

***The Fix: How Nations Survive and Thrive in a World in Decline, Jonathan Tepperman (New York: Tim Duggan Books: 2016).***

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The world is empowered with gloom due to certain alarming trends. Both the global and national problems seem insurmountable since bad information is processed more thoroughly than good. Hence, the news shared is more provocative and unconventional. The answers are also hidden from plain sight. Roy F Baumeister explains it a loss aversion in which, on average, loss es hurt twice as much as gains are felt good and bad is much more strong than good. However, the causes are not dissected with precision.

Teppermann recognises this dilemma in his book with precision. He describes promotion of pessimism as a saleable ingredient. He identifies 10 problems in his book which are unyielding for most of the countries. Amongst those are immigration, income inequality, corruption and Islamic extremism. He has also accounted world political acrimonies between the good and the bad due to shallow policies which have led to the making of rebellion against the International System. Al-Qaeda and Daesh are the eventualities of these erroneous policies. According to the *Economic Outlook 2015*, by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation Development (OECD), the world's economic growth has fallen down from 7.4 per cent in 2010 to 3.8 per cent in 2015.

The disintegration of the nation-states at multiple places like the Middle-East, the Sahel, and Russia's periphery, underscores the growing weaknesses at the heart of the liberal, rules-based global order established by the US after the WWII. This was reinforced by the end of the Cold War and brought peace and prosperity in the world. Frightened voters are embracing Populist outsiders and angry nationalists. There is no doubt that we are living in an age of unprecedented, irreversible decline. However, this is more ingrained in our minds through persistent hammering while negating the good work being done in certain parts of the world.

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“Abandoning hope certainly is tempting, especially at a moment when so many things seem to be going wrong with the world,” Tepperman writes. “Fortunately, for us, it’s also unnecessary,” (219). He confronts the status quo and offers potential solutions from the case studies of the countries he had travelled. Based on the primary data collected through interviews and by digging reports, he argues that not only the solutions exist but also the template solutions are available. He has interviewed current and former heads of states, including former Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and the current Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, as well as numerous experts. Tepperman regrets the prevalent pessimism being promoted by the literature of International Relations as well which is contributing more to the decay of the international system.

In his close analysis of terrorism and counter-terrorism measures by the government, the writer tried to diagnose the exact causes which allow the radicals to spread like a wild fire. Is it the offer of high wages and the prospects of creating Caliphate is the most powerful draw for these aspiring warriors hits his analysis the most. He argues that the demand by itself speaks of the inequality of the prevalent systems espoused with the dearth of leadership. Otherwise, the killing of Osama bin Laden would have decimated the global Jihadist Movement. There are more incubators of rebellion than before. This is coupled with the local grievances since the free world has chosen democracy in their chosen areas only. These groups remain a threat for the world which has suffered more than 39 per cent more terrorist attacks in 2014, than earlier years and 83 per cent more fatalities.

Written with dexterity, the writer has given the example of Indonesia’s campaign against extremism while separating the universally applicable measures. These measures can boost equality, incomes, cooperation, and cohesion in diverse societies. Tepperman explains that although 90 per cent of its citizens are Muslims, Indonesia provides a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures by strengthening the democratic norms and removing the military leaders from political decision-making skilfully. It “has treated terrorism more like a law enforcement problem than a military one,” (p. 79).

This has helped protect each group’s identity and each individual’s freedom. In his chapter “Kill Them with Kindness: How Indonesia Crushed and Co-opted Its Islamic Extremists,” Tepperman writes that this approach offers two major advantages:

- i By trying terrorists in public courts “allows democracies to remain true to their values — values the terrorists seek to undermine,” (p.78).
- ii “Second, observing such scruples makes it much harder for the terrorists to claim that they’re righteous victims being unjustly persecuted by a tyrannical regime,” (p.78).

This allows the Indonesians to live relatively peacefully. Terrorist attacks have become rare, the insurgencies have been peacefully extinguished and the civilian control over the military has been thoroughly established.

Similarly, severe inequality has gripped states around the world. Living in these circumstances of global trepidation, beset by economic, political, and social problems, Tepperman has illustrated Brazil’s battle against inequality. It shows that “the war can be waged cheaply,” (28). Tepperman interviewed Brazil’s former President, popularly known as Lula, about the massive anti-poverty programme known as *Bolsa Familia* (Family Grant). According to the programme, the cash payments are disbursed to the consumers since the families can budget better than government programmes. They are distributed with specific allocations, like food stamps. *Bolsa Familia* helped lift 36 million people out of poverty, reduced Brazil’s income gap by a third and slashed the percentage of Brazilians living in poverty. The programme is inexpensive also. The average recipient gets US\$65 a month, because, as Lula reasoned at the programme’s inception, poor families only need small payments to make a big difference in their daily lives (p.34). The writer disagrees with the exaggerated problems manipulated in the payments of debts. He believes that most of the donor countries, especially wealthy ones like the US, can afford to spend far more than they do to generate economic growth and alleviate poverty and inequality through social spending.

Though Teppermann has given refreshing and instructive economic stories of Singapore, South Korea and Botswana, which have significantly improved incomes per capita over the past 50 years, yet these examples are less convincing in terms of diverse circumstances and variability in factors causing poverty in different states. The overall premise has been ignored to quite an extent. Globalisation continues with the convergence of the poorer places on the income levels of richer countries. It has certainly not been able to address the discontent between the haves and have nots.

Immigration is the largest of the exodus from the underdeveloped countries due to poverty. It has increased many folds ever since the WWII. More than one million entered Germany alone, while widening the spasms between the natives and migrants and even within the believers of the nationalism, right wing forces and the centrists. Europe is tightly entrapped. This is due to the inability of the politicians. Mainly, they have been unable to differentiate between the immigrants seeking better standards in the developed world and those who are illegal migrants resulting in a large section of the resentful underclass. Germany alone suffered more than two hundred attacks on immigrants and migration facilities in the first half of 2015 (p.10).

Tepperman cites Canada, which has its open immigration and assimilation policy to counter such negative underpinnings. He gives credit to Canada's own unique multicultural history. Its successful immigration system embraces pluralism and respects the multitude of ethnic minorities already living in the country.

For this success, the writer appreciates the deft leadership of Canada, who convinced the populace to do the same. In 1971, the Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, (father of the current Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau) declared that "there is no official culture," (p. 55) of Canada and created the first Ministry of Multiculturalism anywhere in the world.

In a political process, which primarily creates a middle class, helps democracy thrive in the hands of stronger. It is more protective. How would the leadership flourish under the circumstances is the question which remains unanswered by the writer despite the prudent example. History and economic development are certainly associated with the individuals, yet the continuity of both does not rely on time alone. Progress without them in a system is a panacea.

Nonetheless, Teppermann's practical advice for problem-solving through a data-driven case for optimism in a time of crushing pessimism is a fresh breeze. Crises do have opportunities which can be experimented with unconventional problem-solving approaches. "Crises have a way of concentrating the mind and sweeping away many of the obstacles that ordinarily block reform," (p. 224) Tepperman said. They have to be resolved by leadership with cajoling and out of the box solutions while

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seeking opportunities from the often overlooked good news. The grim prognostication that dominates the news and even literature on international relations is well encountered.