

## OPINION

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## END YEMEN'S AGONY

The United States, Britain and other enablers of the Saudi campaign can and must demand an immediate halt to the carnage.

Though much remains clouded in the murder of the Saudi journalist-in-exile Jamal Khashoggi, this much is clear: Saudi Arabia's rulers are ruthless and not to be trusted or believed. It is now time to recognize those realities in the kingdom's unspeakably cruel war in Yemen. The Trump administration has been prodded into demanding a cease-fire, but that seems only to have provoked new fighting. The United States, Britain and other enablers of the Saudi campaign can and must demand an immediate halt to the carnage.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, revealed his true face in his lies about how Mr. Khashoggi met his end, though it was his thugs who strangled and dismembered the loyalist-turned-critic in their Istanbul consulate.

Hard on the furor over that murder, The Times published heart-rending reporting and photography by Declan Walsh and Tyler Hicks from the killing fields of Yemen, a war that Prince Mohammed has waged with murderous bombing raids using weapons largely provided by the United States. The wide eyes of a starving little girl became the face of a tribal and sectarian struggle that has rendered the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country into a humanitarian nightmare. Shortly after her picture was taken, 7-year-old Amal Hussain died, just as innumerable other Yemeni children have died and continue to die.

Trump administration officials finally seem to have understood the horror and pointlessness of the war, in which the United States is deeply entangled by the ordnance, targeting and refueling it provides the Saudi-led coalition. Last week, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis urged all sides to stop the killing and to set a 30-day deadline for starting talks to cooperate with United Nations-facilitated peace negotiations. And Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement calling on the Houthi rebels to stop firing missiles into Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi-led coalition to stop bombing populated areas.

Both demands are long overdue, and they should have been made by President Trump along with a concrete warning that the United States will pull the plug on the military assistance if the Saudis persist in their irresponsible and indiscriminate bombing.

Minus a concrete threat, the Saudis seem to have taken the calls as a signal to make what gains they can now. The Saudi coalition pummeled the airport in Sana, the capital, and began an offensive against the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeida, a vital gateway for food and supplies. But the Houthis, who control Sana and much of northern Yemen, held, and the Saudi objective of defeating the rebels has come no closer.

That has been pretty much the situation since the civil war began in 2014, when the Houthis seized control of much of the country and forced President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who remains the internationally recognized leader, to flee. Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates and seven other Sunni Arab states, saw the Houthis as a proxy of Shiite Iran and initiated a military campaign to restore the government, with logistical and intelligence support from the United States, Britain and France.

The campaign, however, has turned into a cruel war of attrition. Under the leadership of Prince Mohammed, Saudi Arabia has tried to strangle the Houthis into submission through punishing bombing raids, blockades, withheld salaries and other punitive measures, driving Yemen toward collapse and a famine of catastrophic proportions. At least 10,000 Yemenis have been killed, and nearly half the population of 28 million faces starvation.

As the civilian casualties have escalated, Saudi Arabia has blithely denied responsibility, or, on a few rare occasions, has said it would investigate. In one of the worst attacks, Saudi-led forces dropped an American-sold bomb onto a school bus, killing at least 51 people, 40 of them children. In an interview with "Axios on HBO" that aired on Sunday, Mr. Trump called the attack a "horror show," which he attributed to Saudi coalition forces not knowing how to use the weapon correctly.

Yet all along, Mr. Trump seems to be more worried about protecting the lucrative arms deals and maintaining his cozy relationship with Prince Mohammed than curbing the prince's excesses and lies. But as Secretaries Pompeo and Mattis have recognized, a continuing blood bath in Yemen serves neither American nor Saudi interests; on the contrary, the United States, according to Amnesty International, stands "at risk of making itself an accessory to war crimes."

The secretaries have taken a first step. The next must be to demand an immediate halt to the bombing, combined with the start of negotiations and a large-scale, global relief effort led by the United States. And if the prince hesitates, pull the plug on the arms.

## Latin American's populist assault

Javier Corrales

**AMHERST, MASS.** It is common to think of Latin America as the land of no hope for democracy. Since independence, the region has been ravaged by authoritarianism and populism. Brazil's new president-elect, Jair Bolsonaro, an ex-military macho promising zero tolerance of everything he dislikes, evokes a "here we go again" feeling. Once again, illiberalism seems ascendant, to the detriment of democracy.

