.S. President Joe Biden.

The summit never mentioned China by name in its communiqué, but Beijing was “the dragon in the tent” and the group, while not yet a military alliance, certainly holds a mutual goal to restrain, deter and even moderate President Xi Jinping’s increasingly aggressive behaviour. Beijing bristled at the leaders’ summit, with the Chinese Communist Party’s daily tabloid *Global Times* writing, “While the U.S. is trying to contain China through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known as Quad, or the ‘Asian NATO,’ such ambition is impossible to realize... and given the different demands, political and religious situations in the Indo-Pacific region, it is impractical for the U.S. to replicate the NATO model in Asia.”

Beijing has raised its hackles repeatedly over wording such as “Indo-Pacific,” which it sees as an attempt by the U.S. and its allies to draw India into the Pacific region in order to contain Beijing. The Chinese Communist Party prefers the term “Asia-Pacific,” which seemingly excludes India from the region. It has termed Indo-Pacific as a “headline-grabbing” idea and suggested it would “dissipate like sea foam.” Many Asia watchers are now asking the question, so what is the impact of the Quad on the future of Indo-Pacific security?

Clearly the Quad would likely not exist without China’s increasingly bellicose and aggressive behaviour throughout the region. The U.S., Australia and Japan have bilateral defence ties and a relationship with once non-aligned India, but there has

been no formal military alliance to date. That could be changing. China has threatened Indian territory along the line of actual control between the two countries as recently as the last year using “salami tactics” (seizure of slices of land over time that doesn’t invite a war) in the Himalayas. Beijing has acted with aggression in the South China Sea in what it views as its sovereign internal waters although its ASEAN neighbours, the rest of the world and the International Court at the Hague see it as an international waterway and do not accept China’s claims to the region in its “nine dash line.”

China’s military test

Almost every day, Chinese fighter and bomber aircraft test Taiwan’s air defence zone, while the Chinese coast guard and People’s Liberation Army navy threaten Taiwan’s control of the Pratas Islands, the

treatment of its Turkic peoples in what many nations believe is genocide, has seen China lash out at Canberra in what amounts to economic warfare.

Some would argue that China’s aggressive behaviour, while not new, has just increased in frequency and intensity with the COVID-19 pandemic, the twilight years of the Trump administration and now the start of the Biden presidency. In December 2020, NATO member states gathered with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea to look at the future Asian security dynamic and how the alliance might pivot to the Pacific in *NATO 2030: United for A New Era*. The report had a section on China that warned, “The scale of Chinese power and global reach poses acute challenges to open and democratic societies, particularly because of that country’s trajectory to greater authoritarianism and an expansion of its territorial ambitions.”



The United States routinely conducts a large annual military exercise with Thailand, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia called Cobra Gold, shown here.

Philippines Thitu and Japan’s Senkaku Islands, all flashpoints in the South China Sea. Beijing’s new law allows its Coast Guard to fire on ships in what it claims, despite international opposition, as its territorial waters. In China’s view, the South China Sea has been viewed by its resistant neighbours as the basis for “grey zone” operations to seize further territory in the region. Australian demands for an investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and its challenge to Beijing’s behaviour in Hong Kong and its

Europe pivots firepower to the Pacific

Building on this NATO pivot or hurdle to the Indo-Pacific, Britain announced, in its just-released *Defence Review*, its concern about China and Britain’s intention to increase its engagement in the Western Pacific, notably with the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier battle group, including two destroyers, two frigates and a nuclear-powered attack submarine scheduled to transit the region this year. The Netherlands has said that it will send a warship along with the Queen Elizabeth battle



This RAF Typhoon aircraft is taking part in Exercise Bersama Lima 2019 at RMAF Butterworth, related to the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangements designed to protect Malaysia.

**LAST YEAR, QUAD
NATIONS TOOK PART IN
A MONTH-LONG JOINT
NAVAL EXERCISE IN THE
INDIAN OCEAN, AND
THIS YEAR CANADA
JOINED THE QUAD IN
AN ANTI-SUBMARINE
EXERCISE AROUND GUAM
AS FURTHER PUSHBACK
ON BEIJING.**

to the region on a regular basis. *HMCS Winnipeg* transited the Taiwan Strait in January of this year, to the outrage of Beijing. Last year, Quad nations took part

in a month-long joint naval exercise in the Indian Ocean, and this year Canada joined the Quad in an anti-submarine exercise around Guam as further pushback on Beijing.

The Indo-Pacific was once home to two Cold War Era (1946-1991) military alliances — Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) — both modelled on NATO. CENTO, originally called the Baghdad Pact, was a military alliance of the Cold War between 1955 and 1979 and included Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom. In a sense, CENTO was replaced as a regional security alliance by the smaller Gulf Cooperation Council in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1981.

Jordan and Morocco have shown an interest in joining the Gulf States in an alliance. It is important to note that the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Morocco and Bahrain recognized Israel this year, building on intelligence relationships in the past decade or so, and on fear of Iran. Saudi Arabia is expected to follow suit on the death of Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

group. Britain's Integrated Review has called for permanent basing and docking facilities in the Far East for the first time since then-defence secretary Denis Healey announced its withdrawal 50 years ago "East of Suez" in 1968. The United Kingdom, which has docking facilities in Bahrain, is paying for a new dock in Oman that can accommodate its aircraft carriers and their escorts, and is looking at an increased presence in Singapore where it maintains a military dock, or Brunei, where it also maintains a jungle warfare training centre.

The French *Tonnerre* amphibious assault ship and a frigate were transiting the region this spring for a joint naval amphibious exercise with Japan and the U.S. in May before returning home for July 14 Bastille Day. Germany announced it would send a frigate into the South China Sea in August of this year in its first trip through the disputed region since 2002. Berlin is also in the process of joining an intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan. In fact, the United Kingdom, France and Germany have all released strategy documents planning for a return



In March 2021, the Quad held its first leaders' summit, opened by U.S. President Joe Biden, shown above. The four countries reaffirmed their commitment to co-operation.

Building on current and historic alliances

SEATO, or the Manila Pact, was made up of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States between 1954 and 1977. Similarly, a regional economic and security organization called Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) emerged in the region of Southeast Asia in 1961, made up of Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines and has expanded to include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam. ASEAN Plus Three brought in China, Japan and South Korea. ASEAN Plus Six added Australia, New Zealand and India. Britain, France and Holland all have historic and former colonial ties to the Indo-Pacific region, and all maintain some presence. The United Kingdom remains part of the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangements designed to protect Malaysia along with Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.

The United States routinely conducts a large annual military exercise with Thailand, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia, called Cobra Gold,

and a biannual naval exercise called RIMPAC with past partners, including Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom and Vietnam. Behind this backdrop of ASEAN and the Five Power Defence Arrangement is a virtual plethora of bilateral defence arrangements between the United States and its principal military allies in the region such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

This patchwork quilt of bilateral, multilateral military relationships, mutual national interests and the emergence of the Quad has left many observers to look at the prospect of alliance-building from the Middle East to the Indian Ocean region and the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific region to contain China, Iran and, to a lesser extent, North Korea and Russia. It is that dare-to-dream moment for the United States and its closest allies and for those being bullied and harassed by China, Rus-

sia, Iran and North Korea to build a new alliance or chain of alliances to bolster the Liberal rules-based world order against those that would destroy it or replace it with their own order. The formation, maintenance and use of alliances, in peace and war are difficult and challenging, to say the very least.

Successful alliances are among the hardest feats in peace and war, in the realm of grand strategy. Alliances are about more than a common threat and the lowest common denominator. A common threat is the basis for states "bandwagoning" together in an alliance, but for them to succeed in challenging times, let alone war, they must have other mutual interests in military, economic, cultural and scientific power and, in NATO, those additional interests have held the alliance together in good times and bad. Without question, an alliance focused on containing Iran in Southwest Asia and Russia and China would have to have more than mutual interest and a common threat. Just as an alliance in the Pacific geared to containing China and, to a lesser extent, Russia and North Korea, cannot be based on



HMCS Winnipeg, shown here alongside the guided-missile destroyer *USS Mustin*, transited the Taiwan Strait in January of this year, to Beijing's outrage.

a military or economic threat alone, even though those are profound persuaders.

The fact that the Quad got all four national leaders to a summit that had never been held before — and in a time of pandemic — speaks louder than words. What was once the realm of officials and then foreign ministers has grown to heads of government and is likely to expand to defence ministers this year. The fact that the Quad branched out its security and economic discussions to include climate change, technology and vaccines against COVID-19 and providing them to Oceania has further rocked Beijing, which fears containment and an Asian NATO. The Chinese Communist Party had previously downplayed the Quad as a U.S. dream or an “exclusive club” of sorts, but the rapid maturity coming from the grouping, only revamped in 2017, is impressive. The move to challenge China's own vaccine diplomacy throughout the globe with a Quad vaccine program was most unwelcome in Beijing. The fact that India is so key to the Quad is a telling sign of that country's rise as a great power and a further challenge to China and the Chi-

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nese Communist Party's hope to be Asia's dominant power by 2027.

Answering nine key “wild card” questions

The United States, United Kingdom and France, when partnered with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, would have incredible land, sea and nuclear power to constrain Iran and its proxies. If coupled with Indian power, it would be formidable, but these states have a spotty history of acting together and training together in a land, sea and air environment. The holding of joint exercises and success of integration would be key to establishing a deterrent stance. Similarly, the Quad, backed by the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Taiwan, New Zealand, South Korea, Canada, parts of ASEAN and Chile would have impressive military power across the gamut of land, sea, air and nuclear power. And, when coupled with India, it would be that much more formidable in dealing with an aggressive China, and, secondarily, North Korea and Russia. But these nascent allies' history of acting together in the Indo-Pacific has been largely in naval



U.S. Marine 1st Lt. Mark Caldwell shares a meal with a Royal Thai Marine during exercise Cobra Gold 2020 in Thailand in March 2020.

activity and much work must be done in other realms to put together a NATO-like alliance that restrains Russia in Europe and the North Atlantic.

There are many “wild cards” that could strengthen or weaken potential alliances:

- Can Turkey be brought back into the NATO fold, given it is fighting Russian forces in Libya, Syria and in the recent Azeri-Armenia war?
- Can Iraq be brought back from the brink of falling to Iranian-backed militias and Iranian military power?
- Pakistan has much in common with Saudi Arabia as a Sunni state with a Shia minority. Can it be enticed to leave China and join an alliance with Saudi Arabia, India and Israel?
- Is India, with its history in the non-aligned movement, prepared, as a U.S. and Quad ally, to do more than it has done to date? How divided is ASEAN between a superpower on the downward slope in terms of the United States, and China on the upward swing as a superpower and its No. 1 trading partner?
- Could choosing sides between the

United States and China lead to civil war in different ASEAN states, particularly with sizable Muslim and Chinese populations?

- Will Taiwan, Japan and South Korea arm themselves with nuclear weapons and will Japan rewrite its pacifist post-Second World War (1939-1945) constitution?
- Will Japan and South Korea come together as allies crucial to Pacific security or move farther apart?

Even in the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, Canada and New Zealand are the weak links in terms of Chinese pressure and appeasing Beijing and the Five Eyes may get new members in France, Germany, Japan and South Korea. While it is clear China and North Korea are military allies, it is less clear that their strategic partnerships with Russia and Iran are more than loose ones. Their ties are not necessarily alliances, as they have as many differences between them as potential United States allies arrayed against the twosome do.

Alliances are tough. They are tough to

build, maintain and use as instruments of international power. But the Biden administration has the opportunity of a lifetime to build alliances in the post-Trump era to secure in the interests of the United States and its allies around the globe. This will not be easy and will require muscular diplomacy and commitment to building a new coalition to restrain the non-status-quo powers of the world. The news coming out of the Alaska summit and the insults hurtled back and forth between the United States and China are illustrative of a new level of great power competition, and, potentially, of conflict.

The fact that Biden was attacked personally by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who Biden had previously labelled “a killer,” while the United States is trying to tell Beijing to back off, is a further example of a badly divided multi-polar world where new alliances are critical.

Joe Varner is the author of *Canada's Asia-Pacific Security Dilemma*, a former director of policy to the minister of national defence and an adjunct scholar at West Point's Modern War Institute.

Quelling Africa's apocalypse



A billboard at the end of Long Street in South Africa's Cape Town encourages people to stay home during the lockdown period.



Robert I.
Rotberg

The horsemen of the apocalypse are galloping through Africa. There is abundant war, in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Somalia. There is pestilence and plague, with locusts swarming across northeastern and eastern Africa and the coronavirus, with its dangerous variants, wreaking havoc everywhere. Famine follows war, pestilence and plague. And then there is death, which

accompanies war, famine, pestilence and — hardly least — the COVID-19 plague or pandemic. For the latter there is as yet no end in sight. Additionally, and a desperate and disastrous accompaniment to this generation's apocalypse, is an economic collapse that immiserates Africans and makes their impoverishment ever more calamitous.

