

A Journey Through Seven Countries Over Three Decades: The Relevance of Eastern Europe of the 1990s to the Middle East of the 2020s

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One of life's great joys and privileges for us has been to study different countries' cultures and histories in many capacities over the past three decades. While this career-guided trip has provided significant practical insights into the human condition in many forms, it has also permitted the ability to better understand the disparate impact of time and experience on individuals and their societies. In much the same way as explored by Plato's allegory of the cave,¹ Oresme's proposal of four dimensions,² Minkowski's discussion of the relation between space and time,³ and Einstein's concept of general relativity,⁴ cross-cultural experiences have become a way for us to traverse and navigate time in a scholarly sense.

Starting in the Czech Republic in 1994, we have benefited from many opportunities to better understand the similarities and differences among various world cultures and traditions. Once our original experience centering on Olomouc was completed, we began a life journey that found us living, working⁵, and/or studying for at least two months apiece, in locations as disparate as Lithuania (1995–1998), Estonia (1995–1998), Mexico (2002), China (2018), Finland (2021–2022), and Saudi Arabia (2023 to the present). For all practical purposes, we did not embark on this international cross-cultural odyssey with many specialized skills or grand intellectual insights. We were only armed with our competencies upon graduation from Monmouth College and the not dissimilar ideals of the Quakers⁶ and the Peace Corps. In short, this can be summarized briefly as viewing those you meet as potential friends while maintaining an unwavering commitment to community, partnership, and sustainability. This general mantra has served us well in the myriad of situations from which we have benefited and which we hope to share with the reader.

This exposition follows a deliberate outline. After an initial position is taken concerning the nature of individual advancement within our increasingly global society, an overview and synthesis of the different economic conditions across the seven countries included in our analysis is conducted. Then, an outline and analysis of the unique socio-cultural perspectives at play in these nations is examined. Finally, based on the information understood to this point, a conclusion is reached by applying our experiences in eastern Europe in the 1990s directly to the conditions we are currently witnessing in the Middle East in the 2020s. In all, we trust this

¹ *The Republic* 7.220–226.

² Nicole Oresme (1325–1382) was a French scholar who was “perhaps the first to approach the fourth dimension from the side of physics” (Cajori 1926:397).

³ Minkowski 1909; presentation was made on September 2, 1908, at the Congress of Natural Philosophers in Cologne, Germany.

⁴ Einstein 1915: 847.

⁵ In 1994 both authors spent a semester in Olomouc, Czech Republic. In an off-campus program run by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM), with William Urban as faculty director.

⁶ The Quakers are known worldwide for their support for pacifist views.

informal intellectual excursion through time can provide partial justification for the critical importance of internationally oriented education and cross-cultural experiences for the improvement of United States (US) citizens and betterment of American society into the future.

American Dream Deconstructed

Perhaps one of the most compelling concepts is the familiar notion of “the American Dream”. As with the 350 million people who call the US their home country, there are countless ways the American Dream may be defined. So, when an allusion is made to the exceptionality of the American Dream in a conversation in Saudi Arabia, one cannot help but pause and consider the ramifications of this national ideal.

Upon reflection, it stands to reason that the American Dream is not necessarily an original American construct. Even before the time bartering was the formal mode of commerce, individuals and groups of people have sought to improve their material standing in life. In fact, when individuals consider their own personal definition of the American Dream, some element(s) may include the realm of accumulating a certain quantity of physical possessions. Why? Because, as Maslow has observed,⁷ people are driven consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously by innate and inherent needs. Particularly manifested in the physical realm, the most foundational of these psychological requirements relate to the need to feel safe. With this comes sustenance, shelter, and rest—but also health, possessions, and social mobility. In short, as the *Declaration of Independence* (1776) clearly states: “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”.

However, there is nothing distinctively American about this dream. The formal origins of this perspective are rooted, of course, in the tradition of Locke’s philosophy.⁸ However, for as long as *homo sapiens* has roamed the earth, our human kin have sought a better life—in whatever form and with whatever definition may be used. Therefore, the concept of the American Dream could seem a grotesquely paradoxical misnomer at its worst. However, at its best, it is a magnificent marketing accomplishment.

