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WASHINGTON'S RETURN TO ASIA: A New Balance of Power?

by *Kit Dawnay*

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The Obama Administration has stated that the US has returned to Asia. An article by Hilary Clinton in the November edition of [Foreign Policy magazine](#) made clear Washington's intentions of focusing on the region. Leon Panetta, the new US Secretary of Defense, reiterated this view on an October visit to important allies such as Japan and South Korea. Finally, in Australia in mid-November US President Barack Obama announced the deployment of 2,500 US Marines to Darwin by 2014. China has reacted cautiously thus far, although the *People's Daily* warned that Australia risks being caught in any "crossfire".

Putting aside unspoken fiscal issues, the US decision suggests that the post-Cold War order is coming to an end. The international system in Pacific Asia has changed since 1945, when the US loomed over a Japan in pieces and a China in ferment. The Maoist revolution and the outbreak of the Korean War transformed Washington's pre-eminence into a balance of power system divided into US and Soviet led camps. However, after 1972 an informal anti-Soviet security alliance between the US and China helped shore up American power in the region in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. (An excellent analysis of that shift came from the pen of international relations theorist [Hedley Bull](#)). The Soviet Union compensated by increasing its Pacific naval capacity prior to collapse in 1991.

China's focus on economic development after the events of Tiananmen Square left the US dominant in East Asia through the 1990s. Beijing was unable or unwilling to challenge the US until about 2001, powerless in its fury at US President Bill Clinton's 1996 decision to deploy two aircraft carrier groups in response to Chinese missile testing in the Taiwan Straits. However, the rapid development of China's economy, largely after its accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001, has changed that dynamic. Trading prowess and the acquisition of huge foreign exchange reserves have swelled China's economic importance, while growing military spending has transformed the People's Liberation Army. If the 2001 EP3 spy plan incident and the

standoff with the USS Impeccable in March 2009 shows anything it is that Beijing has moved away from Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy adage that it must hide its brightness and bide its time. In particular, since the 2008 financial crisis, China appears to have pursued a more assertive foreign policy, with notable developments including increased tensions in the South China Sea and, most recently, Beijing's decision in November 2011 to deploy armed police to northern Thailand. The new US strategy thus seeks to soothe regional concerns of powerlessness in the face of rising Chinese might.

In some ways, then, the US steps may presage moves away from US preponderance towards a more effective balance of power in East Asia. A classic view of a balance of power system is one where each power recognises that other players have rights in certain spheres of interest. The core principle underpinning this approach is one of "co-existence". The arrangements in Europe between powers such as Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia between 1815 and the 1860s would constitute such a system, as might the more hostile division of Europe into pro-US and pro-Soviet camps between 1945 and 1989.

Regional developments appear to support this assertion. One reason behind the Darwin deployment is that Chinese over-the-horizon capabilities, such as its DF-21D missiles and the J-20 stealth fighter, will have the range to hit nearby US facilities. But not those in Australia. The US troops there may also come from those already in South Korea and Japan, amounting to a restructuring rather than an expansion of regional forces. Accordingly, the new policy may amount to de facto recognition of China's growing clout and even its right to exert influence in its near abroad. The move could thus contribute to a division of influence in Asia between a pro-US camp comprising maritime states such as Australia, perhaps India, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea, and a pro-Chinese camp composed of continental states such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, North Korea and Pakistan. In a positive reading, this scenario could evolve into a relatively amicable "concert of Asia" underpinned by strong trading links. In a more confrontational scenario, it could lead to

contest and efforts at containment, although the importance of the US-China trading relationship may for a time prevent the evolution of a new Cold War in Asia.