Africa, especially the 49 countries south of the Sahara that are less fully linked to the Middle East than the Maghrebi states of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and

Morocco, is only today experiencing the full impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Multiple thousands have died in 2021 when only high hundreds perished from the coronavirus in 2020. Over the entire continent, 4,477,942 positive cases have been registered through mid-April 2021. Recorded deaths, so far, are a low total of 118,501, with South Africans representing almost half of both totals. (Africa's population is now about 1.3 billion, set to rise to 2.6 billion in 2050.)

Vaccines are now reaching scattered countries in sub-Saharan Africa. But not until the end of 2022, or possibly 2023, will all Africans be vaccinated. And until they are, with variants multiplying and spreading, none of us in the northern and western hemispheres should feel safe — no matter how vaccinated we may be, or about to be.

Differential impacts explained

I wrote in 2020 about the strangely limited public health impact that the pandemic was having in much of Africa, south of Egypt and north of South Africa. Many African states had locked down early and mandated mask-wearing, in addition to imposing strict social distancing requirements that were obeyed — at least in urban locations. Possibly the fact that half of all sub-Saharan Africans are aged 15 to 34, and median ages are still (and will be for years) in the high teens and low 20s had something to do with slim positive testing and mortality numbers. Some countries, as of July and August, were reporting only a few hundred or a few thousand cases at the same time as South Africa's numbers were magnitudes higher. But we also knew, because it was so obvious, that only South Africa had the capacity to test millions of citizens to see if they had or had not succumbed to the disease. Many of the poorer states of Africa had virtually no testing capabilities (and few swab sticks and reagents).

Or, conceivably, as I tried to account for low African pandemic numbers, Africans were underreporting deaths from the coronavirus, and/or failing to attribute pneumonia-like fatalities to it. Since statistical services in several African countries are weak, and a number lack protocols for labelling death causes specifically, low death numbers from COVID-19 possibly were an artifact of weak accounting regimens. But I did some checking directly with informed medical personnel in several countries and was assured that since death was such a traumatic event in African societies, huge numbers of

unexplained fatalities could hardly go unnoticed.

Since then, however, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, and research in Ghana and Zambia, suggest that infection rates could be much higher than those officially reported by standard surveillance systems. For example, an estimated four million of Lagos' 20 million inhabitants could have contracted the disease. (Lagos is Nigeria's commercial capital and Africa's largest metropolis.)

Perhaps something in the existing burden of African disease has helped, for once, to limit the mortality of the new pandemic. Or, conceivably, as far as Africans are concerned, maybe the coronavirus is reminiscent of other endemic viruses and is therefore "old," not new. Siddhartha Mukherjee, in the *New Yorker*, and other medical researchers, wonder whether "acquired differences in human immunology" could be carrying the memory of an already encountered pathogen, and thus be protective in ways that would help to explain why Africans have been dying (so far) at rates much lower than Europeans, Americans or Brazilians.

Mutated variants

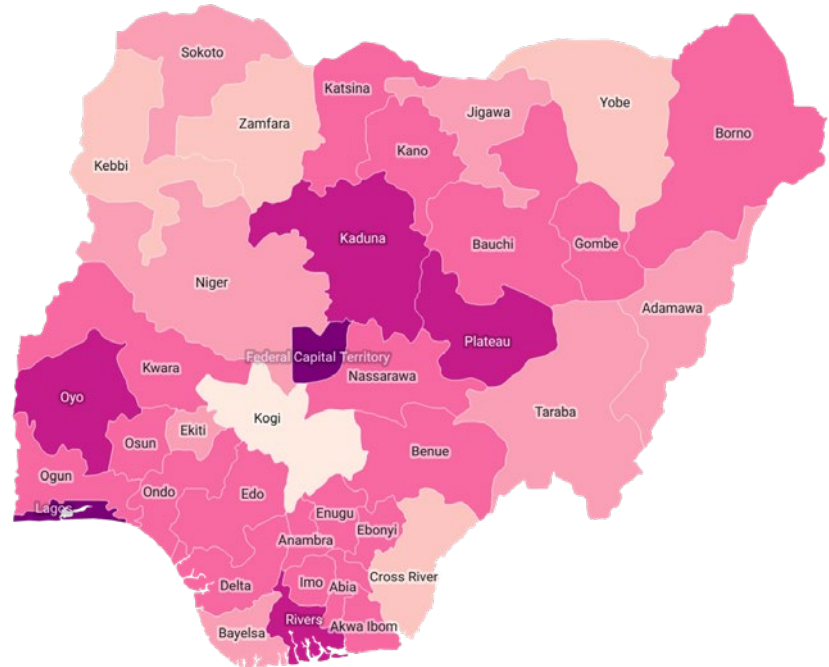
The disease burden from COVID-19 re-

mained accurately light in 2020 until the coronavirus mutated successfully, and became more virulent. That could explain much higher case numbers in 2021 than in 2020, and the fact that countries near to South Africa were among the earliest ones to report sudden spikes in positive cases after Christmas. (Or those higher numbers might merely reflect heavy partying over the holidays.) Death rates in 2021 in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Eswatini and even in hitherto relatively immune Botswana and Namibia, all increased substantially (but not by European or North American standards) in 2021 as, we presume, the South African variant began to spread north. Botswana, with zero deaths in mid-2020, reported 684 deaths (and 44,702 cases) in mid-April 2021. Namibia reported 46,772 cases and 604 deaths at the same time. Zimbabwe, approximately four times the size of Botswana and Namibia, listed 37,859 positive individuals and 1,553 deaths. Malawi, larger and more congested than Zimbabwe, its southern neighbour, affirmed 33,959 positive cases and 1,139 deaths. Cabinet ministers in Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe have died recently from the coronavirus, thus drawing sharp attention to the pandemic in a manner that was absent last year.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Nigeria by state

16 March 2021

Legend: < 100, 100–500, 500–1,000, 1,000–5,000, 5,000–10,000, ≥ 10,000



In mid-April 2021, Nigeria showed excess deaths of about double those officially attributed to the coronavirus — a scant 2,061, with 164,303 testing positive. ("Excess" deaths are those above the numbers reported in comparable months in previous years, and from all causes.)



The late autocratic Tanzanian president John Magufuli, shown centre right with Rwandan President Paul Kagame, died of COVID in March. From April 2020, he refused to acknowledge probable coronavirus cases and likely deaths and allowed no testing for the virus.

As Mukherjee reviews so well, the raw numbers clearly reveal only a part of the pandemic's tale beyond South Africa, where its ferocious rapacity has been evident almost from the beginning. Nigeria — a dynamic country of at least 217 million people — in mid-March 2021 showed excess deaths about double those officially attributed to the coronavirus — a scant 2,061, with 164,303 persons testing positive. (“Excess” deaths are those above the numbers reported in comparable months in previous years, and from all causes.)

Ethiopia, a troubled land of 110 million people, revealed a low number in mid-March of 243,631 positive cases, and 3,392 deaths from the disease, at the same time as fatalities from the ongoing civil conflict in its northern Tigrayan region numbered an estimated 30,000 — stemming from a fratricidal ethnic cleansing exercise that had begun in October. About 60,000 Tigrayans have fled across the border into the Sudan, but the mayhem that approximates genocide and has been roundly condemned in Ottawa, Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and by the United Nations,

continues as I write. Tigray's apocalypse eclipses the pestilence from COVID-19.

South Africa has by far the largest coronavirus caseload in sub-Saharan Africa, with 1,567,513 cases and 53,757 deaths. More than 217,156 Egyptians have tested positive and 12,778 have died. Yet only 151,894 Kenyans have tested positive and fewer than 2,501 have succumbed to the coronavirus despite medical shortages and limited hospital capacities. Ghana, equally prosperous, but on the west coast of Africa and with a population half Kenya's, reports 91,709 cases and a mere 771 deaths. Densely populated and tightly regimented Rwanda, with a population of 13 million, reported 23,894 cases and 326 deaths. Except for South Africa, these are unexceptional numbers. But in Africa, perhaps we are still at an early phase of the pandemic.

Denial, herbs and prayer

In the rest of Africa, Tanzania, Kenya's southern neighbour, and Madagascar are confounding anomalies. Prominent politicians have fallen to the disease in 2021 in Tanzania, as have more than 25 priests

and 60 nuns. Autocratic and querulous president John Magufuli claimed before he died in March that Tanzania was immune from, and was defeating, the coronavirus pandemic because of prayer. From April 2020 he refused to acknowledge, much less count, probable coronavirus cases and likely deaths. No testing was allowed. No statistics listing even probable COVID-19 cases were permitted to be collected and transmitted to the media or the World Health Organization. Nor did Magufuli allow his government to order or receive vaccines, thus jeopardizing the health of his own people, but also contributing to the spread of coronavirus variants worldwide.

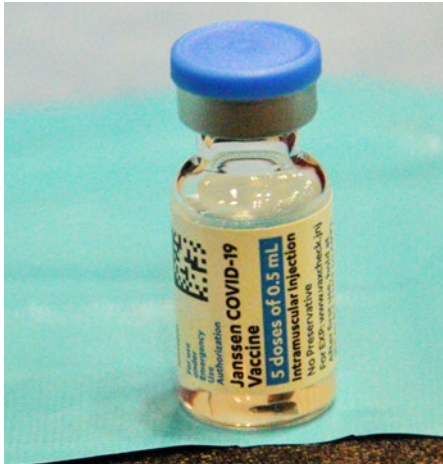
The secretary of the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference, representing its Roman Catholic bishops, finally admitted in February (after priests and nuns died) that the COVID-19 threat was real inside the country, and must be battled by secular means — wearing masks, keeping social distances and washing hands. A week later, after the vice-president of Zanzibar died from what looked like COVID-19, the president's own chief secretary succumbed to a fatal (unnamed) illness, and pressure from the Ethiopian head of the WHO intensified, a smiling Magufuli relented. At the chief secretary's funeral he admitted that an “unspecified” respiratory illness had become a challenge to Tanzania, and that just maybe mask-wearing would be a good idea — but only Tanzanian-made masks should be worn.

By late March, Tanzania had not sought vaccines. Nor had Burundi; the dictatorship of Eritrea, along the Red Sea; and Madagascar, the world's fourth-largest island. In that last place, President Andry Rajoelina prefers indigenous herbal remedies rather than vaccines. So far, despite the herbs, 32,798 Malagasy have tested positive for the virus and 552 have died up and down the vast, mountainous island.

Vaccines, finally

Rejecting vaccination, Tanzanians, Malagasy, Eritreans and Burundians thus suffer, and form a repository for the proliferation of the pandemic, just at the time when millions of vaccine doses have begun finally to arrive in Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa for distribution to patients and anxious citizens. The available doses as of March were too limited to do more than begin to protect first responders and those with other compromising medical issues. The single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine landed in March in South Africa,

but other countries are either beginning to receive or will eventually obtain vaccines manufactured in India under licence to Pfizer or AstraZeneca and distributed by



The single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine landed in South Africa in March 2021.

Covax, the global vaccine compact funded by donors. Chinese-made vaccines will also be coming before too long to Senegal and Mozambique. And Sputnik V, the Russian-created dosage, may be used in the Central African Republic. Getting vaccines into African arms is the key to stopping the proliferation of old and new variants out of Africa.

Back into poverty

Yet, even if Africa manages to slow the pandemic by vaccination, it will still need to cope with a severe economic downturn that has reduced growth by two to four years, made economic prospects for a new generation of school leavers that much more impossible, and halved the size of the rising middle class. Ghana's finance minister even fears losing a full decade of progress.

Already, the World Bank estimates that Africa is the world's slowest growing and slowest recovering region. It says that two out of three Nigerians are poorer now than a year ago. As a continent, Africa is 80-per-cent dependent upon digging up and exporting petroleum and minerals, prices of which have generally slumped because of reduced Chinese demand. Even wealthy Botswana suffers because fewer people overseas are buying diamonds.

Tourism has largely vanished, reducing important revenues in dozens of African countries at a time when population numbers are exploding despite the pandemic. Remittances, critical in all sub-Saharan en-



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was one of the first in his country to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

ties and more significant the poorer the polity, have been greatly reduced because of job losses in Europe and North America. And a number of sub-Saharan African countries are seriously in debt to private lenders. Those monies are coming due; already Zambia has defaulted on some of its obligations. A major credit-rating agency put Ghana and Ethiopia on its endangered watch list.