To put this position in perspective, at the time the American union was being born, there were few political and economic governance options available. Adam Smith formalized a blueprint for the organization of labor, money, profit, property, wealth, stock, and government (e.g., “capitalism”) at that time,⁹ but—as indicated earlier—proto-capitalism existed for many millennia previously. Also, at most locations worldwide, the best form of government a population could hope for was a benevolent monarchy. Typically, such relatively ideal conditions provide many opportunities for individuals to benefit in their daily lives over time. However, in other words, there were a multitude of situations in which people sought to improve their lot – some were more ideal than others.

Therefore, there is only one trait that makes the American Dream distinctively “American”: it was the first pronouncement of its kind made to the world in a formal document on behalf of an entire nation. Stated differently, the American Dream, upon critical evaluation, is—at its heart—the dream of nearly every person. Regardless of their situation in life or prospects for the

⁷ Maslow 1943: 370, 389, 394.

⁸ Locke 1690 (Second Treatise: §6, §85, §87, §123, §209, §222).

⁹ Smith 1776: 10-12.

Table Illustrating Comparative Economic Information for Seven Countries							
<i>(Global Data and Rankings)</i>	Czech Republic	Lithuania	Estonia	Mexico	China	Finland	United States
Population (in millions)ⁱ	10.8	2.9	1.4	130.0	1.422	5.6	343.5
Nominal GDP (per capita)ⁱⁱ	38th	40th	36th	63rd	73rd	16th	6th
Human Development Indexⁱⁱⁱ	32nd (very high)	37th (very high)	31st (very high)	77th (high)	75th (high)	11 th (very high)	20th (very high)
Venture Capital and Private Equity Attractiveness^{iv}	30th	41st	32nd	38th	8th	16th	1st
Public Sector Employment (% total employment)^v	15.40%	26.90%	23.80%	11.80%	28.00%	26.10%	13.40%
Government Expenditure (% GDP)^{vi}	44.84%	36.59%	40.19%	30.23%	33.08%	54.05%	38.50%
Corruption Perceptions Index^{vii}	41st	34th	12th	126th	76th	2nd	24th
Spillover Index^{viii}	135th	153rd	158th	82nd	81st	139th	148th
Happy Planet Index^{ix}	32nd	55th	75th	43rd	51st	17th	102nd
Carbon Footprint (per capita)^x	101st	131st	142th	19th	3rd	122nd	31st
Carbon Footprint (per GDP/capita)^{xi}	24th	45th	69th	36th	106th	37th	62nd

ⁱ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2024.

ⁱⁱ International Monetary Fund 2024.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Development Programme 2024.

^{iv} Groh, Liechtenstein, Lieser, and Biesinger 2023.

^v International Labour Organization 2024.

^{vi} International Monetary Fund 2024.

^{vii} Transparency International 2023.

^{viii} Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller **Error! Bookmark not defined.** 2024.

^{ix} Abdallah, Hoffman, and Akenji 2024.

^x Abdallah, Hoffman, and Akenji 2024.

^{xi} Abdallah, Hoffman, and Akenji 2024.

Figure 14.1:
Table Illustrating Comparative Economic Information for Seven Countries.

future, nearly all people seek to improve themselves, by their own definition, in some fashion; all seek “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” This relates directly to the implicit drive of the human condition as described by Maslow.¹

However, the Americanness of the American Dream is that, absent other more compelling opportunities at the time and since, an individual seeking a better life is a near constant in the human condition. Due to its compelling message, this formal worldwide announcement expressing a popular sentiment unarticulated for many eons previously has enjoyed 250 years of largely uncontested awareness in humanity’s psyche. Thus, “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” are the foundations of the so-called American Dream *brand*. But what is often missed is that this dream is not exclusive within US national boundaries or among American citizens: it is nearly everyone’s dream. To aspire tomorrow to improve upon what we are today is, at its core, the human condition. Therefore, like many other noble human quests toward international peace and prosperity, this brand provides an actionable aspiration for individuals and groups which holds out the hope for achievement and progress to imagine and help bring into reality. Relating first economic and then socio-cultural comparisons of the countries in which we have had experience, the next two sections provide a detailed basis for a conclusion emphasizing the relatedness of eastern Europe to the Middle East—even though three decades separate each region in our experience.