However, it is not yet clear that Washington is willing to settle for a regional balance of power based on principles of "coexistence". First, the Pentagon is developing an Air-Sea Battle Concept which would seek to counter Chinese efforts to deny US forces regional access. This doctrine is notably assertive, since it would involve strikes on weapons systems based in mainland China, such as missile sites. It is worth mentioning in this context that one source of friction between Moscow and Washington in the early Cold War was the US ability to deploy nuclear weapons. In part, this capability prompted the Soviet Union to retain control in Eastern Europe so as to make it harder for US bombers to reach Moscow. China's planners may take a comparable view of the Air-Sea Battle Concept and alter policy accordingly. Second, a US presence in Australia would permit easy access to both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, thus facilitating the imposition of a maritime blockade on China. Turning again to history, it was Japan's fear of blockade which prompted the invasion of South East Asia in an Air-Sea Battle Concept which would seek to counter Chinese efforts to deny US forces regional access. This doctrine is notably assertive, since it would involve strikes on weapons systems based in mainland China, such as missile sites. It is worth mentioning in this context that one source of friction between Moscow and Washington in the early Cold War was the US ability to deploy nuclear weapons. In part, this capability prompted the Soviet Union to retain control in Eastern Europe so as to make it harder for US bombers to reach Moscow. China's planners may take a comparable view of the Air-Sea Battle Concept and alter policy accordingly. Second, a US presence in Australia would permit easy access to both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, thus facilitating the imposition of a maritime blockade on China. Turning again to history, it was Japan's fear of blockade that prompted the invasion of South East Asia in 1941. China, too, would react to any such threat. Third, the new strategy appears to include US efforts to expand influence on China's periphery, both

in states that have a fraught relationship with China, such as Vietnam, and perhaps now in client states such as Myanmar. Arguably, one reason for Cold War stability in Europe was US unwillingness to engage in “rollback” of Soviet influence in Germany in 1953 or Hungary in 1956. Should the US seek to push back Chinese influence in Myanmar or elsewhere, Beijing may react badly. And finally, in terms of economic restraints, success in implementing the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a new regional trade pact, might make bilateral trade with China less of an inhibition to US strategy.

The new order is emerging, then. Australia has decided to move closer to the US despite its trading reliance on China. Other states, such as Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, will seek to hedge, but may in time have to choose one or another side. As such, places

such as Thailand, which is a US treaty partner but could soon have Chinese armed police operating on its territory, will be important barometers for regional relations. For its part, the US must find a balance between soothing its allies’ fears and not stoking perceptions of containment or even rollback in Beijing. That will prove difficult, though, and so the prospects of strategic competition between China and America are rising.

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THE TRAGEDY OF PAKISTAN

by Faisal Devji

Pakistan’s politics is nothing if not murky. Over the last few weeks rumours have been spreading that the army sees the American war of words over Iran’s atomic ambitions as a preamble to the elimination of Pakistan’s own nuclear assets. Apparently terrified at this possibility, the military is moving warheads around the country and through large cities like Karachi in open trucks to prevent radar surveillance. This level of fear, of course, has only become possible because the army is said to distrust Pakistan’s civilian government, which is suspected of wanting to prevent another coup by selling its own military secrets to the Americans and thus gaining their support. Wary of trying to remove the government in the way it has done so many times in the past, the military is in the meantime supposed to be trying to discredit it by supporting a populist movement, led by the cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, that is critical of the government’s oppressive and corrupt policies.

For its part the civilian government is understood to desire the humbling of Pakistan’s powerful army not only in order to

assume power in its own right, but also because it wishes to repair relations with India and link its faltering economy to that of its much more successful neighbour’s. Pakistan’s recent granting of Most Favoured Nation status to India is certainly a move in this direction, but rumours of a larger deal persist, one that would apparently hand over Afghanistan to the Indians as part of their sphere of influence, while at the same time taking advantage of the army’s removal from power to root out the terrorist outfits that threaten her neighbour. We know that India has large financial and infrastructural investments in the country. It plans to build a railway from Afghanistan down to Iran’s Persian Gulf coast, one designed to bypass Pakistan and shift the natural resources its burgeoning economy needs through Iran and thence by sea to Gujarat for distribution across the country.

