

1923

Southern Rhodesia, today called Zimbabwe, is annexed by the United Kingdom.

1974

Juventude Africana **Amílcar Cabral** is founded in Guinea-Bissau.

1977

South African anti-apartheid activist **Steve Biko** dies in police custody.



2011

The National **September 11 Memorial & Museum** in New York City opens to the public.

nowhere to go

sive for the mother whose feet bled searching for news of her son in the dungeons of Syria's security services. Many Syrians I spoke to often wondered why the world did nothing to help them, why the West — a substitute term for the United States — stopped at offering mere words, why every act of horror evoked mere outrage and posturing at the United Nations Security Council.

Americans often have little awareness of just how pervasive their country and way of life is in the Middle East. An activist in Raqqa described to me living under the Islamic State rule by referencing the American television series "The Blacklist" to explain how humans adapt to criminality.

Many lives have been changed, upended or destroyed by the direct or indirect reach of the United States, whether they were Yazidis saved by the United States' intervention in Iraq, or were buried under the rubble by the American-led coalition's airstrikes in Mosul and Raqqa.

The story many Americans believe in and propagate about their country is one molded in the Cold War ethos of spreading liberalism and freedom, a story that people in desperate straits sometimes clung to. After the 2013 chemical attack by Assad's regime in Syria, which killed over 1,000 civilians, many

Idlib has turned into a microcosm where all the regional and international power brokers have claimed a stake, where all the forces that gave rise to and were birthed by Syria's traumatic uprising are struggling in a catastrophic battle whose price, as usual, will be paid for by innocent civilians.

Syrians hoped the United States would enforce President Barack Obama's red line. Even later, in 2016, Aleppo vainly waited for American help that never came.

The prolongation of the war led to the rise of extremist groups the United States is now fighting in Syria. When Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, came under siege this year, the Syrians were no longer waiting for the world to help.

The narrative of America's liberalizing fiction is a convenient one because the United States not only accepted the prevalence of totalitarian dictators in the region and elsewhere, but also abetted and fostered them in the pursuit of its interests. I did not know what to say to the Syrians who wrote to me every day while under siege, hoping that interven-

tion by a benevolent force would put an end to their suffering.

The United States intervened in Syria to protect its "national security" interests, not to protect civilians. America intervened and killed a lot of civilians in its single-minded pursuit of the Islamic State terror group, a symptom of the region's ailments, rather than its cause. Red lines were breached, the perfunctory calls for the dictator to step down were made, and the thirst for moral outrage was quenched, as people continued to die.

Half a million people died, and the only justice they can hope for is in the afterlife, when the scales, they believe, will be balanced.

I repeatedly find myself thinking of the graveyard near Yusef's home in Khan Sheikhun, where I stood after speaking with him, staring at the freshly dug graves of his wife and children, at the cinnamon soil. Those graves remain a testament to the fiction of the international community and international law.

Arab fairy tales start with a line: "Kan ya ma kan." "It was, or it wasn't." The myth is yours to believe in or to deny.

"Kan ya ma kan," there was an international community.

"Kan ya ma kan," there were values of justice and decency.

(Kareem Shaheen is a former Middle East correspondent for The Guardian.)

the revolution?

ts, the more vulnerable it may be

(960-1279). Naito Konan, a prominent Japanese Sinologist, noted in the 1910s and 1920s that before the enlightened autocracy of the Song era, China had for many decades been ruled by an informally hereditary aristocracy whose emperors also filled top government posts and controlled the civil service examinations. The emperors created a closed, self-serving and rapacious elite — until the entire system suddenly collapsed.

Naito noted that for decades the dynasties remained stable even as emperors were often overthrown by other aristocrats. It was another historian, Nicolas Tackett, who recently explained why the aristocracy was finally done in, and why so quickly. After examining hundreds of epitaphs on graves from the ninth century, he concluded that the Tang empire was brought down by Huang Chao, a disgruntled salt-merchant-turned-rebel, who tapped popular discontent to wage a rebellion that swiftly turned into a blood bath — a class genocide that physically annihilated the entire medieval aristocratic class.

This is a precedent that should worry China's leaders today.

Xi's camp may seem powerful, but his base is quite small: The Red Aristocrats number only about 40,000 people, according to one

If Xi stays in power for more than two five-year terms, the ascendancy of the Red Aristocrats may become unstoppable. What then? Some lament that China under Xi is returning ideologically to the Maoist era. But if the Red Aristocracy keeps rising, China's politics may regress all the way back to medieval times.

of them. And within his camp lurk dangerous challengers. Xi came to power as a compromise candidate. A plot to snatch the CCP's leadership by another, charismatic, Red Aristocrat — Bo Xilai — was foiled just months before Xi took the party's helm in late 2012. (Bo was then sentenced to life imprisonment for corruption.) There have been rumors — and sometimes official claims — of attempted coups, including just last year.

As the elite behind Xi congeals into a political aristocracy, it is also overseeing the closing down of Chinese society, through restrictions on the internet, social profiling and extensive surveillance, or the extraordinary repres-

sion of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang province. Corruption remains rampant, and protests and other public expressions of popular discontent continue despite more severe crackdowns.