Seven Economies, Seven Capers in Capitalism

From the internationally uninitiated American business perspective, any form of capitalism that does not place the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) or multinational corporation (MNC) as the critical and central influence in an economy is suspicious at best and heretical at worst. This position ignores the 19th- and 20th-century drivers of American labor led by the likes of Mary Harris (1837–1930), Peter McGuire (1852–1906), and César Chávez (1927–1993) as well as the similarly-timed impetus for American conservation guided by leaders such as John Muir (1838–1914), Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), and Rachel Carson (1907–1964).

As indicated in the table illustrated in Fig. 14.1 there are many different flavors of capitalism. Though the comparative economic traditions of these systems range from government-dominated command economies in countries such as those found in eastern Europe (e.g., the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Estonia), east Asia (e.g., China), and the Middle East (e.g., Saudi Arabia), to more market-driven systems such as those found in Europe (e.g., Finland) and the US, recent developments clearly indicate the varieties of market-based economies that can result. These include a wide spectrum which extends from a relatively fundamental market economy (as found in the Czech Republic and Estonia) to a mixed market economy that includes partnerships between companies and the government (as shown in Lithuania, Mexico, China, Finland, and Saudi Arabia).

In a comparison of former Soviet countries that transitioned to the European Union (EU), it is quite noteworthy how the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Estonia are bunched together by numerous economic metrics. For instance, Estonia leads very slightly over the other two in nominal GDP (per capital), the human development index, and the corruption perceptions index.

¹ Maslow 1943: 370–371, 373, 375, 379, 384–385, 390, 394, 395.

Table Illustrating Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Comparative Economic Information on Seven Countries						
<i>(GCC Data and Rankings)</i>	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates
Population (in millions)ⁱ	1.6	4.8	5.0	3.0	33.3	10.6
Nominal GDP (per capita)ⁱⁱ	5th	4th	6th	1 st	3rd	2nd
Human Development Indexⁱⁱⁱ	2nd	5th	6th	3rd (tie)	3rd (tie)	1st
Venture Capital and Private Equity Attractiveness^{iv}	6th	4th	3rd	5 th	1st	2nd
Public Sector Employment (% total employment)^v	9.60%	18.60%	78.70%	11.30%	35.30%	10.20%
Government Expenditure (% GDP)^{vi}	29.12%	40.68%	29.05%	25.43%	28.06%	26.40%
Corruption Perceptions Index^{vii}	6th	4th	5th	2 nd	3rd	1st
Spillover Index^{viii}	3rd	4th	2nd	6 th	1st	5th
Happy Planet Index^{ix}	1st	4th	n/a	5 th	2nd	3rd
Carbon Footprint (per capita)^x	4th	3rd	n/a	5 th	1st	2nd
Carbon Footprint (per GDP/capita)^{xi}	1st	5th	n/a	4 th	3rd	2nd

ⁱ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2024.

ⁱⁱ International Monetary Fund 2024.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Development Programme 2024.

^{iv} Groh, Liechtenstein, Lieser, and Biesinger 2023.

^v International Labour Organization 2024.

^{vi} International Monetary Fund 2024.

^{vii} Transparency International 2023.

^{viii} Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller 2024.

^{ix} Abdallah, Hoffman, and Akenji 2024.

^x Abdallah, Hoffman, and Akenji 2024.

^{xi} Abdallah, Hoffman, and Akenji 2024.

Figure 14.2: Table Illustrating Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Comparative Economic Information on Seven Countries

Meanwhile, the Czech Republic leads in venture capital and private equity attractiveness, the spillover index, the happy planet index, and both carbon footprint measures.

Contrasting two countries known as large manufacturing suppliers to the global economic system, showing the differences between Mexico and China can help distinguish their current standing. For instance, Mexico leads on the measures of nominal GDP (per capita), the happy planet index, and its carbon footprint (per GDP/capita). Conversely, China leads considerably in venture capital and private equity attractiveness, the corruption perceptions index, and its carbon footprint (per capita). Finally, in terms of the human development index and the spillover index, they are nearly identical.