Interesting about this scenario is that it entirely ignores the disputed region of Kashmir, which supposedly constitutes the most serious bone of contention between the two countries. It is likely that Kashmir has by now become a purely symbolic issue. It has been dwarfed by the geopolitics of the post-Cold War period, and supplanted by Afghanistan as effectively the new Indo-Pakistani border, to say nothing of the frontier

that India must hold against Chinese economic and political influence in the region. And indeed while the periodic protests and violence in India's share of Kashmir might be secessionist, they can no longer be seen as pro-Pakistan in character. Indian Muslims in general seem to have realized that Pakistan's actions have always imperilled rather than protected them. Pakistan, in other words, has ceased to provide a model for Muslim politics or life to anybody outside the country, some disgruntled migrants and militants apart.

Now all these geopolitical visions might have remained in the realm of speculation and fantasy, if Pakistan's ambassador to the US, Hussain Haqqani, had not been recalled recently and forced to resign following allegations that he had approached Admiral Mike Mullen with a plan to prevent another military takeover of the country. This entailed the ambassador casting doubts upon the reliability of his own army in prosecuting the War on Terror, and offering more assistance to the US on behalf of the civilian government. However accurate this now infamous memo, which was published in the Financial Times by a Pakistani-American businessman who has served the two governments as a go-between, it seems to have brought the tension between Pakistan's military and civilian rulers to a head. In the process it suddenly recast the former as the true defenders of Pakistani nationalism and sovereignty.

The two factions of Pakistan's ruling elite have, of course, played this game of musical chairs over several decades, with first one and then the other described as being more subservient to American interests. In fact it is a game that originated in colonial times, when rival political organizations such as the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League vied for British favour in attempts to discredit one another. Reflecting upon this situation, Gandhi had suggested at the time that it was the very presence of a third party in Indian politics, especially one claiming neutrality and disinterest, which resulted in such factional squabbles. What was needed, thought the Mahatma, was a direct relationship between these factions, even if it were to be a violent one, since the third party only prevented them from taking responsibility for their actions. A civil war, maintained Gandhi, was thus more likely to

produce a national consensus than all the third party's efforts to maintain law and order.

In a way, then, it is US efforts at peacemaking that pose the greatest threat to Pakistan's political integrity by preventing that country's various factions from dealing directly with one another—to say nothing of a genuine Indo-Pakistani engagement. This has been the case from the very beginning, when the new state allowed itself to become the staging ground for Cold War conflicts in order to secure international support against its never-ending war with India. What will the army do, incensed by US drone attacks and infringements of Pakistan's sovereignty by unilateral raids like those that eliminated Osama bin Laden in May, or "accidentally" killed some 24 Pakistani soldiers towards the end of November? Is it possible that it will finally break with the Americans and create a truly national politics? Or will the success of the civilian government in reining in the military finally usher in an era of peace and security for the region? Neither of these futures is likely so long as Pakistan's politics remains internationalised.

Paradoxical though it may seem, we should perhaps follow Gandhi in thinking that war, and not some uneasy peace determined by a third party, holds a greater potential for Pakistan's national integrity and even salvation. Will it be a civil war that forces the country's various factions to engage one another directly, a war with India that finally clarifies the disputes among these neighbours as it has done in the past, or if not a hopeless war against the US then at least its expulsion from Pakistan? None of these options seem possible given the region's nuclearized geopolitics. And so Pakistan's tragedy is not that it might descend at any moment into war, but rather that it is unable to wage such a war any longer. All that is possible is internecine and cross-border violence that never assumes either the character or aims of a war. For compared to this sort of violence, Pakistan's wars with India (though not its civil war of 1971) have been exemplary in their restrained and lawful conduct, as well as in their positive political results as far as bilateral relations were concerned. If Pakistan does collapse into anarchy, it will be due to her failure to wage war, an incapacity made possible not by US military intervention so much as its insistence

on stability, nation-building and law and order as a third party representing the international community.