The fate of Africa's billions could easily be decided this year. The coronavirus is poised to become a virulent vector of additional death comparable to its namesakes in the Americas, India and Europe. Without the chance of herd immunity through vaccination, or high case rates, the coronavirus has the potential to persist, to spread, to mutate and to become more of a threat to the continent's peoples than hitherto. Certainly, unless North Americans and Europeans choose to help obtain vaccines and vaccine administrators for African countries, the disease burden may increase just as COVID-19 becomes more manageable elsewhere. Unless outsiders assist benevolently, the coronavirus

may linger in Africa and vitiate economic growth and all manner of African social progress for decades to come.

Africans can ill afford a future so severely mortgaged by a disease transmitted to humans from bats and other mammalian viruses. With generous external support, Africa conceivably can emerge from the pandemic toughened and even more entrepreneurial than before. But important decisions must be made at once to protect Africans from the COVID-19 apocalypse and its many baleful consequences. The horsemen are riding hard across African deserts and savannas.

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Expats: A secret weapon waiting to be discovered



Christina
Spencer

Planet Canada: How Our Expats Are Shaping the Future

John Stackhouse

Penguin Random House Canada, 2020

351 pages

Hardcover: \$35

eBook: \$16.99

Audiobook download: \$32

At any given time, approximately 2.8 million Canadian citizens live abroad. Many are engaged in innovative — and lucrative — work. They've led some of the world's great academic institutions, such as Princeton, Berkeley and Johns Hopkins. They've run the British Royal Mail and the Bank of England. They've long been influential in Hollywood: Think James Cameron, Jack Warner, Louis B. Mayer, even Alex Trebek. And there are a quarter-million Canadians working in Silicon Valley alone, focused on everything from developing computer language to firing up the global internet gaming industry.

What should Canada make of all these talented expats? Federal policymakers act as if they're simply irrelevant. Some in industry or academia think they represent a serious brain drain. Author John Stackhouse offers a third view: that the Canadian diaspora is a potential champion of this country's reputation and influence in an increasingly borderless global economy.

Planet Canada presents that case through an array of interviews Stackhouse has conducted in recent years with Canadians in high-powered positions abroad. Not only do many of them believe their singularly Canadian character traits have helped them succeed (polite, humble, good listeners — people really do seem to value these stereotypical attributes), they are also genuinely puzzled as to why policymakers at home haven't tried harder to leverage their success.

One example is a group of energetic



Famous Canadians, such as Mark Carney (shown here), who served as governor of the Bank of Canada and then lived abroad as governor of the Bank of England, are potential champions of this country's reputation and influence, according to author John Stackhouse.

Canadians working in Silicon Valley. Rattling off a head-spinning list of expats who have made a mark there — for instance, Carleton University grad Shona Brown, one of the first Canadians at the Googleplex; Ottawa-born Rachel Potvin, responsible for the infrastructure that hosted all of Google's code; Montrealer Patrick Pichette, former top executive at Bell Canada whom Brown recruited — Stackhouse explains how Canadians in all sorts of high-

tech firms, from the big names to startups, found each other, then connected into a group they dubbed the C-100, a "leading voice for Canadian entrepreneurs at home and abroad." The C-100 has helped improve some aspects of Canadian domestic policy, such as endorsing fast-track visas so Canada's entrepreneurs can more easily recruit the people they need from other countries. One member kickstarted an artificial intelligence initiative for Canada.

People networks of this sort are replacing institutional (read: governmental) networks in global influence, Stackhouse asserts. Yet Ottawa never called Brown, or most of the other high-powered Silicon Valley expats, to help promote Canada in the world, even though these people are mostly more than willing to be recruited in that effort.

One example of the sort of expat Canadians should pay attention to, Stackhouse says, is Adam Boyes, a globally successful, ambitious internet-gaming developer



who has used his “Canadian intuition for diplomacy and accommodation” to plug into the worldwide supply chain. With 600 active gaming developer studios on its own soil, Canada has huge international opportunities, Stackhouse writes, and people such as Boyes could be “the industry’s best ambassadors, connecting our developers and designers to this virtual form of globalization.” But we don’t take advantage.

In England, at Cambridge and Oxford, he makes the rounds of the brilliant young Canadians innovating in fields ranging from artificial intelligence to blockchain. These are the sorts of people “who could lead this country through the 2020s and ’30s.” Again, though, neither they, nor the author, see any sign of Canada reaching for their help.

Flip to Asia. Even Mark Roswell, the most famous Canadian in China — known better as the hugely successful comedian Dashan — says he is occasionally used as a goodwill ambassador, but “feels we treat him like a prized trophy, to be pulled out at key moments to impress our hosts and guests alike.”

Why, exactly, should Canada reach out to citizens who have chosen to build their

futures elsewhere? In part, Stackhouse argues, it’s because even abroad, these people spread solid Canadian values. Raefer Wallis, for instance, a Canadian architect who has enjoyed great success in China, also pushes green building values, even creating a hugely successful database of sustainable materials. Expat tech-guru Pichette organized a group of investors



Comedian Mark Roswell, known better as Dashan, is occasionally used as a goodwill ambassador for Canada.

to buy 65,000 acres of land in western Quebec near Montebello, the area known as Kenauk, which they then gave to the Nature Conservancy of Canada to protect. Joanne Liu, as president of Doctors Without Borders, lobbied for more international support in the fight against Ebola. If Canadians value these sorts of initiatives, we should take an active interest in the work of our expats.

Moreover, Stackhouse argues, Canada needs them. In the modern era, “our place in the world is fading.” Canada has become “irrelevant — gone from a onetime preferred destination to a distant land that can be ignored.” So, for example, when our Global Affairs minister tweeted out criticism of Saudi Arabia over human rights in 2018, the kingdom retaliated by taking a wrecking ball to its long-time

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Upwards of 28,000 may have died at the Battle of Towton, depicted here, during the Wars of the Roses.

medical residency program in Canada. When Canada arrested Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou on an extradition request from the United States, Beijing punished us by arresting two Canadians, who still languish in prison. “If we aren’t important, we can be impugned,” Stackhouse argues. So why not harness the power of our smart, successful expats — and even encourage young Canadians to spend time out of country — in order to help build relationships and show the world just how valuable we are. “We’re heading into an age that will be more interconnected than humanity has ever known, and yet Canada won’t be one of those connectors if we’re not out there in greater numbers,” he writes.

It’s not like taking advantage of our diaspora is some revolutionary notion. Other countries — from Armenia to India, from Ireland to Israel, from Finland to Estonia, and of course China — have well-developed diaspora strategies. Some even have full federal departments for overseas citizens. Some grant representation to them in their parliaments.

It may be, as we often say of ourselves in flattering terms, that the world needs more Canada. If so, Canada needs to convince the global economy of that, not simply assume it as a given. Our expats, an elite Stackhouse describes as “among the best in the world,” are a secret weapon still waiting to be discovered.

War: How Conflict Shaped Us

Margaret MacMillan
Penguin Canada, 2020
312 pages
Hardcover: \$46.33
Kindle: \$16.99

Who knew that Czar Nicholas II, the unfortunate Russian ruler who would eventually be executed with his family in 1918 when the Bolsheviks took power, was an early arms-control proponent? In 1898, he invited the great Western powers to discuss limits on certain weapons. They met in The Hague the following year, reaching modest agreement on outlawing asphyxiating gas and dum-dum bullets, and they discussed humane treatment of prisoners of war.

The meeting wasn’t a resounding success, but over the decades it led to more attempts to tamp down some of war’s worst excesses. The Hague Conventions, the Geneva Conventions and other “rules” of conflict are today a vital part of the way humans try to approach war.

Still, we are far from fully understanding — let alone controlling — our impulse to fight, as historian Margaret MacMillan argues in this (not totally grim) examination of how conflict has shaped human history and been shaped by it.

For most of the current generation in the West, which hasn’t fought major wars on its own soil, it’s “all too easy to see war

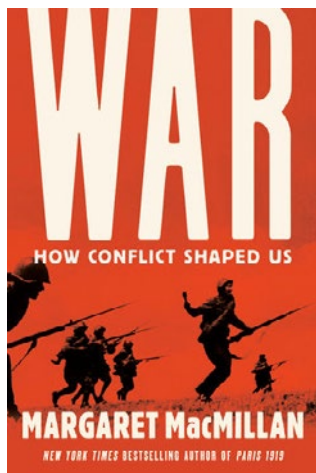
as something others do,” she writes. While we love war stories, movies and games, for the most part “we do not want to fight wars.” Relegating the issue to the world of entertainment isn’t going to make it go away, however. We need to understand much better the place war occupies in our history, culture and, indeed, our very nature, MacMillan argues, lamenting that most Western universities neglect this kind of study.

War: How Conflict Shaped Us, helps the general reader make a start. Based on the BBC Reith Lecture series, which MacMillan delivered in 2018, each chapter focuses on one theme: the evolving technology of war; the impact on civilians; what motivates soldiers to fight; attempts to control or set rules for war; conflict and the arts; how we commemorate wars; and so on. And each is illustrated with snippets from the battlefields of Greece, Rome, Europe and Asia.

From our modern vantage point, for instance, it’s interesting to read that the bloodiest single day of conflict for the United States occurred not in Vietnam or the world wars, but during the American Civil war, in 1862 at Antietam Creek, Maryland. Between 1,500 and 2,700 Confederate soldiers died (with thousands more injured); about 2,000 Union soldiers were killed (and almost 10,000 injured). Britons, meanwhile, can look centuries back to the Wars of the Roses, where, in

Towton, near York, “the bloodiest and biggest battle ever fought in England” took place in 1461. Up to 28,000 people may have died there, with more wounded or killed in the aftermath. Comparing the population of England then with the modern era, a similar proportion of dead today would be about 784,000 people.

Yet battle, “the most organized of human activities,” as MacMillan dubs it, has brought not just carnage, but benefits, notably flattening social inequalities over time as Western governments profession-



alized their armies. This required them to provide proper meals, health care and education to a range of soldiers and broader society, and even open up the officer class beyond the nobility. Women, who moved in during war to do jobs men were no longer available for, began to assert their role beyond that of wife and mother.

Women were fighters too: Archeological evidence points to the Amazons, for instance, as real, not mere legend. Among the fierce Scythian warrior riders of Ancient Greece, women appeared aplenty; 37 per cent of Scythian burials were of female fighters. Viking women warriors have also been uncovered. In the Second World War, the Soviet air force had three all-women units, one of which was called the “night witches” by the Germans. About 27,000 Soviet women fought as guerrillas against the Germans, and in Italy perhaps 35,000 women were among the partisans.

MacMillan rhymes off many horrific numbers associated with conflict: In the First World War, nearly 70 million men were mobilized (40 per cent of the male populations of France and Germany alone). In the Second World War, 286,000 tanks, 557,000 combat aircraft, 11,000 major naval vessels and at least 40 million rifles were made. Fifty million to 80

million civilians died in the Second World War; up to 300,000 were killed in the Japanese sacking of Nanjing in 1937. Today, there are more than two billion small arms in the world. China’s defence spending has risen sharply in the past two decades;



Soviet pilot Irina Sebrova flew 1,008 sorties in the Second World War, more than any other member of her regiment. About 27,000 Soviet women fought as guerrillas against the Germans.

the U.S. allocates nearly two-thirds of its discretionary budget to defence.

Notes MacMillan, “... serious disarmament measures remain more distant than ever. Yet so many of us, our leaders included, still talk of war as a reasonable and manageable tool.” Even Czar Nicholas knew it was not.

Restoring Democracy in an Age of Populists and Pestilence

By Jonathan Manthorpe
Cormorant Books, 2020

299 pages
Kindle: \$10.69

Nineteen eighty-nine was an extraordinary year. The Berlin Wall crumbled. Russia finally left Afghanistan. Key members of the African National Congress were freed by the apartheid regime. And academic Francis Fukuyama wrote *The End of*



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History? — his iconic essay on the triumph of liberal democracy.

Other events, mind you, weren't so promising. Political protests in China ended in the bloodletting of Tiananmen Square, and al-Qaeda established its first cell in New York City. But all in all, the future of free societies looked bright.

Today, a little more than three decades later, democracy's prospects look distinctly dimmer — under threat from Russian internet trolls, a bellicose China and domestic extremists. Civil political discourse has become increasingly difficult, even in nations that deeply value free speech.

Why, and what can be done? In *Restoring Democracy*, Jonathan Manthorpe reviews some key world events of the last 30 years — many of which he covered as a foreign correspondent — to hunt for answers.

Unlike his last book, *Claws of the Panda*, rich in revelations about China's ballooning global influence, this work leans on information a reasonably informed person is familiar with. But Manthorpe's distillation of recent history into easily absorbed chapters, buttressed with authoritative studies and statistics, makes it a useful baseline from which an interested reader can dig further into the political, social and economic malaise undermining democracy today.