But an alternative narrative is that Latin America is actually the land of democratic resilience. Always under attack, democracy does not always prevail, but it does not always die.

In their efforts to stay alive in an inhospitable environment, Latin American democrats have produced survival tactics and innovations. Frequently, these creations have allowed democracy to triumph.

The resilience of democracy in Latin America is impressive. In the current global wave of democracy, which started in the late 1970s, Latin America stands as the region where democracy spread and survived the most. Democracy spread to every country except Cuba and has survived in every country except Venezuela and Nicaragua, and possibly Honduras and Bolivia.

No doubt, during this era, the region has been assaulted by populist presidents who threaten liberal democracy: Market-oriented populists were the trend in the 1990s (Argentina, Mexico, Peru) and socialist populists in the 2000s (Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia). But even during those populist waves, many Latin American countries elected rule-respecting presidents, from either the right or the left, or defeated illiberal presidents at the polls.

If democracy has survived the assaults of dictators and populists, it has not been because of waning supply and

demand for those offerings. Candidates offering some version of populist authoritarianism are as popular now as ever. Today it's Mr. Bolsonaro. Twenty years ago it was the Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez. And more will come.

Democracy has survived instead because Latin American societies have learned to bolster the line of defense against democracy's internal enemies. They've done it through institutional innovation.

First, Latin Americans have focused on institutions that regulate entry and exit mechanisms. At the entry level, the most important innovation has been the runoff rule.

Runoff rules have now been adopted by 75 percent of Latin American countries. Cynthia McClintock's research shows the moderating effects of runoff rules. With a few exceptions, and Brazil's recent election was one, illiberal presidents seldom manage to emerge from runoff elections. The beauty of second rounds is that they force contenders to bargain with other groups, often moderates, as just happened in Colombia this year. So electoral coalitions are less extreme.

On the exit side, a key barrier has been term limits. They were popularized by Latin America in the 19th century, long before the United States adopted the rule in 1951 with the 22nd amendment. Despite a recent weakening of term limits in Latin America, they still work. Mexico, for instance, with strict term limits since the early 20th century, has not had a classic dictator since. Most Latin American presidents respect term limits, and those who try to circumvent them usually face an uphill battle.

Another key lesson from Latin America is the importance of enhancing the autonomy of courts and social movements — important checks on illiberal presidents. Courts have the legal power to stop illiberal measures, and social movements can block them via resistance.

Ensuring that courts and movements remain detached from presidential influence is therefore vital, and Latin America has improved its scores on both fronts. A new book documents how Latin American countries for the most part have made the process of selecting judges more pluralistic, which makes it less dependent on the president.

Likewise, where social movements have resisted the temptation to be co-opted by presidents, illiberal presidents face barriers. In Ecuador, for instance, one of the most effective checks on the illiberal designs of former President Rafael Correa was the advocacy and resistance stemming from feminist, indigenous and environmental groups that refused to be folded into Mr. Correa's ruling party.

A third lesson from Latin America is information maximization. Almost every Latin American country has expanded the number of watchdogs, or as they are often called, observatories. The obsession with observation started with electoral observation in the 1980s, but now covers a variety of public concerns: homicides, police activity, government-business relations, social policy, gender and sexuality. Argentina has even developed observatories of government economists, so that when the populist president Cristina Fernández instructed her officials to doctor economic figures, everyone found out about it.

Finally, some Latin American countries have taken to heart the very liberal principle that in a democracy, the winner shouldn't win that much, and the loser shouldn't lose that much. The most obvious example involves gender. Women are one of the world's most

underrepresented groups in politics. But in Latin America, they have expanded their presence in legislatures, mostly after adopting quota systems mandating parties to nominate more women. More representation of women is no panacea, but it is a significant victory in a region where machismo is a frequent fuel of authoritarianism.

None of these lines of defense against illiberalism is foolproof. Runoff elections fail to deliver moderation if extremist candidates do well in the first round, as happened in Brazil. And crime and corruption remain Latin America's foremost pollution, always choking democratic institutions and fueling demand for hard-liners like Mr. Bolsonaro.