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THE SURVIVAL OF THE EU

by *Stephen Saideman*

I have long been a confirmed Euro-skeptic. No, I am not an expert on the European Union, but I have frequently stumbled across the EU while studying various issues, such as Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the dynamics of Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s, and so on. Each time I ran across the EU in my work, I could not help but scoff at the idea of a single foreign policy. I would admit that the EU could coordinate and act as one on economic policy, but when it came to security issues, I would just snark at the thought of the EU as a unitary actor. Of course, now, with the deep financial crisis, even the EU's ability to act coherently on economic issues is in doubt. Let me revisit the past efforts at a single European effort and then suggest what really matters. Hint: distinct interests and domestic politics.

When Yugoslavia began to fall apart, the European Community/Union saw this as a chance to demonstrate the ability to be a key actor in international relations. Attempts to forestall or to end the violence failed. Germany proved that post-unification and post-Cold War meant that it would assert its preferences, such as early recognition of Croatia and Slovenia. Sure, the EU developed a process to evaluate which former chunks of Yugoslavia were most suited for recognition, Slovenia and Macedonia, but Germany and Greece had other criteria. Ironic that the first big Euro-effort failed when these two countries cooperated to upset the process; ironic, too, now that the end of the Euro may be shaped by conflicts between the two.

The EU was able to manage the process of

enlargement with relatively little conflict among the existing membership. All of the applicants from Europe got in despite having to do onerous paperwork and performing at least lip service to eligibility criteria. But, as we have been reminded with the Greece crisis, those criteria did not really matter. The conditions that were supposed to be necessary for membership only served as additional pages of paperwork. After all, if good neighborly relations and good treatment of minorities were necessary conditions for getting into the EU in the 2000s, it is pretty hard to explain Cyprus' entry. But Greece cared a great deal about Cyprus, so nobody else go in the way. That is cooperation, but it is not really a coherent policy since espoused standards were largely ignored.

Divisions over the invasion of Iraq in 2003 between "old" and "new" Europe with the UK and Spain on the side of new Europe (Rumsfeld never made any sense, really) made a European position impossible. Disputes over the conflict made a great deal of sense since, well, it was a pretty bad idea executed as ineptly as possible. However, the relatively risk-free and inexpensive Libyan operation of this past year also showed deep divides, Germany opting entirely out of the effort.

The point here is that countries have national interests that regularly trump supra-national interests. This should not be all that surprising, but we got sucked into making the mistake of thinking of the EU as a single actor. If it were so, maximizing its interests, would Greece ever have been admitted into the Euro zone?

Instead, despite the hoopla of supra-nationalism, we must remember that all politics is local because people vote on the issues that affect them most. This is an iron

law of politics, and it's just as relevant when it comes to the European Union. People seem shocked that Europe is not getting its act together. The problem is that Europe as a single political entity does not exist. Sure, there are elections for the European parliament, but the key decisions are still made by those with subnational electoral districts and constituencies. British leaders have to play to British audiences, French leaders have to appeal to the French, German politicians have to gain the support of Germans in Germany, and so on. This is obvious, of course, but it's also often overlooked. The interests of countries matter far more than the interests of the European Union, and since the costs and benefits of the various efforts to save the Euro vary significantly by country, cooperation will be very hard indeed.

To be fair, institutions do have value. So when they are at risk, some countries with deep investments in them, will willingly shoulder the burdens they entail. The US got involved in Bosnia precisely because NATO allies were at risk (I just interviewed a Canadian general who had been one of fifty-five or so Canadians held hostage by the Bosnian Serbs in 1994). The Alliance was able to hold it together in June 1999 because the stakes included not just the survival of

Kosovo, but the survival of NATO itself as

well. So it is possible that EU members may change their policies and bear some costs precisely because the organization, and the common currency, is at risk.

Still, failure is an option. The pain of the current economic crisis is heavily localised, and that may require leaders to sacrifice loftier political ambitions. As a cynical political scientist who starts with the assumption that politicians want to get into and keep their positions, I am just a bit skeptical. But I have been wrong before. For the sake of my investments and for the sake of this thing we call Europe, I hope I am wrong.