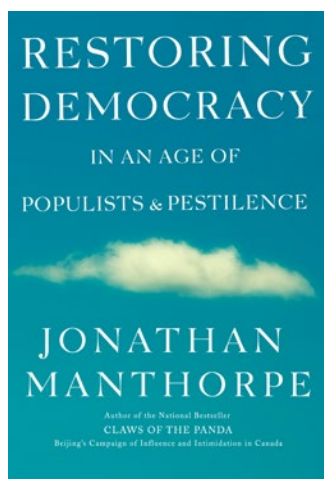
Topping the list of concerns, in Manthorpe's view, are inequality and the growing disparity of wealth — the big crisis democratic governments have allowed to fester by their blind devotion to capitalism; the one predicament they simply must confront if liberal society is to survive. For instance, he cites an Oxfam study for the 2019 World Economic Forum in Davos that concluded, "in the previous year, the 26 richest people on Earth had the same net worth as the poorest half of the world's population (about 3.8 billion people)." For the 2020 Davos meeting, Oxfam reported the 22 richest men in the world "have more wealth than all the women in Africa."

(Canada has its share of disparity too, he writes, citing the Conference Board: "The richest one per cent of Canadians took almost a third of all income gains from 1997 to 2007 — the decade with the fastest-growing incomes in this generation.")

For those in the West not among the wealthier classes, but also not necessarily poor, the growing income gap breeds anxiety about their own future: fear of immigrants, of new technologies, of elites,

and of government in general. It's this vague dread that has propelled authoritarian leaders, from Hungary's Viktor Orbán, to Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, to former U.S. president Donald Trump, into power. Citing U.S. voting data, Manthorpe notes that Trump "was supported by well-off people who looked at the plight of the less fortunate people around them and feared for their own future."

But Manthorpe takes us back further, on a historical tour through the free-market era of Thatcherism and Reaganism (he is no fan of the economists who influenced them, notably Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman) to the failure of the Obama administration to respond effectively to the 2008-09 economic crisis, to the tone-deaf



reaction of French President Emmanuel Macron to the yellow-vest economic protests. Chapters dissecting the triumphant hucksterism of Boris Johnson in the U.K. and Trump in the U.S. round out the lessons.

There is also a meditation on the failures of journalists, who have misread the public mood time and again, and on the democratically destabilizing policies of China's international programs and Russian troll farms working, from the outside, to sow confusion and conflict in the politics of democratic countries. Some Western strategists, such as Trump puppet-master Steve Bannon, embraced these tactics. Manthorpe quotes from an interview Bannon gave to author Michael Lewis: "The Democrats don't matter ... The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit."

COVID-19, oddly enough, helped unmask some of the pretenders: The tactic of distorting facts in order to confuse and divert people simply doesn't work in the face of a pandemic. "COVID-19 was the

agent that stopped both Trump and Johnson in their tracks ... Trump was caught in a trap of his own making," writes Manthorpe. "His populism was built on railing against experts and the media, both of which were now essential to overcoming COVID-19 and informing the public about how to do it."

Reviewing the problems of democracy may be the "easy" part, however. Manthorpe spends somewhat less time spelling out solutions, though his roundup includes many ideas actively under public discussion.

Education, for one: Teaching people how to better distinguish fact from fiction, and how to evaluate critically the messaging with which we are all bombarded. Better social programs, such as the introduction of a universal basic income to address the inequalities the author believes underlie so much of the fear on which authoritarianism thrives, is another.

Overcoming government mistrust and the sense of detachment that this brings would help too; here, Manthorpe runs through a list of reforms actively under discussion among many political scientists, such as re-empowering disrespected MPs, reining in the plethora of unaccountable boards and agencies in government — even compulsory voting to make citizens pay attention to their vital watchdog function.

"There was never a golden age when democracy functioned perfectly, and there never will be. Even so, the contemporary dislocation between the establishment and the citizenry among the countries of the North Atlantic is very real," Manthorpe warns.

He is hardly the first writer to say this. But then, it cannot be said often enough.

Rogue Diplomats: The Proud Tradition of Disobedience in American Foreign Policy

Seth Jacobs

Cambridge University Press, 2020

395 pages

Hardcover: \$39.95

The last people you might consider to be rebels are those who toil in the realm of diplomacy. But you'd be wrong — at least in reference to American diplomats. For example, when U.S. president Andrew Jackson fired his top diplomat to Mexico, Anthony Butler, in 1834, Butler simply ignored him "and remained at his post for two more years, repeatedly attempting to purchase Texas (from the Mexicans) despite having no authority to do so." Another diplomat, Elijah Hise, who was

supposed to negotiate trade treaties with Guatemala and El Salvador on behalf of president James K. Polk, racked up a deal with Nicaragua instead.

In this entertaining romp through the selective history of U.S. diplomacy, Boston College professor Seth Jacobs explores why and when American diplomats deliberately disobeyed instructions from their presidents. Further, he asserts that some of the U.S.'s greatest strategic triumphs early in its existence came about precisely because envoys ignored or disobeyed their orders. No surprise, he reveals that this misbehaving sentiment is unique to Americans; diplomats from other Western countries "almost never displayed comparable refractoriness." Pity, perhaps.

Leaders Who Lust: Power, Money, Sex, Success, Legitimacy, Legacy

Barbara Kellerman and Todd L. Pittinsky

255 pages

Cambridge University Press, 2020

Hardcover: \$33.95

Leaders, we're told, "are supposed to have a range of admirable qualities. One of these is moderation." The leaders described in this book, however, are anything but moderate in pursuit of their ambitions, which cover the realm of business, sports, politics and global influence. The authors break them into groups: those with a lust for power (China's Xi Jinping, for instance); for money (Warren Buffett, say); for sex (John F. Kennedy, or Italy's Silvio Berlusconi); for success (Hillary Clinton and recent Super Bowl champ Tom Brady); for legitimacy (Nelson Mandela); or simply for legacy (Bill and Melinda Gates).

"Lust" is what the authors call a "psychological drive" so great that even when the goal has been achieved "there is relief, but only briefly." Of Xi's success in accumulating power, for instance, they write "his appetite grew with eating." Of Kennedy's sexual behaviour, they note "he had no apparent want or need to rein it in." Of Hillary Clinton's lust for success, they note, she was "sometimes rewarded — and sometimes censured." Mandela's quest for legitimacy, even after his retirement from politics, led to change "of singular consequence" for Black South Africans. Without this ceaseless, burning intensity, these and other leaders would not have had the focus and motivation to become world-class figures.

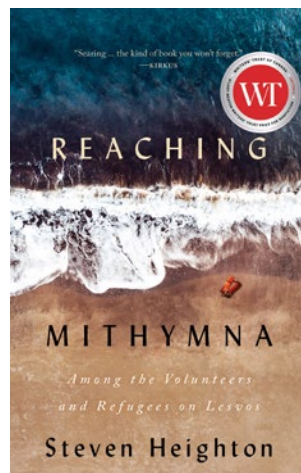
Reaching Mithymna: Among the Volunteers and Refugees on Lesbos

Steven Heighton

Biblioasis, 2020

207 pages

Paperback: \$22.72



"I'm still not sure why I'm here, beyond a wish to do something useful, involving flesh and blood people instead of invented characters and words on a screen," writes Canadian novelist Steven Heighton near the beginning of his non-fiction *Reaching Mithymna*. It is 2015 and he has just ar-

rived in the deserted tourist town on the Greek island of Lesbos, to help on the front line of what the world has come to know as the Syrian refugee crisis. And almost immediately, he is thrust into helping as boatloads of desperate Syrian refugees begin to arrive.

Though he speaks a bit of Greek from his mother's side of the family, Heighton is poorly qualified for volunteer work in the realm of international crisis aid. Yet he finds himself navigating the island with groups of bedraggled survivors, trying to translate, and playing paramedic when no other medical help is around. Heighton brings other unique qualities, of course: a keen sense of observation, openness to experience and powerful writing that, combined, offer a disturbing glimpse at a gritty, real-world crisis of staggering proportions and the people caught up in it.

Christina Spencer is the editorial pages editor of the *Ottawa Citizen* and the inaugural recipient of the Claude Ryan Award for Editorial Writing at the 2017 National Newspaper Awards. She has a master's in international affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University.

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This spring: Rembrandt, Earthly art and Egyptian Queens



Rembrandt's *Heroine from the Old Testament* (1632/33, oil on canvas) is coming to the big summer show at the National Gallery of Canada.



Peter Simpson

Editor's note: given the continuing uncertainty of public-health lockdowns, before visiting be sure to check with museums and galleries as dates listed here could change.

The name "Rembrandt" is so universally familiar that it's difficult to believe Canada hasn't seen a major exhibition of the Dutch master's work since 1969, and that the National Gallery of Canada has never hosted a major exhibition of his work.

Given those surprises, it's fitting that this summer's big show at the National Gallery is unique. *Rembrandt in Amsterdam*, opening May 14, will be the first exhibition "to chart the transformative central decades of Rembrandt's career in the context of the Amsterdam art market," the gallery says, "from his arrival in the mid-1630s to the emergence of his late

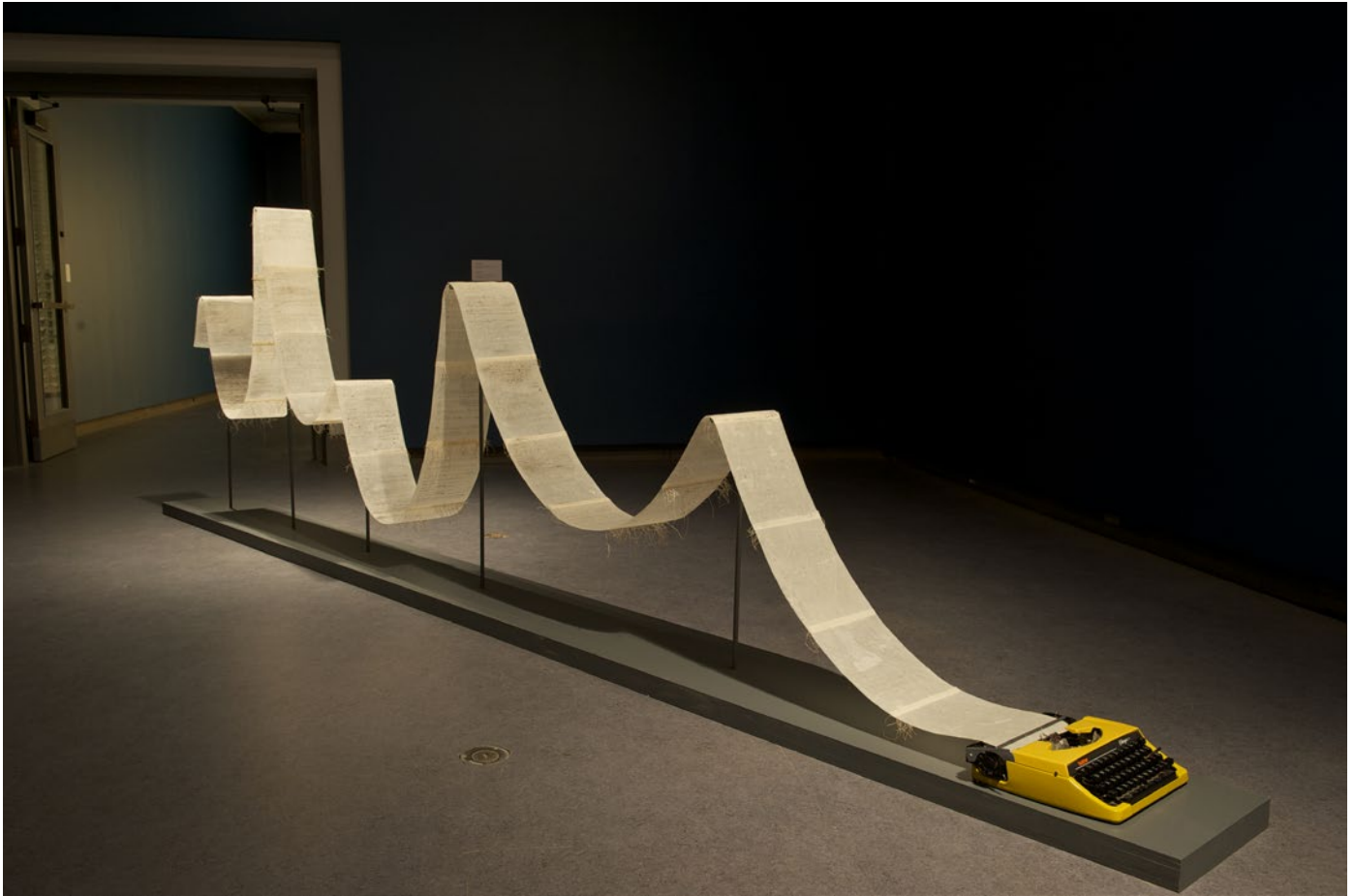
style in the mid-1650s."