Presidents still try tricks to weaken exit rules and undermine courts and social movements. States and nonstate actors have learned to use traditional and new media to counter fact-based reporting. Political winners, even when they lose ground, always find ways to silence losers. And more inclusion can lead to more fragmentation of the opposition, which lowers the chances of blocking illiberal presidents.

Mr. Bolsonaro is likely to exploit these vulnerabilities. Brazilian democrats should not relax — they will need to reinforce their lines of defense and invent new ones.

Nonetheless, there is reason for optimism. Authoritarian populism is a recurrent threat in Latin America, and now in advanced democracies too. Democratic survival is never guaranteed. Countries often come close to falling prey to autocrats. But many times, these episodes become "near misses" rather than full crashes. Latin America continues to be a region where illiberalism often meets its match.

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Supporters of Jair Bolsonaro, in Rio de Janeiro, last month. Crime and corruption remain Latin America's foremost pollution, fueling demand for hard-liners like Mr. Bolsonaro.

## A.I. hits the barrier of meaning

Melanie Mitchell

You've probably heard that we're in the midst of an A.I. revolution. We're told that machine intelligence is progressing at an astounding rate, powered by "deep learning" algorithms that use huge amounts of data to train complicated programs known as "neural networks."

Today's A.I. programs can recognize faces and transcribe spoken sentences. We have programs that can spot subtle financial fraud, find relevant web pages in response to ambiguous queries, map the best driving route to almost any destination, beat human grandmasters at chess and Go, and translate between hundreds of languages.

What's more, we've been promised that self-driving cars, automated cancer diagnoses, housecleaning robots and even automated scientific discovery are on the verge of becoming mainstream.

The Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, recently declared that over the next five to 10 years, the company will push its A.I. to "get better than human level at all of the primary human senses: vision, hearing, language,

general cognition." Shane Legg, chief scientist of Google's DeepMind group, predicted that "human-level A.I. will be passed in the mid-2020s."

As someone who has worked in A.I. for decades, I've witnessed the failure of similar predictions of imminent human-level A.I., and I'm certain these latest forecasts will fall short as well. The challenge of creating humanlike intelligence in machines remains greatly underestimated. Today's A.I. systems sorely lack the essence of human intelligence: understanding the situations we experience, being able to grasp their meaning. The mathematician and philosopher Gian-Carlo Rota famously asked, "I wonder whether or when A.I. will ever crash the barrier of meaning." To me, this is still the most important question.

The lack of humanlike understanding in machines is underscored by recent cracks that have appeared in the foundations of modern A.I. While today's programs are much more impressive than the systems we had 20 or 30 years ago, a series of research studies have shown that deep-learning systems can be unreliable in decidedly unhumanlike ways.

I'll give a few examples. "The bareheaded man needed a hat"

is transcribed by my phone's speech-recognition program as "The bear headed man needed a hat." Google Translate renders "I put the pig in the pen" into French as "Je mets le cochon dans le stylo" (mistranslating "pen" in the sense of a writing instrument).

Programs that "read" documents and answer questions about them can easily be fooled into giving wrong answers when short, irrelevant snippets of text are appended to the document. Similarly, programs that recognize faces and objects, lauded as a major triumph of deep learning, can fail dramatically when their input is modified even in modest ways by certain types of lighting, image filtering and other alterations that do not affect humans' recognition abilities in the slightest.

One recent study showed that adding small amounts of "noise" to a face image can seriously harm the performance of state-of-the-art face-recognition programs. Another study, humorously

called "The Elephant in the Room," showed that inserting a small image of an out-of-place object, such as an elephant, in the corner of a living-room image strangely caused deep-learning vision programs to suddenly misclassify other objects in the image.

Furthermore, programs that have learned to play a particular video or board game at a "superhuman" level are completely lost when the game they have learned is slightly modified (the background color on a video-game screen is changed, the virtual "paddle" for hitting "balls" changes position).

These are only a few examples demonstrating that the best A.I. programs can be unreliable when faced with situations that differ, even to a small degree, from what they have been trained on. The errors made by such systems range from harmless and humorous to potentially disastrous: imagine, for example, an airport security system that won't let you board your flight because your face is confused with that of a criminal, or a self-driving car that, because of unusual lighting conditions, fails to notice that you are about to cross the street.

Even more worrisome are recent demonstrations of the vulnerability of A.I. systems to so-called adversarial programs. Another study, humorously