Then, as they are both leaders in different capacities in the global order, showing the alignment of Finland and the US is necessary.¹¹ As expected, the US leads on issues such as nominal GDP (per capita), venture capital and private equity attractiveness, and carbon footprint (per capita). However, Finland has the upper hand in relation to the human development index, the corruption perceptions index, the spillover index, the happy planet index, and its carbon footprint (per GDP/capita).

Upon closer inspection of the table provided in Fig. 14.2, there are considerable regional differences in the Middle East, as well. For instance, economic traditions may be similar across Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, but recent macroeconomic forces have encouraged considerable shifts to varying degrees. As an example, the central role of government in regional economies is a core foundation. However, due to recent phenomena (such as the Arab Spring movements throughout the Middle East), differential systemic economic changes have been made particularly relevant among GCC countries. In general, benefiting from smaller populations and pragmatic governance approaches, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Bahrain have made considerable progress in their respective economic transitions, leading to comparatively higher nominal gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.

Interestingly, even though the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has the largest population base and arguably the most traditional economic perspective due to its close association with established global Islamic culture¹², the country has made very noteworthy progress since the commencement in 2016 of its Saudi Vision 2030, a government-sponsored initiative to modernize the nation's economy, society, and culture. For instance, among all six GCC countries, the KSA is ranked third by GDP per capita and the corruption perceptions index, but the country is also tied with Qatar for third on the human development index. Even more impressive, the country is second in the region on the Happy Planet Index¹³ and leads the GCC on financial investment, the so-called Spillover Index,¹⁴ and carbon footprint per capita. In short, considering the fact that the country's past economic success has been dominated almost exclusively by the world's largest traditional energy corporation, Saudi Aramco, these national strides toward twenty-first century

¹¹ Finland leads in terms of balancing the government's intervention with societal, environmental, and economic well-being while the US emphasized a very business-centric approach.

¹² The two holiest places of the Muslim world, Mecca and Medina, respectively, are within the country's boundaries and receive religious pilgrims and visitors throughout the year.

¹³ This measure indicates the ability of a government to provide living conditions emphasizing longevity, happiness, and sustainability for its citizens.

¹⁴ This measure provides indication of a country's ability to its neighbors with opportunities to fulfill the United Nation's (UN's) sustainability development goals (SDGs).

progress are indicative of the changes taking place on a local level. As a fast follower to the economic development that has taken place already in the UAE and Qatar, KSA, very notably, is the third—and arguably the most formidable economy—in the region.

While it is unfair to directly compare economic conditions in different regions and time periods, it should be noted that much of the transition currently witnessed in the KSA in the 2020s appears remarkably similar to the shift observed in eastern Europe²³ during the 1990s. No doubt, there were considerable distinctions on the paths taken by the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Estonia. First, originally a part of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic²⁴ began its move away from a Soviet-style system in 1989. As a member of COMECON, the Czech Republic had relied on a planned economic approach for its general commercial activities. Therefore, in order to break away from COMECON, the Czechs chose a so-called economic “shock therapy” which involved, contrary to other nearby countries such as Poland and Hungary, a much more abrupt shift toward a market-based system that abandoned key tenets of government involvement in economic activities.

In contrast, Lithuania and Estonia were not able to depart as easily from the sphere of a centrally planned economic system, because both countries had been formally incorporated as republics into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). As formal members of the Soviet Union since 1940, they were not the beneficiaries of membership in COMECON and their economic activities had been directly tied to Moscow, the capital of the USSR.²⁵ Therefore, although both countries formally began their political and economic departure in 1990, their transition was fraught with considerably more complications than those encountered by the Czech Republic.