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FOOD SECURITY IN THE GCC

by *Mari Luomi*

Qatar, along with the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, is growing visibly worried about food security. In 2009, the government established a task force to devise a national master plan for food security. This year, Qatar flashed the idea of becoming a regional food industry and investment hub through the establishment of an Agricultural City, which would boost domestic food availability and tourism (sic). Such anxieties seem contradictory, given that Qatar is the world's richest state (on a per capita basis) and has the world's fifth highest diabetes rate. The country is not financially restricted. Nor is there a problem with food

availability. So what's the fuss?

The answer is simple: Qatar imports 90% of its food (and 98% of its rice and wheat). In an anarchic international system of sovereign states, countries that depend to that extent on international markets for a resource as essential as food are entitled to feel a little insecure. In 2010, Russia, the world's second biggest wheat exporter, suffered from droughts and decided to ban the export of grains, sending food prices through the roof.

For the GCC states, including Qatar, however, the wake up call was the 2007-2008 global food price crisis. Rising oil prices, increasing demand for biofuels, and trade restrictions drove up food prices. This made the GCC states realise they had no

consistent policy or strategy to secure their food supply, either in the short or the long term. To make things worse, in Saudi Arabia, these events coincided with a government decision to phase out wheat production by 2016 after it realised that an ambitious food self-sufficiency policy, dating back to the 1980s, had depleted the country's ground water reserves.

The other GCC states had never had an important domestic agricultural industry to begin with. Their import dependency ranges between 27-83% for vegetables, 55-80% for meat and 96-100% for cereals (in 2006). They are classified by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation as suffering from absolute water scarcity. According to the organisation, Kuwait is the worst of the lot, with only 7.6 cubic metres of renewable water resources per capita per year (i.e. 21 litres per day). These figures do not of course include desalination. The GCC states, however, are drawing several times over their natural replenishment rates. As a result, water reserves are becoming saline and depleted. Agriculture, which generally uses groundwater, uses a lion's share of total conventional water use. In Qatar, this share is practically 100%.

The GCC states have the energy resources to desalinate water for municipal use, but with fast growing populations, it would be self-defeating to argue that a significant increase in food self-sufficiency is realistic. Or isn't it?

The Qatari task force (a.k.a. the Qatar National Food Security Programme, or QNFSP), under the patronage of the country's heir apparent, has already announced that by 2023 the country will achieve 70% self-sufficiency in food production. With a current population of 1.7 million and double-digit growth rates (both in terms of economy and demographics), this doesn't sound very realistic. As if this weren't enough, the QNFSP's solution is like no other: Qatar will use solar energy to desalinate the water needed for the increase in agricultural production. So not only will Qatar solve the food problem, but it plans to do it in an environmentally sound way. No data from presumably ongoing economic feasibility studies of this 'silver bullet' solution have been made public, but the QNFSP's announced goal is to double the amount of

Qatari farms (currently in decline), from 1,200 to 3,000. It is not yet clear who or what will take up the challenging task of actually implementing the master plan that the QNFSP is drafting. Given Qatar's natural gas abundance and low incentives to drop domestic user subsidies, I am personally betting low success rates for the proposed technological fix. Solar desalination indeed makes for nice rhetoric in a country that has the questionable honour of having the world's highest greenhouse gas emissions per capita and is otherwise doing relatively little – implementation-wise – to mitigate climate change at home.

Nevertheless, it is good that the GCC states are taking a systematic look at food security. Surrounded by countries where governments are falling due to failed economic policies (and their consequences on food prices), official inattention to price inflation would be self-destructive. Not all GCC citizens are filthy rich, as those familiar with the region know. High food prices also make the GCC states less attractive to low-wage migrant workers. As a reaction to the Arab spring, GCC governments have resorted to mainly two kinds of patch solutions: Kuwait and Bahrain have given cash hand-outs and free food rations to nationals, and (as part of a longer trend) at least the UAE has managed to temporarily freeze the consumer prices of major commodities. The GCC states have also begun to plan and debate the need for longer-term strategic food reserves: Abu Dhabi is planning a 6-month reserve and Saudi businesses have called for a similar one.

