Homogenizing nationalists, budding fascists, and truculent exceptionalists: the end of world order in the Indo-Pacific

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Abstract
Building on Ernest Gellner’s theory of the nation-state and drawing on insights from John Lukacs and George Kennan, this article contends that the major powers of the contemporary Indo-Pacific are characterized by conflicting nationalisms. Homogenizing nationalism seeks to form China—a former multiethnic empire—into a unitary nation-state. Budding fascism endeavors to transform India—founded as a secular state—into a Hindu nation in which there is little place for the ‘other.’ And in the USA, truculent exceptionalism readily acknowledges that coexistence with China is no longer possible in the long run. All three powers have an alternative that they might embrace: toleration. But civility, in both domestic and international politics, is increasingly rare. The future of world order in the Indo-Pacific does not look bright.

Keywords Great power competition · World order · The Indo-Pacific · Nationalism

“All the Isms are Wasms”—except nationalism. This is the thread that unites the prolific scholarship of the late Hungarian-American historian John Lukacs (1924–2019). This essay contends that Lukacs’ insight should be applied to the contemporary Indo-Pacific, where rapid but now faltering economic growth, reactivist economic policies (Dent 2020), uncertain power transitions, simmering border disputes, and acrimonious major power rivalry are all emerging. The three predominant states

1 Though I never met him, I owe John Lukacs a debt of gratitude for what I have learned from him. This article is my way of commemorating his memory.
of the region, China, India, and the USA, are increasingly animated by different forms of nationalism. The argument of this essay is that identifying these forms and reflecting on their (il)logic is the key to unlocking probable trajectories of world (dis)order as the century unfolds.

The essay begins by conceptualizing the genus, nationalism. It then moves to study the species of nationalism represented by the three major powers of the Indo-Pacific, arguing that these are best conceived as homogenizing nationalism, budding fascism, and truculent exceptionalism. The final section of the essay reflects on how the interaction of these three is likely to affect the future of world order.

Nationalism as a genus: concept and logic

Throughout world history, states—taken here simply as political units that can ‘expand without splitting’ (Cohen 1978, p. 4)—have been created through the conquest and assimilation of hundreds or even thousands of smaller political units. In 1000 BC, according to the best guesses, there were between 600,000 and 800,000 polities in the world (Carneiro 1978); today, there are fewer than 200. Historically, state expansion was facilitated through the techniques of empire, which allowed one state to rule multiple nations.² Broadly speaking, these techniques might be separated into ideal types represented by two historical empires from the Ancient Near East: unification that ‘welcomed the “other”’ as represented by the Neo-Babylonians and Persians, and unification that eliminated and subordinated the other, as represented by the Neo-Assyrians (Liverani 2014, p. 549 ff.). Most empires in history have fallen somewhere in between these poles with power (and permissible otherness) radiating outward from an imperial core to a zone of domination, to a zone of suzerainty, to finally one of mere hegemony (Buzan and Little 2000, p. 179 ff.). The larger the empire and the less ephemeral its existence, the more necessary it is to embrace pluralism and tolerance, ordering territory in the manner of ‘Chinese boxes’ with the imperial superstructure on top but increasingly autonomous units, classes, bureaucracies, religions, languages, and cultures within (Liverani 2014, p. 572; Garfinkle 2020, p. 233). Premodern states and empires had ‘extensive power,’ which could coordinate cooperation for major initiatives, but limited ‘intensive’ power given the diversity of political units, the exertions of communication and transportation, and the segmentary organization of sub-units (Crone 2003, p. 57).

In the modern era, the older extensive Chinese box style of governance gave way to societies reordered intensively into a ‘pack of cards that can be reshuffled any time’ (Crone 2003, p. 194). Ernest Gellner, one of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century, believed that nationalism explained this transition. He defined nationalism as ‘a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (Gellner 2009, p. 1). Gellner believed that nationalism as such was a modern political phenomenon—possible only in the industrial and Protestant

² Nation is here taken simply to mean a given ‘imagined community’ that is ‘limited and sovereign’ (Anderson 1991, p. 6).
age—which broke down old class divisions and religious hierarchies, brought people together in large cities, and homogenized populations through a process of ‘exosocialization’ (involving, for instance, mass mandatory education) (2009, p. 37, 1992, pp. 71, 263, 277). This process of political transition—from agrarian empire or feudal polity to industrialized nation-state—would, he explained, be necessarily ‘violent and conflict-ridden,’ for the peaceful modification of political boundaries is something rarely undertaken by political units. It would also result in societal division, generating ‘dislocation, mobility, acute inequality not hallowed by time and custom’ (2009, pp. 39, 108, 116).

It would be a distraction to delve into the reception and criticism of Gellner’s argument here3; I wish instead to highlight a prominent element of his narrative easily overlooked as well as to emphasize the Eurocentric-nature of Gellner’s initial optimism about the decline of nationalism.

The first point is that Gellner—like Lukacs, an ethnically Jewish refugee from the continent—emphasized the implicit genocidal tendency of nationalism.4 In cases where nations were intermixed, ‘a territorial political unit can only become ethnically homogeneous... if it either kills, or expels, or assimilates all non-nationals’ (2009, p. 2). It was, Gellner explained, ‘regrettably rational’ for one group to pursue the ‘systematic liquidation’ of another in order to maintain national dominance within a polity (2009, p. 83). Gellner considered ‘population exchanges or expulsions, more or less forcible assimilation, and sometimes liquidation’ to be methods which flowed from ‘the inescapable logic of the situation’ (2009, p. 97). The alternative—‘genuine cultural pluralism’—was a mere artifact of the premodern era, now made illegitimate by the universal dominance of the nationalist principle (2009, p. 54; cf. Anderson 1991, p. 19; Badie 2000, pp. 48–50, 59, 86).