If in the years ahead Xi's Red Aristocrats become even more entrenched and social mobility is further obstructed by vested interests, economic exploitation will intensify, fueling class differences. As the Plebeians head toward defeat, strife among powerful oligarchs within the Red Aristocracy will take center stage.

Whether a modern-day Huang Chao would then appear — and would know how to galvanize a disgruntled population into rising up — no one can tell, of course. But some people seem to worry about the possibility.

In 2012, Wang Qishan, a confidante of Xi's and the head of his anti-corruption effort at the time, called on senior CCP members to read Alexis de Tocqueville's "The Old Regime and the Revolution," about the popular uprising that toppled the monarchy in France in 1789. Mentioning Huang probably would have struck too close to home.

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TOP
4
TWEETS

01



I admire Apple most for their focus. They don't have a venture arm. They don't run incubators or accelerators. They don't want to host you. They focus on what they do best: making sure you have to replace all your accessories and connectors each time you buy a new Apple product.

@bigyahu

02



On this, the most solemn of anniversaries, may we never forget the events of 9/11 or the brave men and women who were lost. And may we also be reminded that we responded to this tragedy as Americans, regardless of our subtle differences.

@ChiefJacksonKPD

03



Over the years, I've come to think of the DC/Silicon Valley difference like this: The DC mindset is shaped by watching solvable problems prove impossible to solve. The Silicon Valley mindset is shaped by watching impossible problems prove possible to solve.

@ezraklein

04



Bitcoiners 2009: central banks are evil, be your own sovereign bank, something something coming collapse of filthy statist bucks Bitcoiners 2018: we just got regulatory approval for multiple USD-backed stablecoins and are also pushing for several Bitcoin ETFs to be approved

@ofnumbers

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

Wide Angle

Personal morality of political leaders: Does it matter?



JOEL INDRUPATI

"How can we believe someone who takes an oath of office but can't keep an oath of fidelity?" This angry tweet from a viewer was scrolling across the screen, as I watched a TV panel discussing the Boris Johnson scandal.

Incensed at the news that Boris Johnson, the former Foreign Secretary of UK and former Mayor of London, is divorcing his wife of 25 years, amidst accusations of his cheating, many viewers expressed great anger and disdain.

How can he, who must've made his wedding vows to be faithful 'till death us do part', suddenly leave his wife like this? Where is fidelity in the marriage?

But then, many other viewers felt differently too. They said this was no big deal. Why should his personal life be allowed to affect his political career? His wife and children are of little consequence, when it comes to his own political achievements and aspirations.

I was actually watching 'CNN Talk with Max Foster' — even though on this particular occasion it was being hosted and moderated by the beautiful Bianca Nabilo. The panel discussion was titled, 'Boris Johnson Scandal: Does Personal Morality matter in Modern Politics?'

Like someone on the panel had said, Boris Johnson is a brand, a persona, which he has been building for years. So, who knows, it could even help him fight Theresa May as a possible future Prime Minister of UK.

"Not getting along with your wife has nothing to do with a lack of morality", said a viewer's comment on screen.

Another commentator gave his or her version of moral code: "Extra marital affairs are not immoral, but lying about them, is!"

I found this thought-provoking. This 'perceptive' commentator obviously believes that 'lying about an affair' is immoral. But an 'extra marital affair' is itself not immoral.

We are living in a world where 'morality' is carelessly assumed, if not completely misunderstood. The definition of 'morals' has become 'relative' in the light of our fast diminishing beliefs in - if not in the complete absence of - 'absolutes'.

Absolute moral values have often come to us from religious texts. And once we negate these values, citing great societal changes, 'relativism' increases. And 'relativism' can often twist thoughts in any way to justify our actions.

Whether we believe that eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, by Adam and Eve, has brought in the moral dimension to human beings, or whether we believe that all of us have an innate collective conscience that defines morality, we will always be debating specific actions.

Especially, the actions of those in power. Because, they indirectly influence the direction of our own personal moral compasses.

"Immorality of leaders adds glamour to politics!" This other comment shocked me.

By now, readers must have realized, I was paying more attention to viewers' comments appearing on screen, than to the words of the panellists.

I'd realized that even though the intelligentsia was at the table, the real world was out there. And its members were expressing thoughts of their own, on morality, shaped by whatever they had been exposed to — from parents, family, school, movies, books and their own personal experiences.

On 'personal morality', the viewers were sparring better than the panellists as they compared Boris Johnson with Trump, Clinton, and Kennedy in the USA and with John Major, Macmillan and Churchill in the UK.

If immorality does give glamour to politics, is it then 'an advantageous defect' to have?

Like someone on the panel had said, Boris Johnson is a brand, a persona, which he has been building for years. So, who knows, it could even help him fight Theresa May as a possible future Prime Minister of UK.

It doesn't really matter that he'd once said, "My chances of being PM are about as good as the chances of finding Elvis on Mars, or my being reincarnated as an olive".