But it still isn't enough for the pessimists that security analysts tend to be: markets can't be trusted in extreme worst-case scenarios, there is not enough water to feasibly produce food for the entire population domestically, and policies will only help to a limited extent. What else can be done?

In the past few years, foreign agricultural investments, often referred to in the press as land grabbing and food neo-colonialism, have seen a resurgence in popularity, not only among relatively tiny Arab oil states, but also with major rising Asian economies like China and India. Announced (though not yet heavily implemented) leases, purchases and consequent cultivation on other sovereign

states' lands arguably create more questions and problems than they solve. There is an immediate, practical concern over the long-term security of these farms and plantations. But from the investor country's perspective, the most difficult questions are perhaps the moral ones. Land is in most cases acquired in developing countries, most of which suffer corruption, poverty, human rights violations, malnourishment, and even famine. Nevertheless, the trend is still too recent to evaluate the successes and failures of emerging business "partnerships". At a recent working group meeting on the topic at Georgetown University's Qatar campus, a participant suggested that many of the overseas agro investments, particularly those coming from the smaller GCC states, could well remain empty plots of land, serving more as insurance policies for a rainy day. Or, perhaps better said, for a rainless day.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This was the first in a two-

part series on food security in the Gulf Cooperation Council states. The issues covered in this piece were based in part on conversations held during a two day working group meeting at the Center for International and Regional Studies, at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. The second essay will discuss the linkages of food security and climate change in the Middle East, and particularly GCC.

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POPULISM VS. ALGORITHM

by *Scott Smith*

In 1985, Terry Gilliam released his brilliant film *Brazil*, which explores a future dystopia wherein some key plot elements look and feel, upon reflection, a lot like the present day. The protagonist, Sam Foley, finds himself thrust into a world in which technology doesn't empower, it ensnares. In Foley's world, technology is a weapon, strangling Everyman in a tangle of wires and tubes, replete with a soul-crushing tech support bureaucracy, errors of identity and an ever-watching, lidless eye of surveillance. Unlike Orwell's 1984, *Brazil's* main threat isn't so much a well-honed, lethal government machine, as it is a poorly controlled claptrap Rube Goldberg device driven by institutional dysfunction and apathy. The powers-that-be are equally dangerous and incompetent.

Over a quarter of a century later, we have increasingly seen technology become a key component of social, economic and political disorder, inequality and abuse of power. Surveillance and government oppression are

not new forces—these are sadly timeless—but conflict over the role of technology itself is moving to center stage in debates about equality, freedom, rights and values.

Political protest over the last few years show how technology has become such a pivotal feature. The international antiwar movement stirred up by Wikileaks, Iran's abortive Green Revolution, the Arab Spring, the Tea Party, Anonymous and the Occupy movement have all been running battles of top-down, centralized use of technology for control and suppression, versus bottom-up, distributed use of technology for protection and presence. See the *Wall Street Journal's* sensationalist feature on vendors of surveillance equipment for the cartoon version of the former.

These groups span the political spectrum. One could argue the Tea Party was the most quickly co-opted. The American Right has made very effective use of technology for coordination in the last decade and in doing so got a jump on the progressive left, but technology has become a weapon of choice, and perhaps an equalizer of sorts, though

none of these games has yet been played out entirely.

Both the Tea Party and Occupy are in large part battles against economic inequality brought about or exacerbated by technology—populism versus algorithm, so to speak. The acceleration of economic inequality has been computer-aided. The wealth gap has opened so destructively and so quickly, in part because of the ability of those with capital to very quickly turn it into yet more capital. This, in turn, spawns investment in better algorithms that multiply the effect even further.