The second point is connected to the first: from the ashes of destruction, the goddess of peace was to arise. Gellner thought that the disputes generated by the nationalist principle would dissipate in the emerging ‘late industrial’ society, since boundaries had been adjusted, peoples assimilated, and nation-states solidified (2009, p. 117). While this was certainly true of the western world after the Second World War, the same is not true of Africa and Asia, continents even now undergoing the dislocations and dissensions involved in the processes of industrialization and globalization. In short, insofar as the non-western world is now experiencing the dynamics of industrialization, then it too can be expected to conform—at least in part—to the West’s tortured path to modernity.

A criticism of Gellner’s theory of nationalism is that it was basically ahistorical theorizing. *Nations and Nationalism* is a slim book filled not with case studies and citations but elegant argumentation and classification. A series of major books (Levene 2005; Mann 2005; Lieberman 2006; Ther 2016) have since filled this gap, offering direct and extensive evidence that confirms the thesis that mass violence and expulsions were implicitly lodged within (even if not explicitly mandated by)

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3 For contrasting discussions, see Smith (2010), Hall (2011), Gat and Yakobson (2013).

4 Though technically not a refugee, Eric Hobsbawm (2012, p. 133) would observe the same tendency.
the nationalist principle. Ethnic cleansing and genocide are merely two types of violence consistent with nationalism’s logic.\textsuperscript{5} As Mann has outlined (2005, p. 12), other means of making the nation and the state into one entity vary on a spectrum that includes voluntary assimilation at the peaceful beginning, discrimination and selective repression in the middle, and at the bloody end, violent repression/pogroms and finally ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Making nation-states is a constitutive element of nationalism. But nationalism also describes how peoples think about nation-states, and how nation-states act. The first move of a nationalist is to place their nation ‘beyond good and evil,’ in the words of Orwell (1945). This was indeed the declaration of the renowned theorist of the French Revolution the abbé Sieyès, who in 1789 declared the French nation, operating as it was in the state of nature, to be ‘the law itself’ (Smith 2010, p. 47; also see Dadrian 2003, p. 383). Most nationalists are not so honest as the abbé and merely display an ‘indifference to reality’ rather than heretical revolutionary grandiloquence. This indifference, Orwell explained (1945), results in an inability to see ‘resemblances between similar sets of facts.... Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them....’ When situations look damning, the benefit of the doubt is always extended to the nationalist’s own people, but not to the other. The nationalist speaks the language of ‘victories, defeats, triumphs, and humiliations.’ He finds meaning and drive in his own nation’s superiority and goodness, concepts given meaning by the logic of ‘competitive prestige.’

Once again, this is not mere theorizing. The ‘competitive prestige’ with which the European states of the early twentieth century reeked led to a masculine political scene in which ‘winning’ required forcing the other to back down in a ‘trial of strength’ (Offer 1995; Frevert 2007; McKinney 2018). When no one backed down, war was the outcome (Levy and Vasquez 2014; Stevenson 2014). Today, nationalism (conceived holistically as a sociological process demanded by industrialization, a legitimating principle, and as the emotional tendency of peoples nested within nation-states) stands at the heart of the major flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific. This is seen not only in the China-Taiwan relationship, which involves a dispute over the number of nations and the number of states appropriate to govern two geographically distinct territories, but also in China’s domestic policies in Xinjiang (which activate American exceptionalism), border disputes between China and India and China and Pakistan, which activate opposing claims of sovereignty (Davis et al. 2021), and India’s increasing repression of Muslim minorities, which threaten its democratic identity and therefore its position as a geopolitical alternative to China.

This article seeks to make connections between the domestic and international aspects of nationalism, phenomena usually separated into two or even three different fields (ethnic studies, comparative politics, and international relations). The argument is that with respect to their minority populations, China and India today

\textsuperscript{5} Secession and war are two other phenomena consistent with the logic. For neglected cases of the former and an emphasis on a surge of nationalism after the Cold War: Thomas and Falola (2020); for war and an emphasis on boundaries: Levin and Miller (2011), Miller (2015); for a review of the literature on the relationship between nation-states and genocide: Segal (2018).
are both responding to similar pressures of modernity, but that their options remain open and each state could call upon alternative traditions that stress the Chinese box rather than the pack of cards. At the same time, internal nation-state decisions in both countries are exerting considerable influence on international political calculations, particularly vis-à-vis the USA and China, but also with respect to China-India relations and prospectively, US-India relations. This perspective should be seen as complementary to the more usual path of studying nationalism primarily as an emotional tendency or legitimating tactic.

Three species of nationalism in the contemporary Indo-Pacific

This section will classify the types of nationalism animating the politics of China, India, and the USA: homogenizing nationalism, budding fascism, and truculent exceptionalism. Other states within the Indo-Pacific might also be profitably considered—particularly Japan, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Myanmar—but the hope is that comparison of the Great Powers will provoke further efforts that include major, middle, and middling powers, a task of significant importance due to the contemporary relinking of Asia’s three subregions (South, SE, and NE) into one mega-region (Pardesi 2020).