Despite these challenges, Lithuania and Estonia managed to adapt their unique circumstances to market-based economies. Partially due to its traditional cultural proximity to Poland, Lithuania opted for a more gradual transition. Meanwhile, because of their closeness geographically and culturally to Finland, the Estonians chose a more direct route toward a market-driven system. There are two drivers that facilitated this decision. First, during the lifetime of the USSR, the global political and economic strategy taken across the Gulf of Finland from Tallinn was called, in political science circles, Finlandization. This decades-long tactic of Finns acting as “fake

²³ Although the geographic space generally found between Germany and Russia in the 2020s is considered central Europe, use of the term “eastern Europe” reflects the contemporary mindset and parlance of the 1990s. This is based on the hegemony of the Cold War (1947–1991) which clearly demarcated Europe into a western zone and eastern zone. The western zone, of course, reflected the EU as an economic system and an earlier form of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a military alliance. Meanwhile, the eastern zone was manifested by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) for economic purposes and the Warsaw Pact as a military organization.

²⁴ The Czech Republic and Slovakia split peacefully in 1992.

²⁵ It should be noted that, at the time of their formal declared independence resolutions, the Lithuanian and Estonian economic systems were nearly exclusively reliant on the Soviet Union’s infrastructure. Citizens in the former USSR reflected that, before 1991, there were two so-called “walls” that inhibited information flow. The first wall was the well-known wall of demarcation between eastern and western Europe. The second wall, however, was between the Soviet Union and the rest of eastern Europe. This resulted in at least two outcomes: (1) COMECON countries in eastern Europe had little knowledge about the Soviet Union aside from the formal information communicated, thus associating all Soviet Union countries with the singular message provided from official sources; and (2) countries in the Soviet Union found it nearly impossible to gain information about COMECON countries in eastern Europe, thus making nations such as Lithuania and Estonia comparatively very dependent on the economic system of the Soviet Union.

friends”²⁶ with the Soviet Union (and then later Russia) was derisively and derogatively referred to as a capitulation strategy by many observers in western Europe. However, while this approach prevented the Soviet Union from invading Finland, it also provided the opportunity for Finnish businesses and consumers to make the very short and easy 50-mile trip between Helsinki and Tallinn to support Estonia throughout the Cold War. Therefore, an economic kinship was established and maintained between the two Finno-Ugric cultures even during those inhospitable decades.

Second, and perhaps more importantly for its future, Finland acted as an economic role model for Estonia during the 1990s. This is very easily captured by Finland’s admittance to the EU in 1995. Based on the bonds with Finland that had been sustained for decades, the Estonians, in effect, benefited from a western European economy at its doorstep during the critical times of its transition to a market-based economy. While the Finnish model is not nearly as business centric as the US approach to capitalism, Estonia took a more *laissez-faire* approach to its economic system than Lithuania.

The relevance of the economic transitions of eastern European nations in the 1990s and GCC countries in the 2020s can also be seen from two countries in which we have experience but have not yet mentioned: Mexico and mainland China. As its southern neighbor, Mexico has had a more than informal economic relationship with the US for a very long time. However, the two systems were bound together formally with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and then reaffirmed with the United States-Canada-Mexico Agreement (USMCA) in 2020. Following Nixon’s visit to Beijing and Shanghai in 1972, mainland China also started on a path toward a market-driven economy in 1978 which was solidified in 1982 by internal reforms resulting from Mao Zedong’s passing.

As seen through the eyes of two US citizens, the foundational tenets and impact for the considerable economic changes briefly described in these seven contexts (the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia, Mexico, China, Finland, and Saudi Arabia) can be found in Smith’s (1776) treatise due to its primary emphasis on the dynamics and importance of supply and demand. The assembly and configuration of the workforce, the efficiency of the systems developed and deployed, and the possibility of providing choices in the marketplace are critical for the success of any capitalist-oriented economic structure. However, the underlying lever that has driven this system from well before 1776 in its myriad proto-capitalist forms and continues to this day in a largely globalized format is perhaps one issue: private property.

One must consider that the notion of private property should not be akin to political science notions of democracy. In its most foundational form, the concept of monetary-based ownership is a purely economic concept. However, be it tangible or intangible, private property can have implications for the individual, group, and corporation levels. As a result, this creates the possibility for a person, several people, or companies to develop a vested interest in identifying, creating, and/or acting upon opportunities for their own material and/or financial improvement.