The so-called one percent can accelerate beyond the horizon, in other words, and the result is economic, social and political whiplash. Iceland can go from fishing economy to financial hub back to fishing economy in under a decade. Google can go from dorm room to dominance at a similar rate because it is first a hyper-efficient analytics company, second a search and freemail provider.

This current phase is likely to be an attenuated, running battle between people and formulae. A recent McKinsey piece on the emergence of a “second economy,” powered by data rather than physical manufacturing, forecasts this shift as a long-term one. The major Wall Street firms, big banks and credit card companies, Facebook and Google have one important thing in common: they are the early players in the coming era of so-called “Big Data.” Our current economic, political and technological conflicts center around the amassing of enormous amounts of data, which fuel computer perceptions and projections for how the real world is behaving. The TSA, the PRC, American Express, Wal-Mart, Bank of America—the list of organizations converting human behavior and needs into data points for modeling, upselling or interdiction continues to grow. The weight of all this analysis, the codification and commodification of daily life, continuously tracking attitudes and beliefs, actions and interactions, is in part what drives the discontented onto the streets. We’ve only just begun to see the society-wide impacts of algorithms gone wild. Data spillages, robo-

signing, and flash crashes are just the start.

Don’t assume the opposition is embracing old-fashioned Luddism, though. The populist side is just as pro-technology, fed by a new generation as enamoured of all things data as its predecessors. Just look to the rise of the Pirate Party in Northern Europe as a leading indicator. Born just five years ago, after a popular Swedish torrent site found itself in a legal dispute over intellectual property and technology, the Pirate Party has emerged as an international political movement, winning seats in several European legislatures including the European Parliament. It also holds seats on municipal councils in a handful of cities, and broke 10% in national polling at the end of October in Germany, landing the group in fourth place nationally among German political parties. At the beginning of this year, a Pirate Party member even took an appointment in the Tunisian government. A central plank in the Pirate Party agenda is the freedom to respect different values regarding how technology should be used.

Similarly aligned social and economic values have turned the Pirate Party’s views into a broader ideological platform, and even created a place for it as a potential power-broker in national politics. Considering the issues the German government is dealing with at the moment — primarily the technology-fueled banking crisis — this is an important moment. Rick Falkvinge, founder of the Swedish Pirate Party, described the movement this way: “We are not just a party for the free exchange of TICKS [tools, ideas, culture, knowledge, and sentiments]. We are a lifestyle party for the entire younger generation, starting somewhere at 35-40 years of age. This lifestyle—digital natives, as some have called it, or the connected generation, which I prefer—is being actively condemned and demonized by the old parties.” These old parties, he claims, are using their position to turn “free market mechanisms into mercantilism and corruption.”

Their position, which is not completely dissimilar to that of the Occupy movement, marks an important turning point in the emergence of a strain of populism that isn’t just social, political, economic, or environmental. It is technological as well. In

effect, it argues something like this: "you gave us the cheap, accessible tools, now we will use them." It embraces the hack as well as the vote, shifting away from decades of harmful, stagnant sameness among political movements, to political strategies that can evolve and flow in unpredictable ways—symmetry to asymmetry.

Several decades of political positioning among conservatives have been based on the premise that overgrown government is the biggest potential threat to the individual. What the corporatist right and increasingly corporate-captured left have failed to see coming was the extent to which a citizenry would object to being parsed, sorted, or, in *Brazil*-like fashion, deleted from their own lives. The new strains of techno-libertarianism are less about freedom from responsibility than they are about equalisation and democratisation of access.

Generational changes in political power and action are driving an interesting shift in

libertarianism. It has been a right-leaning philosophy flavored by a desire to use one's property free from government dictat. It is becoming more technologically progressive, for which a key desire is to use digital tools free from both government and corporate control. Free, in other words, to boot up wherever one wants. It's a shift decades in the making. Occupy may be the first time its digital face fuses with its physical one.

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