China: homogenizing nationalism

Chiang Kai-shek opened his 1943 book *China’s Destiny* with an impassioned defense of China’s origins, unity, and peaceful character. He explained: ‘our Chinese nation was formed by the blending of numerous clans. This blending of various clans continued, dynasty after dynasty, but the motive power was cultural rather than military, and it was accomplished by assimilation rather than by conquest’ (Chiang 1947, p. 30). While expressing the Confucian ideal of peaceful Sinicization, this is certainly not an accurate description of Chinese history, where the state was fashioned through warfare in the beginning and remade and expanded periodically in the same manner thereafter (Ge 2015; Hui 2019). Chiang did not extend his impassioned defense to China’s Qing rulers, who, he argued (1947, p. 48), ‘followed exclusively a policy of slaughter and enslavement in governing the different clans.’ He believed this failure of the Qing undermined China’s ability to compete with the European powers of the modern world and explained China’s relative weakness.

If the account given by scholars within the New Qing History movement stands, then once again, Chiang is incorrect. It is true that the Chinese conquest of Xinjiang, which met with final ‘success’ during the long reign of the Qianlong emperor (1735–1796), involved the genocidal destruction of the Zhungars. And it is also true that this was interpreted by Chinese scholars as the ultimate resolution of millennia-old difficulties in dealing with nomadic frontier peoples (Perdue 2010, pp. 497; 562). However, once the conquest was complete, it has been argued (Millward 2019, p. 80) that the Qing managed minorities according to ‘its inclusive, culturally pluralist ideology, with localized administration by native elites who were enrolled
symbolically in the ruling house.’ The doubling of Chinese territory during the Qing era is a success that should not be explained only by military power, but also by the imperial tolerance characteristic of all large premodern empires (e.g., Zarakol 2019).

After the Qing collapsed in 1911, nationalism was seen as essential to activating China’s people against the humiliating exploitation of foreign powers (Duara 2018). Sun Yat-sen’s version of nationalism was branded as inclusive, seeking to unite Chinese not through ‘military occupation’ but through ‘natural evolution’ and the ‘development of various forms of culture’ while retaining traditional family and clan loyalties (Sun 1981, pp. 4, 24, 28). While China’s minzu (nationality) policy under the People’s Republic of China (PRC) after 1949 was certainly not so ideologically peaceful, Millward (2019, pp. 82–87) argues that the PRC inherited and revived important aspects of Qing pluralism. Tensions remained, however, with Xinjiang becoming a colonial project with millions of ‘peasant-soldiers’ dispatched as pioneer farmers and workers to the region, raising the Han ethnic presence in the region, which theretofore had been nominal, to approximately 40% (Castets 2003, pp. 2–3; Anand 2019; Cliff 2020).

With time, Han economic, demographic, educational, and political colonization, as well as the manias of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution (Thum 2018), fueled ethnic tensions. In the 1980s, many Uyghurs embraced with renewed vigor Turkic and Islamic values, and in the early 1990s a few groups advocated insurrection; these groups were suppressed in 1990 and 1997 (Smith Finley 2019, pp. 85–86). After 9/11, despite the absence of any immediate terrorist activities in Xinjiang (Tobin 2020, pp. 308–309), Beijing branded Uyghur organizations a part of global terrorist networks, facilitating crackdowns and new propaganda campaigns (Rodríguez-Merino 2019). Conceptually, China was now moving in the direction of a second-generation nationality policy that, Millward argues (2019, p. 88 ff.), abandoned the pluralism of the Qing to embrace a European-style homogenization policy close to that originally advocated by none other than Chiang Kai-shek.

The year 2009 then proved a turning point, connecting ideas with events. Ethnic violence directed against Uyghur workers in Guangdong province sparked protests (on 7/5) in Urumchi which devolved into violent riots; Han residents responded (on 7/7) and in total approximately two hundred people were killed and almost two thousand injured in unprecedented mob violence (Tobin 2020, pp. 309–310). Beginning in 2009, the question of ethnic relations was ‘securitized’ in a manner equivalent to China’s securitization of student protestors in 1989 or Falun Gong in 1999 (Vuori 2008). According to Beijing, the threat was Uyghur identity, and the solution was to suppress and subordinate it. Long-term Confucian methods of Sinicization were increasingly replaced by Legalist methods, particularly after 2014, when Uyghur participation in Syria’s civil war ignited a new campaign of preventive repression that mixed panopticon surveillance with dystopian coercive re-education (Ramzy and Buckley 2019; Greitens et al. 2019; Leibold 2019).

Lord Shang (d. 338 BC), in his (in)famous book of advice (Shang 2019), called for the state to control “the people as the metalworker controls metal and the potter clay” (18.2). Lord Shang thought this could be done through a relentlessly materialistic system of punishments and rewards from which surveillance and restrictions on movement prohibited any escape (18.3; 2.12). To these methods, the modern
Chinese State, under the framework of its second-generation nationality policy, has added the unremitting propagation of the ideology of the nation-state, for which Uyghur culture is a ‘tumor’ (Leibold 2019, p. 12) or a ‘virus’ (Roberts 2018) alien to the Chinese people.

China’s contemporary campaign in Xinjiang would qualify as genocide according to Raphael Lemkin’s original conception, which included ‘cultural genocide’ (Rotberg 2017). International jurisprudence, however, has typically required mass killing along with the specific intent of eliminating a group in order to meet a stringent legal standard for genocide (Naimark 2017, p. 4). There has been no evidence of mass killing in Xinjiang. However, statistical evidence indicating disproportionate enforcement of Chinese population control policies on Uyghur women suggests minimally a campaign to destroy the Uyghur people ‘in part,’ which would qualify as genocide under the Genocide Convention (Smith Finley 2020; Associated Press 2020) assuming a juridical assessment that ‘a substantial part’ of the Uyghur people had been targeted for destruction (Mettraux 2019, p. 52). Whether a case that technically qualifies as genocide under the Convention is sociologically the same thing as genocide is a remarkably convoluted question as many studies of genocide define the concept in terms of mass killing/murder (e.g., Levene 2000, p. 314; Lie 2004, p. 227; Sémelin 2007; Spierenburg 2014). The question is further muddied by the political tendency to use the genocide label ‘as a sword raised against one’s deadly enemy’ (Sémelin 2007, p. 313). For these reasons, *The Economist* has argued it is more appropriate to designate China’s actions crimes against humanity (The Economist 2021), a category that condemns the same universally prohibited practices but without the requirement that they be linked to the destruction of a group as such (Mettraux 2020, p. 57).