The second half of the exhibition title — *Creativity and Competition* — points to the forces that forged "a young artist from Leiden" into a household name almost 400 years later. There's little doubt of the ever-lasting reverence for the man in his homeland, as the Embassy of the Netherlands is an exhibition partner, and King Willem-Alexander is a patron.

The exhibition will present Rembrandt drawings, prints and paintings along with works by his "friends, followers and rivals," to re-create the feel of the thriving art market into which the young man was immersed. Works by Rembrandt will



The Large Horse, by Albrecht Dürer (1505, engraving) from *The Collectors Cosmos: The Meakins-McClaran Collection* at the National Gallery.



Christos Pantieras has three works in *Filtered*, at the Ottawa Art Gallery. The exhibition also features work by Craig Commanda, AM Dumouchel, Greta Grip, Lee Jones, Farouk Kaspaules, Peter Owusu-Ansah and Art Price.



Resembling, by Sarah Anderson at Sivalrasa Gallery.

include the portrait *Heroine from the Old Testament*, from 1632-1633, with its subject deftly illuminated, as if by God's own hand, against a murky background. Also seen will be the large painting *The Blinding of Samson*, from 1636. The painting is from the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, Germany, the co-organizer and next stop for the exhibition.

Most uniquely, the exhibition will also include newly commissioned and acquired works from Indigenous and Black artists in Canada, including Ruth Cuthand, Kent Monkman and others, "to understand the impact of colonialism during Rembrandt's era and beyond."

More at gallery.ca.

Earthly art

Over at the Canadian Museum of Nature, a new installation features not art of this earth — but Earth itself.

Gaia is a sculpture by the British artist Luke Jerram, making its Canadian debut and the closest that most people will ever come to experiencing what it must be like for astronauts to gaze upon our blue planet from space. *Gaia* is seven metres in diameter and hangs in the museum's deep atrium, where it rotates slowly. It can be seen from every level of the museum, offering a variety of perspectives.

The detail is impressive. Jerram used high-resolution photographs captured by NASA, and each centimetre of the sculpture's surface equals approximately 18 kilometres.

"I hope visitors to *Gaia* get to see the Earth as if from space, an incredibly beautiful and precious place, an ecosystem we urgently need to look after — our only home," Jerram says.

Nearby is Jerram's companion piece, *Museum of the Moon* — a seven-metre model of Earth's lone moon — which hangs in the glass tower above the museum's main entrance. More at nature.ca.

Egyptian queens finally visit

Across the river at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, it's a case of better late than never. The exhibition *Queens of Egypt*, which was postponed last summer due to the pandemic, will finally open May 19, and what glorious treasures it'll bring.

It's the story of seven women who ruled the storied ancient empire that continues to entrance us thousands of years later. The exhibition looks back to 3,500 years ago, into the stories of Nefertari, Nefertiti, Hatshepsut and others. More than 300 objects will be included



Gaia, by Luke Jerram now hangs in the atrium of the Museum of Nature.



A funerary stela, left, discovered in the tomb of the Deir el-Medina, and a figurine of Ahmose-Nefertari, from *Queens of Egypt* at the Canadian Museum of History.



Detail from *Un peu plus haut, mon torse veillait sur vous* (video still, 2020) by Pascale Théorêt-Groulx at the Ottawa City Hall Art Gallery.



Raphaëlle, Nicolas Nabonne (oil on canvas) at Galerie Montcalm in Gatineau.



Summer's end, by Richard Ahnert (oil on canvas) at Wall Space Gallery.



The first career survey of Jin-me Yoon is showing at the Carleton University Art Gallery.

in the show, “including monumental statues, sarcophagi, funerary objects and jewelry, associated to legendary queens,” the museum promises. “This immersive multi-sensory experience offers visitors an unforgettable glimpse into one of history’s most important ancient civilizations.”

Public interest in this exhibition is expected to be strong, and admission will be by timed ticket. See historymuseum.ca to book tickets and for more information.

Also showing in other galleries . . .

Ottawa Art Gallery: *Filtered* shows from March 5 to Dec. 19 at 50 Mackenzie King Bridge. Decades after Canadian thinker Marshall McLuhan told us “the medium is the message,” this group exhibition considers how each new form of media is, by nature, “omitting, distorting, censoring, selecting, organizing and generalizing content.” The artists include Craig Commanda, AM Dumouchel, Greta Grip, Lee Jones, Farouk Kaspaules, Peter Owusu-Ansah, Christos Pantieras and Art Price. As media options expand, “we must thus remain critical,” the exhibition notes state, “recognizing the various filters at play as we rapidly pivot in our forms of connection.” oaggao.ca

Carleton University Art Gallery: *Here Elsewhere Other Hauntings* takes place June 6 to Aug. 22, in the St. Patrick’s Building, 1125 Colonel By Dr. This selection of works from a career survey of Vancouver lens-based artist Jin-me Yoon investigates her concerns “related to Korean history, experiences of gender and diaspora, as

well as the layered histories that make up Canada in the present.” The Korean-born artist’s works “explore commemoration, belonging and immigration, and deconstruct and challenge how identities are formed.” cuag.ca

The School of Photographic Arts (SPA0) Gallery: *Mega Seoul 4Decades* shows from May 21 to July 18 at 77 Pamilla St. The Museum of Photography in Seoul curated this exhibition and the Korean Cultural Centre of Canada presents it. spao.ca

Central Art Garage: A Frank Shebageget solo exhibition shows April 2 to June 25 at 66B Lebreton St. N. Shebageget, the Anishnabe (Ojibwa) artist who lives in Ottawa, has produced new works inspired by blueprints of a “standardized Canadian Indian home” and the “rudimentary plywood chairs and tables to furnish them.” The artist “explores the uniformity and numbness of these cookie-cutter homes” that fit a federal government perspective that “overlooked the diversity of cultures, languages and traditions that existed across many nations.” centralartgarage.com

Jean-Claude Bergeron Gallery: *Mario Avati*, runs May 27 to June 27 at 150 St. Patrick St., Ottawa: A selection of prints to mark the 100th birthday of Mario Avati, who was born in Monaco on May 27, 1921. For most of his career, Avati worked exclusively in mezzotint, for a dozen years only in black-and-white and then also in colour. galeriejeanclaudebergeron.ca.

Studio Sixty Six: *Imaginary Monsters* by Julia Campisi shows from April 16 to May 16 at 858 Bank St. Julia Campisi’s work appropriates and re-imagines feminine imagery. She transforms “complicated sexualized images” into ordinary objects that society sees as female, such as “an oyster, a flirtatious gesture, a knitted blanket.” studiosixtysix.ca

Wall Space Gallery: Richard Ahnert’s work is showing from June 24 to July 17 at 358 Richmond Rd. Ahnert’s paintings of animals behaving in very human ways have a distinctive, dry humour, perhaps even satire. It’s an animated animism that is full of emotion and reflection on the costs of interaction between wildlife and human activity. wallspacegallery.ca

Galerie Montcalm: *A Last Kiss for the Road* by Nicolas Nabonne runs from April 29 to June 6 at 25 rue Laurier, Gatineau. Nabonne gives animals that were killed by cars a sort of new life as elements of sculpture, restoring “their dignity.” Search for more at gatineau.ca.

L.A. Pai Gallery: *Camp* runs from June 5 to 25 at 13 Murray St. This juried exhibition of rings was organized by CoAdorn, an art-jewelry collective, and every piece is unique. lapaigallery.com.

Orange Gallery: *Breath of Life* by Violeta Borisonik is on exhibit from May 26 to June 13 at 290 City Centre Ave. These are new works by the artist at the gallery, housed in a unique heritage building that was formerly a bank. orangeartgallery.ca.

Galerie St-Laurent + Hill: *Philip Bottenber* runs from April 15 to May 4 at 293 Dalhousie St. This is a selection of new works by the artist. galeriestlaurentplushill.com

Sivarulrasa Gallery: *Rooted in Time* by Gayle Kells shows from April 28 to June 4 at 34 Mill St. in Almonte. The Ottawa-based artist explores her own Lebanese-Canadian heritage going back three generations. sivarulrasa.com.

Electric Street Gallery: *Tulip Art Festival* runs from May 14 to 24 at 299 Crichton St. Timed with the city’s annual Tulip Festival, 20 or more artists will exhibit works inspired by the beloved flower. electricstreet-gallery.myshopify.com.

Contact Peter Simpson at pete@petersimpson.ca with details of your upcoming art exhibitions.

Complex flavours guarantee culinary success



Aromatic Coconut Cream Shrimp gets its flavour from the blending of several spices.



Margaret Dickenson

As stay-at-home advisories continue, the focus on home dining has evolved to remarkable levels, not only through necessity, but also personal interest. At least occasionally for many, the desire to re-create menus at home that would emulate those offered when dining out has intensified.

In this issue, I present three straightforward, but unique, recipes featuring a combination of ingredients chosen to play off one another. The resulting complexity of flavours and textures, as well as enticing visuals, ensure this menu will successfully fulfil your culinary expectations. Bon Appetit!

Aromatic Coconut Cream Shrimp

Makes 4 servings

The true aromatic flavour of this dish is defined by the harmony of several spices, along with a final addition of fresh dill weed. I tend to use crushed kaffir lime leaves to lend a touch of originality; however, one could use a combined trio of more easily available spices (see note*) instead. Garlic butter-glazed corn kernels and an arugula salad seem to work well in complementing the complex flavour of the shrimp.

1 lb (450 g) jumbo shrimp (count: 16 to 20), peeled (with tails attached) and deveined

Sauce

2 tsp (10 mL) cornstarch
 ½ cup (125 mL) coconut milk (20 per cent fat), first addition
 1½ tsp (8 mL) peeled and grated fresh gingerroot
 1½ tsp (8 mL) finely chopped fresh garlic
 1½ tbsp (23 mL) vegetable oil

1 tbsp (15 mL) finely chopped shallots
 ¾ tsp (4 mL)** Thai red curry paste
 1 ½ cups (375 mL) coconut milk (20 per cent fat), second addition
 1½ to 2 tsp (8 to 10 mL) crushed*** dried kaffir lime leaves
 ¼ tsp (1 mL) each of onion powder and garlic powder
 ¼ cup (60 mL) heavy cream (35%)
 1/3 tsp (2 mL) salt
 ¼ tsp (1 mL) granulated sugar

Garnish

½ cup (125 mL) roasted cashew nuts (broken into pieces)

1. Whisk cornstarch into ½ cup (125 mL) coconut milk; set aside.
2. In a large deep skillet, stirring constantly, sauté ginger and garlic in hot oil over medium-low heat for less than a minute.
3. Add shallots; stir frequently and cook until translucent, but not brown. Add curry paste; stir constantly to combine well, cooking the mixture for two minutes.



Extraordinary Beef Carpaccio with Sesame-Balsamic Syrup Drizzle is a crowd pleaser.

4. Whisk cornstarch-coconut milk mixture again. Continuing to whisk constantly, add it along with the remaining 1½ cups (375 mL) of coconut milk, heavy cream, crushed dried kaffir lime leaves* as well as onion powder and garlic powder to the skillet. Bring to a boil.

5. Reduce heat to low; add salt and sugar. Allow sauce to simmer for a few minutes, stirring frequently and adjusting flavours if desired. (This makes about 1¾ cups or 430 mL of sauce.)

6. Just before serving, add shrimp to heated coconut cream sauce over medium-low heat. Turning frequently, cook shrimp for about 2 ½ minutes until they are pink and centres are barely opaque. Avoid overcooking. If sauce appears too thick, add a touch of coconut milk or heavy cream.

7. Serve sauce-bathed shrimp over rice; garnish with roasted cashew nuts.

* Alternative to kaffir lime leaves: ½ tsp (3mL) each of ground nutmeg, crushed dried tarragon leaves and regular curry powder.

** There are several varieties of Thai red curry paste. Be aware that different brands provide different intensities of spiciness; therefore, the quantities required may be different from those suggested above. Note: The amount indicated above refers to the quantity of the Thai curry paste brand "MAESRI."

*** Dried kaffir lime leaves are available at oriental food stores. Crush the leaves in a spice grinder before transferring them to a large sieve set over a large bowl. Rub the crushed leaves through the sieve; discard all hard ribs and bits remaining in the sieve. Use only the tender crushed leaves that pass into the bowl.