This is the common essence across the seven countries in which we have studied, lived, and/or worked: in general, people—regardless of place, background, beliefs, or orientation—seek to improve their lot in life in whatever way it may be defined. In places and times undergoing

²⁶ This is a direct quote provided to one of the authors by an ethnically born and raised Finn.

considerable economic transitions, such as eastern Europe in the 1990s and the Middle East in the 2020s, the experience is quite visible. Regardless of context, local people undergoing the transformation are more open and willing to consider reason-based concepts, ideas, and strategies for which they would be considerably more skeptical in stable economic circumstances. The reason for doing so? To create potential opportunities to increase their standing in society.

In varying degrees, this was also the case in Mexico, China, and Finland. At the time of our experiences, Mexico and mainland China were aligning their economic goals and ambitions with the US in the manufacturing and service sectors. A burgeoning middle class had emerged in both countries and was actively focused on upward mobility and continued personal economic improvement. Meanwhile, though Finland had stable conditions due to its EU membership for more than two decades by the time of our arrival, the notion of individual material betterment was somewhat different. Rather than searching for immediate personal progress, Finns were more concerned with longer term issues such as individual enrichment and system maintenance and preservation. Therefore, given the economic accomplishments achieved by Finland, it is little wonder the country sought to protect its prized possessions by joining NATO in 2023.²⁷

To conclude on commerce-related cross-national issues, there is a prevailing tendency to attempt to categorize economic and political ideologies in a crude binary fashion as either capitalist or non-capitalist. After judging an ideology as non-capitalist, some pundits seek attention and drama by going further and claiming that these so-called thoughts are socialist or communist. However, the discrete choice fallaciously presented as capitalist or non-capitalist very rarely exists. In reality, among economic and political decision makers, this approach amounts to nothing more than a stale McCarthyite Henny Penny tale.²⁸

We both have seen firsthand the psychic devastation that a true socialist economic system can cause on a population. A planned economy stripped of any and all notion of improvement, wellbeing, and profit is, in many ways, unimaginable to the pundits. Lacking conditions in which the multidimensional concept of private property is not sought, encouraged, and/or the norm, a centralized socialist economic system that lacks any semblance of private enterprise wreaks havoc on the intellect of a country's citizens. The mindless desolation that results can be discouraging for the uninitiated and terrifying for the masterful.²⁹

In some fashion, the top decision makers in each of our seven countries understand these ramifications very well. Returning to Maslow, people require the achievement of basic necessities and a sense of personal ownership to feel safe and secure.³⁰ As alluded to earlier, this has existed from the earliest days of proto-capitalism. We need these provisions in whatever form they take to sense membership in the small and/or large community of our choice. In effect, this is the reason that—for better or worse—the diverse options of capitalism available now and into the future will remain the same. Until humanity can conjure a better economic system, we will

²⁷ This action was precipitated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

²⁸ In essence, a derivation of a constant "The sky is falling!" siren from some societal figures.

²⁹ The absence of individual incentive can become so prevalent in a society due to its economic system that personal achievement is irrelevant and shunned. As a result, the mindset is such that—if accomplishments are meaningless—then individuals, groups, and organizations detach psychologically, physically, and practically. This creates perverse conditions in which cheating, corruption, and black-market activities abound. As one author has experienced in the workplace and been informed by local knowledgeable citizens, this is the enduring legacy of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

³⁰ Maslow 1943: 373, 376–381, 384, 388–389, 396.

continue to seek to modify and improve upon the varieties of market-based approaches currently at our disposal.

Seven Cultures, Seven Societies: The Foundations of National Cultural Values

In terms of a singular socio-cultural insight from our international experiences, the most resounding concept is very simple: the human spirit cannot be defeated. We have benefited from this understanding in both smaller and larger countries. As indicated previously, these experiences have occurred in the wake and/or amid some very forceful historical dynamics. In fact, no matter the worldly strength of the powers attempting to subjugate, direct, and/or undermine an adversary, even the smallest and seemingly most underestimated socio-cultural rival can remain.