The question of the legal designation aside, the actions of the Chinese state are a continuation of the assimilationist project begun in the Mao era, but now sped up using emergency measures intended to homogenize and anesthetize a people-group conjured up as threateningly anti-national. This objective is akin to the goal of the Spanish Inquisition (‘one state, one nation, one faith’) or France’s interwar goal for Alsace-Lorraine (*purifier, centralizer, assimiler*) (Ther 2016, pp. 28, 45). On Mann’s spectrum of national violence (Mann 2005, p. 12), the means employed are those of total ‘violent repression.’ Enabled by elements of modernity (see Bauman 1991), the scale and organization of this repression are unique when compared with any previous case, however, because of the mixture of techno-totalitarian means and nationalist ends.

Because China is a late modernizer (see Buzan and Lawson 2020), it is convenient and easy for outside critics to interpret its homogenizing nationalism as unique, the necessary consequence of its Communist ideology, or the predictable malignance of an authoritarian state (Fanell 2019; Bosco 2020). This section has suggested that such claims are incorrect. To the contrary, China’s ethnic policies in Xinjiang (and elsewhere6) reflect the triumph of nationalism in a modern world in which

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6 The argument could logically be extended to developments in Hong Kong, Inner Mongolia or Tibet, topics I skip for reasons of space. For a superb overview: Atwood (2020).
‘genuine cultural pluralism’ (Gellner 2009, p. 54) has become a distant memory of a maligned imperial past. This outcome, despite the trajectory of modern states—which should be seen as an underlying cause—was not inevitable. It required a conjunction of proximate causes, including (1) an intellectual shift, (2) increasing ethnic tensions, (3) the ostensible emergency conditions created by the wars in Iraq and Syria, and (4) the growing centralization of the Chinese state in the Xi Jinping era. The outcome is also not unalterable, though this is a topic for separate consideration (see especially Wang 2014, chap. 4). The comparative and international relevance of this overall argument for international politics will be developed in the following sections, which examine the nationalisms at work in India and the USA.

India: budding fascism

Though often an insult, ‘fascism’ is first of all a sociological category. A subtype of nationalism, fascism is most simply conceived as ‘the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism’ (Mann 2004, p. 13). Though fascism was a European movement embraced in the interwar years, this is no prima facie reason to dismiss the appropriateness of the category for other locales (pace Singh 2019). In China, Chiang Kai-shek’s Blue Shirts believed the nation to be ‘supreme and sacred’ and thought that only the ‘fascist spirit of violent struggle as in Italy and Germany’ could redeem their nation (Eastman 1972; Esherick 2010). Chiang nonetheless failed, because by ‘sitting’ on the Chinese masses instead of ‘winning’ them over, he undermined the populism needed to sustain the movement (Wakeman 1997, pp. 427–428). As for India, it is by no means an accident of history that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), India’s premier mass movement, was founded in 1925. In the struggle for India’s independence, Gandhi and then Nehru took the lead, relegating the RSS to a sideline role of anti-Muslim agitation. But today, India’s great independence organization, the Indian National Congress, has through loss of intellectual cohesion and corruption been relegated to the periphery of a new India dominated by Narendra Modi, an RSS apparatchik who has mastered the art of leading, rather than sitting upon, the masses.

A brief comparison of competing ‘ideas of India’ reveals the distinctives of the RSS ideology. For Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘nationalism cannot be accepted only when it profits the majority community’ (Agravāla 2019, pp. 71–72). Nehru believed not in ‘Hindu nationalism,’ but Indian nationalism, a fusion of all of India’s groups united in opposition to foreign rule (Agravāla 2019, p. 74). He believed India needed to affirm its best traditions by avoiding a ‘narrow and limited religious outlook,’ embracing instead ‘reason and common sense’ (Agravāla 2019, p. 89); he contended that there was ‘no going back to the past’ and so visions of a purely Hindu state (or for that matter, a purely Islamic state) were ‘idle fancies’ (Agravāla 2019, p. 91). Pluralism was at the heart of Nehru’s vision, as he explained to India’s tribal peoples in 1952:

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7 M.S. Golwalkar: “Hindus, don’t waste your energy fighting the British. Save your energy to fight our internal enemies that are Muslims, Christians, and Communists” (see Deshpande 2016).
I am alarmed when I see—not only in this country but in other great countries, too—how anxious people are to shape others according to their image or likeness and to impose on them their particular way of living. We are welcome to our way of living but why impose it on others? This applies equally to national and international fields. In fact, there would be more peace in the world, if people were to desist from imposing their way of living on other people and countries. (Agravāla 2019, pp. 102–103)

A consequence of the pluralism idea was that there was only one unifying objective in the modern world: ‘a widespread raising of the people’s standard of living’ (Agravāla 2019, p. 117). As for India’s internal disputes (such as Jammu and Kashmir), Nehru—using language conceptually similar to that of Sun Yat-sen—insisted that ultimately the ‘wishes of the people’ of disputed regions, and not the ‘point of the bayonet,’ should decide the issue (Agravāla 2019, p. 131).