Extraordinary Beef Carpaccio (with Sesame-Balsamic Syrup Drizzle)

Makes 4 servings

Experience a unique and exciting beef carpaccio recipe that will become a go-to appetizer on many a menu. The addition of blackberries and a Sesame Balsamic Syrup Drizzle creates an adventurous mingling of flavours. Note: Served with thin slices of toasted sesame bagels, this recipe remains a light lunch of choice for my daughter and me.

8 oz (225 g) beef tenderloin, frozen*
To taste salt and crushed black peppercorns, divided
2 tbsp (30 mL) of a mustard herb type of vinaigrette
1 cup (250 mL) fresh arugula leaves
16 whole fresh blackberries, cut in half vertically
2 oz (60 g) Parmesan cheese, slivered

Sesame Balsamic Syrup Drizzle
3 tbsp (45 mL) Balsamic Vinegar Syrup**
3 tbsp (45 mL) sesame oil

1. To make the Sesame Balsamic Syrup Drizzle, whisk together Balsamic Vinegar Syrup and sesame oil. Set aside. Note: If desired, whisk in only a touch more sesame oil to achieve a milder drizzle.

2. Several hours in advance of serving, transfer the frozen tenderloin to the refrigerator so that the beef is no longer frozen solid. Shortly before serving, with a very sharp knife, shave the tenderloin into very thin (virtually paper-thin) slices.

3. For 4 individual servings, place 2 oz (60 g) of shaved beef in a single layer on 4 separate dinner plates; season well with salt and crushed black peppercorns; then, drizzle each portion with 1½ tsp (8 mL) of vinaigrette.

4. Loosely pile a quarter of the arugula leaves (i.e., ¼ cup or 60 mL) on the central area of each portion of beef and season with salt and crushed black peppercorns. Scatter ½ oz (15 g) of Parmesan cheese over the arugula and arrange a quarter of the blackberry halves (i.e., 8) over the top of the presentation.

5. Finally, drizzle 1 tbsp (15 mL) of Sesame Balsamic Syrup Drizzle artistically over each serving of beef carpaccio and around the margins of the plate.

* To facilitate safe shaving of the frozen beef tenderloin, it is best to work with a larger piece than required.

** To make 3 tbsp (45 mL) of Balsamic Vinegar Syrup, place ¼ cup (60 mL) of balsamic vinegar and 2 tbsp (30 mL) of granulated sugar in a small non-stick



Blueberry and Maple Cream Meringue Timbales make a “chic” yet simple dessert.

skillet over medium heat. Stir until sugar dissolves and mixture boils. Reduce heat to medium-low and allow the mixture to simmer, stirring frequently, until reduced to 3 tbsp (45 mL). Remove from heat immediately and allow to cool; place in an airtight container and refrigerate until ready to use.

Blueberry and Maple Cream Meringue Timbales

Makes 6 servings

Here is a chic and easy dessert that can be quickly folded together just before serving; however, take a few minutes to organize your ingredients in advance. No complicated ingredient list or real culinary skills are required. The sensation is like feasting on a crunchy, delectable cloud that seductively melts in your mouth within seconds. Indeed, it's a small taste of heaven.

1½ oz (45 g) baked meringues*
1 cup (250 mL) heavy cream (35 per cent fat), chilled
2½ tbsp (38 mL) icing sugar
1 tsp (5 mL) maple extract
1½ cups (375 mL) fresh blueberries, di-

vided
1/3 cup (80 mL) Star Anise-infused Lemon Syrup (recipe follows), divided
1/3 cup (80 mL) walnut pieces

Garnish (optional)
6 sprigs of fresh herbs
edible flowers (e.g., violas)

1. Break meringues into “fingernail-sized” pieces, set aside.
2. In a medium-sized chilled bowl, whip cream with chilled beaters until cream begins to thicken. Add icing sugar and beat until soft peaks form; then add maple extract. Continue to beat until stiff peaks form.
3. Drizzle and gently toss blueberries with only 2 tsp (10 mL) of Star Anise-infused Lemon Syrup.
4. Just before serving, gently fold meringue and walnut pieces into the maple whipped cream, then fold in 1 1/3 cup (325 mL) of blueberries.
5. For individual servings, if desired, place a cylinder (diameter: about 2½ inches or 6 cm) in the centre of a plate. Gently spoon in one sixth of the delicate berry and meringue cream. Carefully remove the cylinder.
6. Artistically drizzle each dessert and

plate with about 2 tsp (10 mL) of Star Anise-infused Lemon Syrup. Garnish with a few of the remaining blueberries, a sprig of fresh herb, and/or an edible flower.
7. Serve promptly.

* Commercial meringue shells which are available in grocery stores and bakeries, may be used.

Make-Ahead tips: (1) The Star Anise-infused Lemon Syrup may be prepared up to months in advance. (2) The meringue pieces may be broken into pieces days in advance. (3) Up to a couple of hours before serving, the blueberries may be tossed with a touch of Star Anise-infused Lemon Syrup and the cream whipped (including with maple extract). Note: If necessary, just before serving, whip the cream briefly again to restore firm peaks.

Tip: Serve this dessert promptly after plating while the meringue pieces are still crisp.

Star Anise-infused Lemon Syrup

Makes 1 cup or 250 mL

1 cup (250 mL) granulated sugar
½ cup (125 mL) lemon juice
6 whole star anise*
¾ tsp (4 mL) grated lemon zest

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, stir together granulated sugar and lemon juice until sugar dissolves and syrup comes to a boil. Immediately reduce heat to the lowest setting.
2. Add 6 whole star anise, cover saucepan and allow syrup to simmer gently on very low heat for only 5 minutes.
3. Remove syrup from heat and stir in grated lemon zest. Let cool.
4. Store syrup refrigerated in a well-sealed jar until ready to use.
5. When using, stir well and discard the star anise (i.e., only use the syrup).

* Whole star anise is available at oriental food stores as well as some grocery, health food and specialty food stores.

Make-ahead tip: The syrup may be prepared in advance and stored refrigerated for up to several months. Note: If crystals form during storage, simply reheat the syrup, stirring frequently until all the crystals dissolve.

Margaret Dickenson is a cookbook author, menu/recipe developer and a protocol, business and etiquette instructor.

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The row over 'Embassy Row'

By Patrick Langston

Local residents and the National Capital Commission (NCC) remain at loggerheads over a proposal to turn 3.7 hectares of green space, west of downtown, into a new diplomatic precinct.

In December, the NCC asked the city to rezone the land next to the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway in Mechanicsville to permit the eventual construction of six diplomatic missions. The space lies between Slidell Street and Forward Avenue. An existing mission, the Indonesian Embassy, is on the western border of the property.

The NCC's intention to use the location for diplomatic missions is long-standing and forms part of the Scott Street Community Development Plan and other land-use strategies. It has been included in three public consultations since 2015 and is in keeping with the city's Official Plan policies, including intensification and use of existing infrastructure, according to the NCC.

The proposal is still at the conceptual stage, but it doesn't sit well with many area residents.

"The lands are an iconic green space in the neighbourhood," says Lorrie Marlow, president of the Mechanicsville Community Association. "It's very popular with bird lovers. There's a horned owl that's beloved. There are 75 trees on the property. The long grasses, the wildflowers. So, it's quite precious to us." She says she's received hundreds of emails objecting to the plan.

The commission's proposal includes a park on the eastern side of the property. However, Marlow and others are con-



There are several streets that house embassies and ambassadors' residences — Island Park, Acacia Avenue, and Range Road in Sandy Hill, seen here.

cerned about the trees and wildlife habitat — frequented by, among others, 63 bird species — that will be destroyed.

The NCC's zoning request is supported by a planning rationale from Fotenn Consultants, which identifies the creation of "new, green pedestrian/active transportation connections from the Mechanicsville neighbourhood to a new pathway along the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway." But Marlow would like to see the entire property preserved in a natural state. "We don't want it manicured with fancy little paths. We like it the way it is."

The potential loss of green space in a neighbourhood experiencing infill and where many residents have no backyard isn't Marlow's only concern.

She says tight security surrounding diplomatic missions means they aren't usually "community friendly."

"They're usually very hardened. They're walled, they're fenced ... we

want residents that are engaged in the neighbourhood." She also wonders about having to evacuate the area in the event of a terrorist or other attack on one of the missions.

Jeff Leiper is councillor for the area and would like to see the proposal paused. He believes the city should, instead, be addressing housing and environmental concerns in keeping with its declarations of housing and climate emergencies.

Like Marlow, he's also concerned about the loss of green space in his intensifying constituency, a point driven home by the restrictions of the pandemic. "We've learned in the course of the past year how important it is in intensifying neighbourhoods like Mechanicsville to have as much open space as possible. Putting embassies in open space doesn't strike residents as a particularly wise choice."

Leiper held an online public meeting about the plan in February, and more than



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The National Capital Commission sees this and neighbouring green space as a potential area for a series of embassies, though no countries have been identified to occupy what's being called Embassy Row.

200 people showed up. He says there was "highly consensual opposition" to the plan.

He adds there are other potential locations for more embassies, including Le-Breton Flats, and he would like the NCC to re-examine those options.

The NCC proposal will likely go to planning committee this spring before heading to council for a final decision, Leiper says.

The NCC's plan for the space comes from "a general need for diplomatic missions in the capital," says Andrew Sacret, chief of long-range planning and trans-

portation. "Our plan for Canada's capital has policies that state the need to have that inventory at the ready so we're not caught flatfooted as a nation when a foreign mission needs something like this."


No countries have yet been identified to occupy what's being called Ottawa's embassy row, a term that calls to mind, albeit on a far more modest scale, that section of Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C., where multiple diplomatic missions are based. Many missions already have gracious digs in Ottawa, but others are currently using downtown office space and may need to expand their

facilities in the future, Sacret says.

As to Marlow's concerns about security, Sacret responds that ambassadorial residences and chanceries already exist in some Ottawa neighbourhoods and that each has its own security plan.




What will the NCC do if the city turns thumbs down on its plan for the Mechanicsville space?

"That would be very unfortunate," Sacret says. "We would have some appeal rights ... [and] we have the authority to plan on federal lands, which these are. Our hope is that the city can follow our lead in approving that land use." ■



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The boozy pivot from restaurant to bottle shop



Tristan
Bragaglia-
Murdock

Like you, I'm sure, I, too, long to sit and dine with all the delights that entails. But the next best thing is to take a little piece of your favourite restaurant home to enjoy. Restaurants are already well-versed in finding the perfect bottle for your night out, so why not for your night in? They often carry wines that aren't available at the LCBO, so you're bound to find something worthwhile at a very reasonable price.

The silver lining to this pandemic, in Ontario at least, is the proliferation of great bottles of wine being all the more accessible. Previously, we were resigned to LCBO purchases (good, but not great for sustainable wine-making practices), purchasing directly from representatives (but usually only available by the case), or hopping the border to head to the SAQ for low-intervention offerings (an admittedly legal grey area).

Nowadays, there are easier options: online direct-from-winery sales and restaurant-cum-bottle shops. The former is a good option for supporting the producers of great wines and spirits, made in Canada from coast to coast. The latter is a gem worth delving deeper into, especially if you want to support local restaurants.

Over the past year, restaurants have opened and shut so many times due to government regulation that it's getting hard to keep track. Pivoting was the only way to survive: Early on, restaurants were granted the ability to sell alcohol to-go. Operating on slim margins in the best of years, alcohol sales have always been the lifeblood of a restaurant's success.

Fauna has one of the city's finest champagne cellars. The producers listed, many of whom are themselves the growers, are the usual suspects found in New York's best wine shops and top restaurant wine lists around the world. [Full disclosure: I started working behind the bar at Fauna



Fauna restaurant, shown here pre-pandemic, has pivoted to takeout and a bottle shop with some of the best restaurant wines in the world.

after writing this column.]

With such specified production methods and terroir-driven approaches, from the subtleties of different regions down to vineyard orientation, choosing can be daunting. Sommelier Mike Rochon offers concise and apt advice, recently putting me onto a 100 per cent Pinot Meunier champagne, Bérêche et Fils Rive Gauche, a bottle loaded with slightly browned tropical fruit, preserved lemons and a beautifully creamy bubble set.

In Hintonburg, Bar Lupulus, a beer-centred fine-dining restaurant, changed gears to become a bottle shop and deep-dish pizza takeaway joint. While waiting for the Chicago-style three-pound pizza to cook, grab a bottle from its well-curated bottle program. Bar Lupulus stands out with shelf-talkers that set you up for success. A description such as "funky fun" and "zippy skin-contact whites" hints at what to expect. Its light, fresh reds are perfect alongside the spicy tomato sauce and mozza-laden pies.