Nehru was principally ‘for’ India; the RSS (and its associated organizations within the Sangh Parivar) has been principally ‘against’ various others from the beginning. Historically, this was most clearly seen in how the Congress Party led the movement against the British colonizers while the RSS contented itself with opposing Muslims within India. Even today, for the RSS, the Congress Party is not a competitor but an ‘enemy’ (Chatterji et al. 2019a, p. 4). At the heart of the RSS philosophy is the idea of Hindutva, an ideology championed by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966), an intellectual steeped in European history who might be called India’s Mazzini. As Ashis Nandi (2014, p. 100) explains, Savarkar understood that ‘modern nation-building and state-formation had been a violent, criminal enterprise in all societies.’ Savarkar embraced this violent legacy, defending it favorably in contrast to ‘Gandhi’s “eccentric,” “effeminate,” “irrational” defiance of the canons of modern statecraft’ (Nandy 2014, pp. 101, 106). These ideas contributed to the bloody partition of India and the assassination of Gandhi. Hindutva became a religious and cultural shell for the western idea of a homogenous, virile, and absolutely sovereign nation-state, instantiating the ‘annihilatory fantasies’ of the modern world (Nandy and Darby 2015).

According to the website of the RSS (RSS, no date), the organization is dedicated to ‘sustained efforts for restoration of the Hindu psyche to its pristine form.’ This requires ‘intense and continuous propagation of the ideal of nationalism and the recognition of the Hindu national identity as a fundamental fact transcending corroboration and discussion.’ The Sangh is in the business of ‘man-making’ a goal so total that all corners of society will become ‘ultimately engulfed’ into the organization’s system. Whereas Nehru embraced (at least in theory) the ‘wishes of the people,’ the RSS calls for the use of the bayonet in places like Kashmir. ‘As too much mollycoddling and lack of discipline spoil the child, so has been Kashmir, a problem created out of our own folly.’ The language here is somewhat abstract, but M.S. Golwalkar (1906–1973), the most influential leader of the RSS, clearly articulated the

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8 V.D. Savarkar wrote: “Nothing makes Self-conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-Self.... Hatred separates as well as unites” (quoted in Sarkar 2019, p. 159).
practicality of the position: the ‘good lesson’ from the practice of Nazi Germany during the era of Kristallnacht (Sen 2015, p. 695) was that non-Hindus ‘may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges... not even citizen’s rights’ (Sarkar 2019, p. 160). In this conception, nationalism and imperialism converge, a common occurrence historically (Go 2017; Halperin 2017; Aydin 2018, pp. 121, 159).

The manner in which violence is subcontracted (or at least not prevented) by the ideologues who run many of the present-day governments of India is the distinctive that places India within the subtype of nationalism called fascism, and which I have qualified with the adjective ‘budding.’ As Edward Anderson and Christophe Jaffrelot have explained (2018, p. 473), ‘the official face of this structure is not misbehaving, but it lets others intimidate the deviant.’ In India, sub-state level violence is normal and increasingly normalized (Chatterji et al. 2019b). The Sangh Parivar, which believes the nation is superior and more fundamental than the state, desires the state’s ‘protection’ more than its ‘action’ (Anderson and Jaffrelot 2018, p. 476). This model suits Prime Minister Modi just fine, because he intuitively understands Nehru’s original argument: that only development could unite India’s people (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020a). However, as Modi begins his second five-year term, already the mood is shifting. ‘Team India’ was the theme of his first five years, when he focused on decentralization and development. ‘One nation’ is the emerging theme of his post-2019 tenure, with centralization, homogeneity, and ideology taking pride of place (Aiyar and Tillin 2020; Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020b).

This has been seen most clearly in the revocation of Article 370 of India’s Constitution, which guaranteed autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir, as well as in the government’s attempt to reduce the number of Muslims through a citizenship register. The most pressing domestic political concern for India’s medium term is whether Modi and the RSS, having ‘fattened’ themselves on the language of ‘democracy’ will now ‘cast it away as useless lumber,’ to use words Nehru once wrote in anonymous self-criticism (Agravāla 2019, p. 314). This would cause a budding fascism to become a flowering fascism.

Internationally, whether Indian democracy self-destructs into nation-statist fascism or not, the Hindutva ideology challenges the status quo. Maps of ‘whole India’ include Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, implicitly claiming some form of sovereignty over hundreds of millions (Banaji 2018, p. 339). This is propaganda, but it points once again to the connection between nationalist movements and imperialist policies. Fascism as a genus births various species. The activating factor, which can turn a dog into a wolf, is war (Mann 2004; Suvin 2017, pp. 263–272). Already the Kashmir Valley has been militarized in a manner unprecedented anywhere in the world. In the past thirty years, some 70,000 people have been killed in the region. The dream of the RSS is to make Kashmir a non-issue by achieving the cultural genocide China is now implementing in Xinjiang. Since Kashmir is bordered by Pakistan, and since the Indian bureaucracy is much weaker than China’s, such a program is not possible. India (under both the Congress Party and Modi) has instead settled for something close to a constant state of war in the region.

With regard to its sovereign neighbors, Modi and the RSS have significant domestic incentives to accept war, or indeed, cause it, preferably with Pakistan but possibly
with China. Modi has failed to significantly develop India’s economy, which partly explains the shift in political rhetoric. Demonetization and his government’s reckless response to the spread of Covid-19 (see Ganguly 2020) have furthered destabilized the economy, which has undergone a radical contraction. Already, the 2019 Pulwama attack and India’s muscular response (bombing Pakistan) served Modi’s electoral interests. The June 2020 fighting with China in Galwan Valley, which according to Indian accounts was sparked by Chinese operational recklessness but Indian acts of belligerent intent at the tactical level (Aroor 2020), illustrates the possibility for serious conflict in the near future. Regardless of whether it was accepted or caused, such a war could easily serve as a bridge between nation-led Hindutva and nation-state-led Hindutva; traveling over such a bridge would eliminate the qualifier ‘budding’ from the description of India’s form of nationalism. Today, without an emergency environment of war, Indian intellectuals have been rounded up and persecuted with draconian laws (Anand 2020; Mevani and Kandasamy 2020). The point of such arrests, as one intellectual explained a year prior to being arrested (Teltumbde 2018), is to cow into silence anyone who would dare challenge Hindutva hegemony by the prospect less of being convicted for any crime (India has one of the lowest conviction rates in the whole world) and more by the prospect of spending years in jail pre-trial. A war environment would make such suppression easier, even as it provided an opportunity to expand the othering that has long defined the RSS, to say nothing of a program for economic development that could overcome a state increasingly characterized by inertia and deep inequality (Scheidel 2017; Crabtree 2018; McKinney 2020).

It is not coincidental that China and India are both openly seeking to annihilate cultural pluralism simultaneously (Anand 2012). These two states were created, in their modern form, within two years of one another. They both have been experiencing the painful inequalities (Piketty 2020) and degradations of industrialization (with China approximately a generation ahead in this regard). For security and legitimation, they both have embraced the logic of the nation-state. And they both have lately abandoned the more tolerant ideas of their recent and distant pasts, embracing instead nationalist ideologies that originated in the decades prior to the Second World War. If something akin to Gellner’s theory of modernity made such changes possible, a series of proximate causes actually brought it about in both countries. Neither country is locked into its current trajectory: governance in Kashmir could be reformed along the very successful federal structure of Tamil Nadu (Stepan et al. 2011; Khosla 2020); Xinjiang could be given the respect and autonomy promised by its designation as an ‘autonomous’ region; and minorities in both countries could be treated more as citizens and less as subjects, an outcome fully compatible with versions of nationalism. But in neither country do such changes appear likely in the short to medium terms. Instead, they both seem committed to standardizing their

9 For categories of war causation: Suganami (1996).
10 The journey from budding fascism to flowering fascism is not inevitable. The KMT, in Taiwan, eventually abandoned its fascist roots and embraced democracy; other such parties might do likewise in the future.
Homogenizing nationalists, budding fascists, and truculent... ‘decks of cards,’ consequences be damned. To this increasingly poisoned chalice, it is time to add American Exceptionalism.

**America: truculent exceptionalism**

The species of nationalism predominant in the contemporary USA is not driven by ethnicity, religion, or culture.\(^{11}\) It is instead tied to the identity and ideology of the nation’s elite (see Löfflmann 2020). Arguably the best diagnosis of the psyche of this elite remains that offered by George Kennan, a man ‘respected by many but followed by few’ (Lukacs 2007, p. 3). Kennan believed that they were united in a ‘legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems’ that understood international relations to be constituted not by ‘awkward conflicts of national interest’ that ought to be resolved in the manner ‘least unsettling to the stability of international life,’ but by legal questions subject to juridical resolution and moral questions demanding of judgment and closure. America’s standard for international morality, Kennan (2012, pp. 101–109; 142) explained, was ‘the extent to which’ other nations ‘contrive to be like ourselves.’ The ‘ourselves’ refers less to America as it really is (see Jouet 2017; Page and Gilens 2017), but instead the nation as the exemplar of pure principles of political morality—the ‘city on a hill’ (see Gamble 2012).

If Kennan’s construction appears unduly abstract, consider the following situation. As the Korean War escalated, Kennan believed admitting the PRC to the United Nations, including the Security Council, would better position the USA for a successful negotiated settlement to the war. The suggestion enraged John Foster Dulles, who was a very fair representative of America’s legalist-moralist tradition (Lukacs 2007, pp. 109–112). In fact, US diplomats in 1950 had proposed that India should replace China’s position, an offer roundly rejected by Nehru, who believed that ‘shutting out the established government because it was communist’ would exacerbate world disorder. Nehru believed international politics should be about settling disputes, not ‘making deliberate attempts to annoy’ adversaries (Roy 2018, p. 10), and that this required recognizing reality even when it was uncomfortable:

> The fact of China is patent enough and not to recognize it was and is a fundamental breach. . . . The result is that a country as tremendous as China has been treated as though it did not exist and a small island off the coast of China is accepted as representing China. . . . The non-recognition of realities naturally leads to artificial policies programs [sic] and that is exactly what is happening. (Agravâla 2019, p. 125)

Nehru’s attitude was very close to Kennan’s; Dulles, in contrast, entertained the illusion that the PRC was a ‘passing phase’ and in time the Nationalists in Taiwan would truly govern ‘China’ (Chang 2015, p. 204). India, Britain (which had never

\(^{11}\) Attempts to build a nationalist movement along these lines have recently been attempted by Steve Bannon, and Donald Trump certainly embraced a populist (anti-elitist) form of nationalism based on a myth of ‘the people.’ Such attempts have overall not succeeded because the USA is a deeply divided nation, on the verge perhaps of really being multiple nations governed by one state.
broken diplomatic relations with the PRC) and France (which recognized it in 1964) knew better. The late diplomatic historian Nancy Bernkopf Tucker has argued that around the time of the Bandung Conference (1955) there may have been an opportunity for the USA and PRC to normalize relations, but that it was missed because Dulles would not talk with Zhou Enlai, and in consequence Mao decided the USA was an implacable foe and further radicalized his revolutionary agenda (Lukacs 2010, p. 176; Tucker 2012, chap. 6). The point is simply that the legalist-moralist worldview tends to perpetuate rivalry and endanger world order under the banner and pretense of righteousness (Hendrickson 2020a). As Lukacs has observed, ideas pushed to extremes degenerate into their opposites (Lukacs 2010, p. 239): law and morality transition surprisingly easily to lawless domination and immoral empire, what Partha Chatterjee (2017) calls the ‘imperial prerogative.’