Arlo, a natural wine bar on Somerset Street that opened mid-pandemic, has yet to operate in its idealized form. Since its conception, Arlo has moved from summertime wine garden to bottle shop, and, for brief periods, has operated as a real (physically distanced) dine-in restaurant. When it's been shut down, the kitchen team has been offering a rotation of snacks for takeaway. More notable, however, is sommelier (and former author of this



Alex McMahon, of Arlo, is one of the city's most innovative sommeliers. He has a wine club that delivers six wines to members each month.

column) Alex McMahon's deep cellar of highly sought-out wines from around the world.

Recently introducing the Arlo wine club, McMahon offers to choose six wines a month for guests. His accolades in the wine world and Ottawa scene — including a stint at Noma, reputedly the best restaurant in the world — make him the perfect guide to take you on a journey through different regions and styles. McMahon's natural-wine list runs the gamut — from the pioneer and rockstar winemakers of the movement to back vintages of cult classics.

Naturally, this is simply a sip of all the wonderful wine shops around the city. Most restaurants have converted into a bevy of food-service pivots: Grocery stores, corner stores and takeaways being the frontrunners. Most of them carry wine and beer that's not available through more traditional means. If we want to see these restaurants carry on post-pandemic, it's more imperative to support them now than ever. Who thought pulling a cork could make a difference?

Wines and food can be ordered ahead of time from faunaottawa.ca, barlupulus.ca and restaurantarlo.com.

Tristan Bragaglia-Murdock writes freelance on all things alcohol, is co-owner of Union and Jabberwocky bars, and ferments his time away at home. He recently started working at Fauna.

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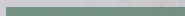
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New arrivals

Josefina Martinez Gramuglia
Ambassador of Argentina



Ambassador Martinez Gramuglia began her career at the pro bono office at the ministry of justice and human rights. In 2000, she joined the directorate for international economic negotiations and was in charge of multilateral economic affairs and bilateral investment treaties.

Between 2003 and 2004, she was deputy chief of staff at the secretariat for trade and international economic relations and then, between 2004 and 2009, she was the official in charge of disarmament, non-proliferation and international security at the United Nations mission. She returned to the secretariat for international economic relations at headquarters for the next four years and then became head of political affairs at the embassy in Washington. After that, she joined the G20 digital economy task force and, since 2018, has been general coordinator of the foreign affairs minister's cabinet.

She speaks Spanish, English, Portuguese and Italian.

Sylvia Meier-Kajbic
Ambassador of Austria



Ambassador Meier-Kajbic joined the foreign ministry in 1992 and held numerous positions at headquarters before being sent to the Czech Republic as a press attaché. She was then posted to Italy as deputy director of the Austrian Cultural Institute in Rome, and cultural attaché.

From 2001 to 2006, she was deputy chief of protocol before being sent to Algeria as ambassador. Four years later, she became ambassador to Azerbaijan, with concurrent accreditation to Georgia for one year. She returned to the ministry as deputy director general for development co-operation and director of multilateral development co-operation before being appointed ambassador to Canada.

The ambassador speaks English, French, Italian and German.

Khalilur Rahman
High commissioner for Bangladesh



Ambassador Rahman is a career diplomat. He has held several positions at headquarters, supervising areas related to international trade, investment and frontier technology and high-tech. He also served in the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to Geneva and at the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

The ambassador, who is medically trained and has a PhD in public health, served at the World Health Organization in several senior positions.

When COVID-19 broke out in December 2019, the ambassador was asked to co-ordinate the government's efforts in managing the pandemic by forging partnerships with foreign countries and international organizations. He was also in charge of repatriating Bangladeshi migrant workers affected by the pandemic. He developed programs to help them reintegrate into the domestic economy and retrain to return to work abroad.

High Commissioner Rahman is proficient in both English and French. He is married and has two children.

Raúl Eduardo Fernández Daza
Ambassador of Chile



Ambassador Fernandez Daza started his studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Chile in 1980. He has served at Chilean embassies in Romania, Switzerland, Brazil, Malaysia, Belgium, France, Mexico and the European Union. He was also consul general in Chicago.

At the foreign ministry, he oversaw the U.S. desk; he worked for the directorate for multilateral affairs, the European directorate and as head of the content unit of the 1998 Summit of the Americas.

He was appointed ambassador to Haiti in 2013 and the EU, Belgium and Luxembourg in 2017. He became secretary-general for foreign policy in 2019.

The ambassador was awarded the Order of Isabel La Católica and the Order of Malta in 1990.

He is a married father of three and grandfather of three.

Jorge Londono
Ambassador of Colombia



Ambassador Londono comes to diplomacy from the world of business. He started his career at Interconexión Eléctrica, Colombia's state-owned power company. He was an account executive at polling company In-vamer-Gallup from 1989 to 1993, rising to the position of general manager in 1994. He stayed there until 2015, when he became general manager and CEO of Medellín Public Enterprises Group, a public utilities company.

The ambassador has served on corporate boards and has received several awards and honours in Colombia, including being named one of the top-10 Colombian leaders by MERCO in 2019.

An engineer by training, he has a bachelor's degree in systems engineering from University EAFIT in Medellín.

Michelle Cohen de Friedlander
Ambassador of the Dominican Republic



Ambassador Cohen is a lawyer and career diplomat who has accumulated vast experience over her 26 years on the job. She has focused on multilateralism and international co-operation at the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the OECD.

From 2008 to 2013, she was ambassador and deputy permanent representative to the UN in Vienna. From 2013 to 2016, she was president of the National Commission for the Defense of Competition of the Dominican Republic (the competition authority). From 2016 to 2021, she was responsible for the Canada and the U.S. file at the Dominican Republic's foreign ministry. She was also responsible for relations with the OECD, where she serves as a delegate in special missions.

She has a law degree, a master's in international relations and post-graduate degree in international relations. She completed her studies in the Dominican Republic, the U.S., Spain, England and France. She is a married mother of two.

Melita Gabric
Ambassador of the European Union



Ambassador Gabric has a new set of responsibilities, but she's remaining in Canada. The career diplomat has been ambassador of Slovenia for the last four years and in February, she changed positions and is now ambassador of the European Union.

She started her career as a diplomatic affairs adviser to the prime minister. She had completed a bachelor's in journalism and social affairs and subsequently studied at the diplomatic academy. She later completed a master's degree and PhD from the same university, this time in international relations.

In 2003, she was named senior foreign affairs adviser to the president of Slovenia and then spent one year as senior adviser to the president of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, after which she served as consul general of Slovenia in New York. In 2012, she joined the foreign ministry's department of human rights. She then served as director of development co-operation and humanitarian aid before being posted to Canada.

The ambassador speaks Slovene, English, French, Italian, Serbian and Croatian. She is married.

Guisela Atalida Godinez Sazo
Ambassador of Guatemala



Ambassador Godinez Sazo takes up her position in Ottawa after having served as Guatemala's consul-general in Montreal for two years.

From 2016 to 2018, she was ambassador to Russia and, for one year during that time, she had concurrent accreditation to Kazakhstan. From 2013 to 2016, she was ambassador to Chile and before that, she spent four years as ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, with concurrent accreditation to Barbados for two of those years and to Guyana for one of them. She was ambassador to Spain before that, and ambassador to Panama between 1996 and 2004. For a number of years before joining the foreign ministry, she worked at the National Bank of Agricultural Development.

She speaks English, Italian, French and Spanish.

Emil Druc
Ambassador of Moldova



Ambassador Druc joined the foreign ministry after spending the first 12 years of his career working as a deputy director of a theatrical union in Moldova. When he

joined the foreign ministry, it was as deputy head of the Europe and North America division. He was then sent to the OSCE mission in Georgia as political officer. From 1997 to 2001, he served as counsellor at the embassy in France and then returned to headquarters as deputy director of the international organizations division.

He was minister-counsellor at the embassy in Belgium from 2002 to 2006 and then ambassador to Sweden (with accreditation to Norway and Finland) from 2010 to 2015. From 2017 to 2019, he was ambassador to France before heading up the Americas division for three years.

He speaks Moldovan, French, English and Russian.

Bogdan Manoiu
Ambassador of Romania



For Ambassador Manoiu, coming to Canada represents a return. Canada was his first posting as an attaché in 1996, a year after he joined the foreign ministry.

In 2000, he returned to headquarters, was promoted to third secretary and sent to the embassy in Luxembourg. He held numerous positions at the foreign ministry between 2002 and 2007 when he was promoted to first secretary and became a foreign affairs adviser to the presidential administration. In late 2009, he became minister for European Affairs and, from 2011 to 2014, he was presidential adviser on European Affairs. He was promoted to ambassador at the same time, and returned to Canada as chargé d'affaires in 2018. He was named ambassador in March 2021.

Dennis D. Moses
High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago



A career diplomat, Ambassador Moses has his first diplomatic posting as first secretary at the mission in Belgium in 1983. After six years, he became regional representative of the

Commonwealth Agriculture Bureau International for the Caribbean and Latin America.

From 1993 to 1998, he was deputy representative in Barbados of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. From 2002 to 2013, he was the representative of the Organization of American States General Secretariat in Guyana and had the same role in Dominica from 2014 to 2015, at which point, he became a senator and minister of national security in Trinidad and Tobago. He was minister of CARICOM affairs over the same period.

The high commissioner speaks English, French and Spanish. He is married and has two children.

Non-heads of mission

Australia
Matt Tyson Linfoot
First secretary

Dominican Republic
Laura Patricia Adames Reyes
Counsellor

Angel Antonio Gonzalez Garcia
Counsellor

Egypt
Helmy Nabawy Mohamed Mohamed
First secretary

Indonesia
I Made Diangga Adika Karang
Third secretary

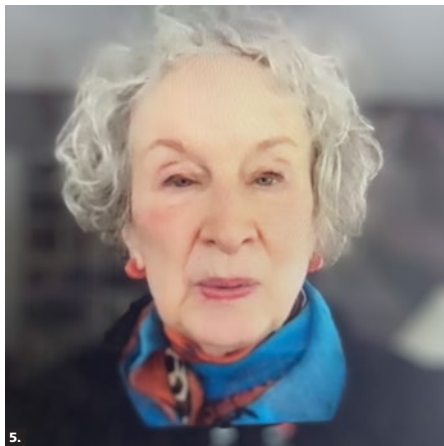
Italy
Salvatore Cozzolino
Attaché

Israel
Moshe Sermoneta
Minister and chargé d'affaires

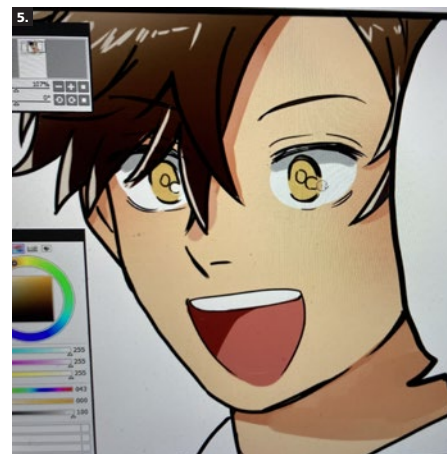
Korea, Republic
Yeaji Kim
Second secretary and consul

Sri Lanka
Lashinka Dilini Dammullag
First Secretary

Vietnam
Van Hieu Nguyen
Counsellor



1. To mark Cuba's National Day, Ambassador Josefina Vidal hosted a virtual celebration. Niagara Falls was lit up in the national colours of Cuba. Ambassador Vidal delivered remarks. (Photo: Ülle Baum) 2. Members of Head of Mission Spouses Association (HOMSA) organized a "Europe in the snow" event near the Rideau River at the New Edinburgh Park Fieldhouse. Mónica Echavarría, wife of Colombian Ambassador Jorge Alberto Julian Londono de la Cuesta (in the middle) was joined by her daughters, Luciana Londono-Echavarria (left) and Raquel Londono-Echavarria. (Photo: Ülle Baum) 3. A group of spouses of ambassadors attended the same event. From left to right beginning at the bottom, and moving clockwise are spouses: Vikki Eriksson (Finland), Helena Skracic (Croatia), Alma Muça (Albania), Monica Echavarría (Colombia), Letitia Herberg (Spain), Jenni Ahlin (Sweden), Ann Philippou (Cyprus) and Kathleen Billen (Belgium). (Photo: Ülle Baum) 4. The Korean Cultural Centre (KCC) celebrated the 2021 Korean Lunar New Year with a performance by the National Gugak Centre at KCC's YouTube Channel. Korean Ambassador Chang Keung Ryong delivered opening remarks. (Photo: Ülle Baum) 5. To commemorate International Women's Day, French Ambassador Kareen Rispal hosted an event featuring novelist Margaret Atwood. Atwood spoke on women and power in today's world. The conversation was led by writer Bianca Wylie. (Photo: Ülle Baum) 6. To mark St. Patrick's Day, Irish Ambassador Eamonn McKee and his wife, Mary McGillis McKee, hosted a virtual reception. Eamonn McKee, shown here, spoke in advance of some musical performances. (Photo: Ülle Baum)