The chief contemporary difficulty of American exceptionalism is that the nation’s elite are unable and unwilling to surrender the position of global lawgiver, judge, jury, and executioner (Gray 2004, p. 23), which at their bidding the USA assumed after the end of the Cold War under the guise of a ‘New World Order.’ This order worked tolerably well and was certainly better than many alternatives (McKinney and Butts 2019). But the power distribution that made this order possible no longer exists. Even so, the majority of the Washington elite have not adjusted their ambitions (Layne 2017; Porter 2018; Hendrickson 2020b; Johnson and Foster 2020). This inability to adjust remains true regardless of which political party holds power: the Washington elite principally agree on ends while disagreeing merely on means (Walt 2018b). Indeed, one salutary effect of the Trump Administration’s pugilistic rhetoric was that it unveiled truths believed by all corners of the elite but usually disguised by the insipid qualifiers of Liberal IR theory. When President Trump declared that “America will not be #2 anywhere!” he expressed a view that the Washington elite has embraced for two generations: supremacy is the name of the game (Layne 2006; Leffler and Legro 2008; Anonymous 2021). This is why China’s rise is such a ‘challenge.’

‘The general feeling in China is that the USA does not want China to stand up as a global power,’ Wang Jisi, China’s most distinguished IR scholar, has observed (Medeiros et al. 2020). In the past, such sentiments would have been refuted by official US rhetoric even if not US actions. During the Trump Administration, official rhetoric was more honest. As then-Secretary of State Pompeo explained: ‘I don’t want the future to be shaped by the CCP, and I would wager no one on this call wants that either’ (Fromer 2020). This is not a ‘gotcha’ quote, but expresses the consistent message that China needs to be kept ‘in its proper place’ (Pompeo 2019b). Shaping the future is a form of power. It was precisely this power the USA attempted to deny China in the 1950s through diplomatic non-recognition and exclusion from the United Nations. Nehru understood this at the time: ‘Can anyone deny China at the present moment the right of a Great Power, from the point of view of strength and power, to mould events…and shape her destiny or round about her? She is a Great Power, regardless of whether you like or dislike it’ (Roy 2018, p. 5).

12 https://twitter.com/TeamTrump/status/1266847970424586240 (05/30/2020).
That this remains the heart of the matter today, as it was seventy years ago, illustrates a remarkable consistency in American foreign policy.\textsuperscript{13} The very fact that no significant corner of the foreign policy establishment contested Pompeo’s formulation reveals a complicity of silence. Of course, there was an interim period from the 1970s through the 2000s when the American elite decided it served the nation’s interests to treat China as a Great Power. But this era is now over (Scobell 2020; Wu 2020) and anti-Communism, as seen in the election ads run in 2020 and the mileage the Covid-19-as-a-Chinese-conspiracy theory received, has been reactivated by the elite as a legitimizing device.

Again, Lukacs has insights for us here. America’s new China consensus was not the result of the ‘popularity’ of the idea but the ‘publicity’ the issue has received. In American history, Lukacs (2010, pp. 149–150) once observed, ‘hard minorities’ manipulate and stimulate ‘soft majorities.’ The fault lay not in the ‘tyranny of public opinion’ but ‘the frequent and inauthentic stimulation of public opinion.’ On its own, the Washington elite would have had a hard time coaxing the American people to believe China’s rise as a great power posed an existential threat—after all, in many ways China is simply returning to her historical role in Asia (see Kang 2012). However, contemporary China has lent a hand in this regard by its techno-totalitarian policies in Xinjiang and its jerking of Hong Kong’s leash back toward the national identity of the mainland. These policies—despite being consistent with the logic not foremost of Communism but of nationalism—have generated an ideal evil empire that activates America’s Exceptionalist duty to propagate and enforce law and morality.

With respect to China, this nerve was initially stimulated by the Tiananmen massacre, but because China remained relatively backward militarily and economically at the time, that event alone was insufficient to derail a normalized relationship. Today, the globe’s formerly hegemonic elite sees a world in which China is seeking to mold events and shape her destiny, and this time there is little hope that China will become an Oriental America. In this environment, Orwell’s ‘resemblances between similar sets of facts’ (such as responses to the pressures of modernity or the strong parallels between Chinese and Indian nationalism) completely disappear: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is instead treated as the idiographic source of China’s misguided actions and internal ills.

In a world where every discernable exertion of Chinese influence is explained with reference to ‘a bankrupt totalitarian ideology’ (Pompeo 2020) and evaluated according to the framework of ‘victories, defeats, triumphs, and humiliations’ (Orwell 1945), peaceful coexistence in the Indo-Pacific is impossible. Mike Pompeo and Edward Luttwak, to their credit, have clearly articulated this (Pompeo 2019a; Luttwak 2020). The only option other than open warfare that seemingly remains is Cold War (Khong 2019; Zhao 2019; Goldstein 2020; Yang 2020). This ‘solution,’ however, is not nearly as cheery as it is oft made out to be. Fourteen million people died, indirectly or directly, as a result of the previous Cold War (Chamberlin

\textsuperscript{13} Different IR approaches (Neorealistic, Geopolitical, and Liberal) converge with this objective. For examples: Mearsheimer (2014), Auslin (2016), Green (2017), Walt (2018a), Wu (2018).
On numerous occasions, the Cold War almost ended in nuclear holocaust (Chang and He 1993; Pelopidas 2017; Downing 2018). Statistical analysis indicates that Great Power war was as much avoided by chance as contrivance (Braumoller 2019). You can only play Russian Roulette so many times. As nationalism with Chinese characteristics clashes with American exceptionalism, the Indo-Pacific will, eventually, cease to be characterized by a period of long peace (Kivimäki 2016).

With this dire prediction in mind, the essay’s final section will consider how the three clashing nationalisms of the Great Powers of the Indo-Pacific might be restrained and redirected.

**Whither the great powers of the Indo-Pacific?**

Tolerance is the virtue of coexisting in a civil manner with those with whom we have fundamental disagreements. This virtue developed by necessity as an alternative to the religious wars of seventeenth-century Europe. As the sociologist John Hall explains:

> In a condition of continuing stalemate, in which neither side was capable of outright victory, it suddenly began to make sense, as it had to those divided by religion in early modern Europe, to try to live together—the successful accomplishment of which then fostered a culture of civility. (Hall 2013, p. 32)

Today, if they are to avoid the deleterious consequences of nationalism, internally and externally, China, India, and the USA must rediscover the principle of civility. Rediscover is the correct formulation, for all three states have rich traditions on which they might draw: China, the relative pluralism of the Qing or more inclusive traditions from the Nationalist and (initial) Communist eras; India, the cosmopolitan and diverse world system of its imperial past placed alongside the inclusive thought of Nehru and other Indian nationalists; and the USA, its tradition of *shining as a city on a hill* rather than ‘seeking monsters to destroy’ (Garrity 2009). Civility does not require meekly tolerating anything. But when it comes to political reasoning, as Montesquieu argued in the 1720s, self-righteous proclamations that ‘persuade everyone and affect no one’ are a dead end, something particularly true in relations between Great Powers. Instead, Montesquieu recommended the ‘circuitous route’ that demonstrates ‘how little utility’ an immoral policy will produce (Callanan 2011, p. 141). Recent work in social psychology supports this approach to persuasion (Snyder 2019).

So far, the rediscovery of civility does not appear to be on the cards. China and India, in their respective quests for cultural homogenization, both seem intent on manufacturing Jihadists and Maoists. The USA is in the process of leaving its own negative-sum game in the Middle East, but only—apparently—to take up a new cross of ‘extreme’ Great Power competition (Macias 2021). Intolerance can probably ‘succeed’ domestically in China since minorities make up a tiny part (relatively speaking) of the population and the state is competent and strong. In contrast, intolerance seems doomed to fail in India, where minorities constitute a sizable part of the population and the state is incompetent and weak. But the Chinese should bring
to mind a weather-worn maxim: ‘nothing fails like success’ (see McKinney 2018). ‘Success’ in China’s campaign for cultural and national unity makes failure at the level of international politics much more likely by (indirectly) fashioning the USA into an existential enemy (see Harris 2021). And as for India, failure in the form of domestic unrest and violence incentivizes diversionary war, particularly with Pakistan but possibly as part of a more general Indo-Pacific anti-China pact that might hurl a coalition into joint conflict with China. ‘Success’ in such a war, from the perspective of India and the USA, would again promise only failure in the long-term. A defeated and humiliated China would almost certainly become not the liberal democracy of Washington’s fantasies but a totalitarian war-state intent on revenge à la Hitler’s Germany of the 1930s. Kennan (2012, p. 136) warned about the tendency to see ‘victory’ as a solution long ago; the warning has been all but forgotten.

The tragedy of the situation is that the true enemy of China is not Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, or Americans but corruption, economic instability, and societal dissatisfaction; the true enemy of India is not Muslims, secularists, or Chinese but poverty, inequality, injustice, and intolerance; and the true enemy of the USA is not a rising China but inequality, institutional decay (see Fukuyama 2015, pp. 455–548), and incivility. Instead of seeing the disappointing reflection in the mirror, all three societies see principally the failings of others (cf. Rathore and Nandy 2019, p. vii). Consequently, all three are choosing to mobilize against the other instead of uniting against common enemies such as global pandemics, tax havens, economic contraction, global warming, nuclear apocalypse, and a whole collection of known unknowns including a new volcanic eruption on the scale of Tambora in 1815 or a powerful Carrington Event.

Nationalism and nationalists need enmity, for it is their raison d’être. Without implacable enemies, societal unity and renewed cohesion feel impossible. This is not an irrational feeling, but a reflection of social reality. Existential group competition has played a crucial role in evolutionary history, incentivizing cooperation, altruism, and pro-social emotions (shame, love, pride) and making groups more fit to survive (Bowles and Gintis 2011). The tragedy comes in the selection of enmity’s object. By elevating the ‘Uyghur threat,’ the ‘Kashmir problem,’ or ‘China’s rise’ to a place of existential significance, the three Great Powers of the Indo-Pacific are embracing a false consciousness that will at best inebriate, and more likely destroy, those aspects of world order that make peace probable and cooperation possible. For this outcome, the homogenizing nationalists, budding fascists, and truculent exceptionalists will only have themselves to blame.

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