1. The Embassy of Kazakhstan hosted a virtual celebration of Nauryz in Zoom. Nauryz means "new day" and marks the Persian New Year. Kazakh Ambassador Akylbek Kamaldinov delivered remarks. (Photo: Ülke Baum)

2. The working group of the Kazakhstan-Canada Business Council in the field of energy and natural resources held a meeting at which Zhandos Temirgali, managing director of Kazakh Invest, delivered opening remarks. (Photo: Ülke Baum)

3. 1,500 people from 25 countries participated in the 2021 Virtual Gatineau Loppet ski marathon. Inara Eihenbauma completed the 50-kilometre cross-country ski event in classic form. Here, she stands with her skis in Gatineau Park. (Photo: Ülke Baum)

4. The Latvian Embassy in Canada invited people to build a snowman and to share their photos. More than 200 people participated. This cheerful snowman was made by Inara Eihenbauma, wife of Latvian Ambassador Karlis Eihenbaums. (Photo: Inara Eihenbauma)

5. The Japanese Embassy hosted an anime and manga online webinar featuring Azusa Matsumoto, CEO of the Montreal Japanese Manga School. It was a chance to learn about the process and tools to create manga and basic manga drawing. (Photo: Ülke Baum)

6. To mark the National Day of Japan and the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, Ambassador Yasuhisa Kawamura and his wife, Miho Kawamura, hosted a virtual celebration. Ambassador Kawamura delivered opening remarks. (Photo: Ülke Baum)



1. The Philippines launched a six-part series called "Fiesta Filipinas: An Online Celebration of Philippine Festivals." To bring the Filipino fiesta experience to a Canadian audience, Ambassador Rodolfo D. Robles invited Canadians to join via Facebook or YouTube and see a virtual presentation of the Panagbenga Festival, a popular flower festival. (Photo: Ülke Baum) 2. Kosovo Independence Day marks Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. In celebration of the 13th such day, Ambassador Adriatik Kryeziu hosted a flag-raising ceremony in front of Ottawa City Hall. The Kosovar flag is shown here, next to the Canadian flag. (Photo: Ülke Baum) 3. Mongolian Ambassador Ariunbold Yadmaa and his wife, Enkh TUYA Ayurzana, joined other diplomatic families in winter sports activities and learned snowshoeing. Here they hold traditional Canadian snowshoes in New Edinburgh Park before heading out for a workout on the banks of the Ottawa River. (Photo: Ülke Baum) 4. The Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada hosted Canada's first women-only virtual business mission to Taiwan. Taiwan's Economic Affairs Minister Mei-Hua Wang spoke at this pre-mission virtual training event. (Photo: Ülke Baum) 5. To mark the 10th anniversary of the earthquake in Japan, Ambassador Yasuhisa Kawamura thanked Canadians for their "warm and heartfelt assistance." A carillon performance on Parliament Hill marked the occasion, with music by Japa-nese composer Teichi Okano Furusato, arranged by Minako Uchino. (Photo: Ülke Baum) 6. Approximately 2,000 members of the Estonian diaspora from 50 countries participated in the first virtual forum by Estonia's foreign ministry. Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets delivered an opening speech. (Photo: Ülke Baum)



1. On India's 72nd Republic Day, members of the high commission joined forces with Thali and Coconut Lagoon chef Joe Thottungal and Sylvain de Margerie, of Food for Thought, in the kitchens of the Château Laurier to prepare free hot meals for residents in Ottawa shelters. From left, Marie Thérèse Wang, Food for Thought financial officer; Kathleen Brault, Food for Thought inventory manager; Anupama Potdar, Food for Thought operations manager; Liz Smith, publicity co-ordinator; Deirdre Freiheit, president and CEO of Shepherds of Good Hope; Chef Joe Thottungal, Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria, Sylvain de Margerie, Food for Thought founder and president; Sunil Kumar Sharma, second secretary at the Indian High Commission; and Prabhat Jain, first secretary. (Photo: Christo Raju) 2. At the same event, from left, Sylvain de Margerie and Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria. 3. The Embassy of Poland hosted a virtual concert on the 16th anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II. Ambassador Andrzej Kurnicki delivered remarks and Canadian and Polish musicians took part in a concert. (Photo: Ülle Baum) 4. Paraguayan Ambassador Ines Martinez Valinotti, left, received book donations from Mayelinne De Lara, general director of the International Public Diplomacy Council at The Hague on the occasion of the inauguration of the library at the Paraguayan Embassy. (Photo: Ülle Baum) 5. A public diplomacy conference took place at the Embassy of Paraguay and a memorandum of understanding between the embassy and the Canadian chapter of the International Public Diplomacy Council was signed. From left: Valinotti and De Lara. (Photo: Ülle Baum)

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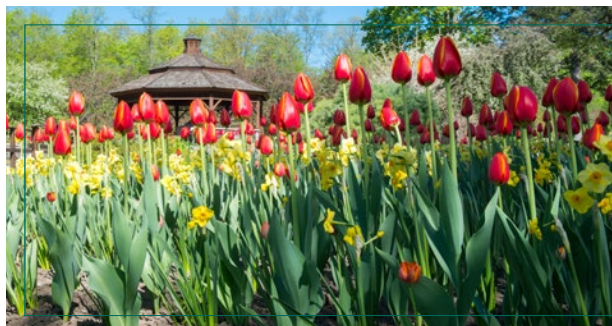
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Springing into travel mode

By Patrick Langston



Espace pour la vie in Montreal is home to earthly and celestial delights, including Le Jardin botanique, which has more than 20 outdoor gardens.

If spring has you hankering to hit the road, you're in luck this year. The pandemic isn't yet behind us, but travel opportunities — both real-life and virtual — are slowly opening up, and the long winter of our discontent will soon be a distant memory. Our suggestions for the coming months won't take you too far afield, but you still need to check ahead because some COVID restrictions may be in force.

Rainforests and starlight: Travel is all about discovery, and Montreal's multi-faceted Espace pour la vie is your ticket to new earthly and celestial delights. A walk through the Biodôme is an immersion in five ecosystems, from a tropical rainforest to the sub-Antarctic Islands, including their diverse flora and fauna. Le Jardin botanique is a sensual feast of

greenhouses, a tree pavilion and more than 20 outdoor gardens. Renovations mean the Insectarium is closed, but the Planétarium Rio Tinto Alcan is in full swing, with shows such as *Birth of the Planet Earth*, which explores the Earth's origins in the violent beginnings of our solar system. A heads-up: You may want to pack a lunch — at the time of writing, the food facilities at Espace pour la vie were closed because of the pandemic.

And here's a tip: If you're looking to commune with more nature while in Montreal, check out the 30-hectare Parc des Rapides on the St. Lawrence River in LaSalle or other outdoor spots.

Zippering along: You could drive across the Ottawa River from Ottawa to Gatineau. Or you could fly. Kind of. Interzip Rogers, originally planned for last summer,

is opening this spring just west of the Portage Bridge. Billed as the world's first interprovincial zip line and promising to offer spectacular views from 37 metres in the air, it will take riders from the departure tower at the Zibi development on Chaudière Island to Zibi's Quebec site. Riders (you need to be between 32 and 124 kilograms to participate) will zip along at 40 kilometres an hour and can hook up rain or shine, except in extreme weather. Tickets for the eco-tourism activity are \$36.99 for adults and \$26.99 for those under 14. interzip.ca

Getting the kinks out: Been cooped up for months by winter and COVID-19? An historical walk will work out your physical and mental kinks. The Ottawa Valley offers multiple self-guided tours, including several in North Grenville, about 40 min-

utes south of downtown Ottawa. There, you'll spot stone churches, clapboard-clad and log homes, commercial buildings and more dating back to the 19th Century. Learn what's where at explorenorthgrenville.ca. There are also tours in Perth, Merrickville and pretty much any other spot you look.

Screen time: Long-distance travel remains off-limits for most of us, but we can still expand our cultural horizons by dropping in on international and other film festivals via the internet. South Korea's Jeonju International Film Festival runs from April 29 to May 8, with films such as Éric Baudelaire's *A Flower in the Mouth*, a French/Swiss production that blends the world's largest flower market in Holland with an adaptation of a post Spanish-flu play by Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello. Canada's Hot Docs documentary fest is on at the same time, Toronto's LGBT festival Inside Out, and others, kick off in May, and June is jam-packed with everything from France's Annecy animation blow-out to the venerable Edinburgh International Film Festival, established in 1947. Find more and keep up to date at screendaily.com

Old-growth perspectives: You've never tromped through an old-growth forest? It's at once exhilarating, humbling and calming. Towering maple, beech and hemlock trees that sprouted long before we did also put our current anxieties into perspective; after all, if they've weathered centuries of challenge and change, can't we survive disruptions? Those magnificent trees (50 hectares of them) along with wetlands, a mixed forest and gigantic boulders strewn by a retreating glacier (65 hectares of those various items) comprise Shaw Woods Outdoor Education Centre near Eganville, 90 minutes west of downtown Ottawa. The site, which includes 14 kilometres of walking trails, is open year-round, dawn to dusk. It's free, although there are donation boxes, and washrooms are on-site. It will take about five hours to hike all the trails, including a stop at the lookout where you should keep your eyes peeled for the eagles who once nested in the woods and sometimes still visit. Tip: Other area attractions include beaches and the Bonnechere Caves. shawwoods.ca

Patrick Langston is an Ottawa-area writer who believes Jack Kerouac's 1957 travel-based novel *On The Road* should be required reading for everyone.

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Photo by Bill Blackstone

Celebration time

A listing of the national and independence days marked by countries

April		
4	Senegal	Independence Day
16	Denmark	Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II
17	Syria	National Day
18	Zimbabwe	Independence Day
19	Holy See	Election of the Pope
26	Tanzania	Union Day
27	Sierra Leone	Republic Day
27	South Africa	Freedom Day
27	Togo	National Day
27	Netherlands	King's Day
28	Israel	National Day
May		
1	Marshall Islands	National Day
3	Poland	National Day
8	Israel	Independence Day
9	European Union	Schuman Day
15	Paraguay	National Day
17	Norway	Constitution Day
20	Cameroon	National Day
22	Yemen	National Day
24	Eritrea	Independence Day
25	Argentina	May Revolution
25	Jordan	National Day
26	Georgia	Independence Day
28	Azerbaijan	Republic Day
28	Ethiopia	Downfall of the Dergue
June		
1	Samoa	Independence Day
2	Italy	Anniversary of the Foundation of the Republic
4	Tonga	Independence Day
6	Sweden	National Day
10	Portugal	National Day
12	Philippines	National Day
12	Russia	National Day
14	United Kingdom	Her Majesty the Queen's Birthday
17	Iceland	Proclamation of the Republic
18	O/of Eastern Caribbean States	OECS Day
18	Seychelles	Constitution Day
23	Luxembourg	Official Celebration of the Birthday of His Royal Highness Grand Duke Henri
25	Croatia	National Day
25	Slovenia	National Day
25	Mozambique	Independence Day
26	Madagascar	Independence Day
27	Djibouti	National Day
29	Holy See	National Day
30	Congo, Democratic Republic	Independence Day



Thali

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Photographer Mike Beedell: "I met this Arctic ground squirrel in Nunavut, near the Coppermine River, 600 kilometres north of Yellowknife, NWT. One often hears these precocious yet paranoid critters in their multitudinous burrows (researchers have counted 56 entrances over 46 square metres.) The paranoia is understandable because almost everybody — eagles, owls, hawks, foxes, grizzly bears, wolverines and weasels — considers them delicious fare for a tundra banquet. Indigenous people also make garments from their pelts. Indeed, Alaskans call them "parka squirrels." The squirrels spend half their lives in snooze mode. This hibernation, allowed by special adaptation, drops their heart rate to a few beats per minute. It keeps their brains only just above freezing, and their core body temperature as low as -2.9°C . They weigh half to one-and-a-half kilograms, with an average length of 39 centimetres. The squirrels can live 10 years and are opportunistic feeders — vegetation, eggs, invertebrates, lemmings, carrion and even their own kin. Besides Alaska and Siberia, in Canada, they appear from the Arctic Circle to northern British Columbia and down to the southern Northwest Territories. A mummy of a frozen squirrel found in Alaska dated to 20,000 years old."



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