In Table 3 two well-established complementary approaches to national cultural values are used to compare seven countries, including the United States.³¹ During this approach, we discuss in detail some critical thematic aspects related to each country that are indicative of each nation's character. In the Schwartz (1999) approach to national cultural values, there are three pairs of concepts that, based on established research practices, have unique scores for a variety of countries: (1) embeddedness and autonomy (affective and intellectual); (2) mastery and harmony; and (3) hierarchy and egalitarianism. The first pair deals with the tension between social stability and tradition versus individual choices. Meanwhile, the second two concepts address the strain between personal ability and improvement versus an individual's satisfaction with their place. Then, the third duo approaches the tradeoff of definite social boundaries as opposed to an emphasis on equality.

The Czech Republic and Estonia,³² are very similar on the embeddedness (3.81 vs. 3.77) and affective autonomy (3.36 vs. 3.37) measures. To an extent, this is plausible due to their similar recent Soviet-influence background. Along with this, it makes sense that both countries could seek a somewhat equal measure of stability and way for individuals to seek enjoyment. The Czech Republic is somewhat higher than Estonia in terms of harmony (4.31 vs. 4.23), thus leading to the conclusion that their greater emphasis on the group manifests itself in a slightly stronger national identity. Again, this is believable as the Czech Republic tracks its origins back to the establishment of the Duchy of Bohemia in A.D. 870 while Estonia became a nation for the first time in 1918. That stated, Estonia exceeds the Czech Republic on intellectual autonomy (4.45 vs. 4.23), mastery (3.98 vs. 3.79), (2.97 vs. 2.07), and egalitarianism (4.77 vs. 4.58). While, at first glance, it appears somewhat surprising that the encouragement of independent ideas as well as individual achievement is higher in Estonia than in the Czech Republic, the greater emphasis on harmony in the Czech Republic makes this understandable. However, since they are considered in direct contrast, the more intriguing finding is that both hierarchy and egalitarianism are higher in Estonia. Though speculative, this could be based on the ability of Estonians to balance the

³¹ As there is a considerable dearth of data on national cultural values concerning countries in the Middle East, we are unable to include the KSA in this part of the analysis. Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Schwartz 1999.

³² Schwartz 1999 lacked data for Lithuania.

maintenance of order with the encouragement of free thought. Given Estonia's significantly smaller population,³³ this appears easier to accomplish.

We can also contrast Mexico and China as they have similar underlying economic dynamics as emerging markets. Mexico scores higher on embeddedness (4.23 vs. 3.25), mastery (4.02 vs. 3.84), and hierarchy (2.99 vs. 1.69). Historically, the governing system in Mexico has been less centralized than the socialist-based system China has had since 1949. That, combined with the traditions of a race-based social system in Mexico,³⁴ explains the emphasis on societal stability, individual skill, and hierarchical order. In comparison, China exceeds at affective autonomy (3.94 vs. 2.68), intellectual autonomy (4.64 vs. 3.80), harmony (4.35 vs. 3.97), and egalitarianism (5.20 vs. 4.39). While the first three likely are related to Chinese philosophical pillars such as Confucian ethics³⁵ and the Taoism's *yinyang*,³⁶ the last cultural value emphasizing equality is probably due to the recent dual impact of socialism and capitalism on Chinese culture.

After that, we can also compare the US and Finland, two successful, yet opposite, implementations of capitalism (one societal-centric and the other business-centric, respectively). The data show Finland ranking higher on embeddedness (4.46 vs. 4.27) and harmony (4.19 vs. 3.53). Given the relative newness of Finland³⁷ as well as the diversity of the US,³⁸ this is somewhat expected. The US leads on affective autonomy (2.49 vs. 2.13), intellectual autonomy (3.89 vs. 3.58), mastery (4.12 vs. 3.60), and hierarchy (2.68 vs. 2.46). This aligns with motivated and impactful activities by corporations to bring a much higher comparative GDP per capita (as found in Table 1), but it also leaves much opportunity for personal advancement as identified in its leading in venture capital and private equity attractiveness (also in Table 1). Interestingly, the level of egalitarianism is quite similar in Finland and the US (4.68 vs. 4.73). While the US *Declaration of Independence* (1776) mentions the issue of equality as a foundational tenet, it is quite common for the Nordic countries to value this quality culturally, as well. And, due to the particularly challenging survival conditions posed by Finland's harsh climate, it is little surprising that egalitarianism is a core concept.

Switching to another, even more established framework of national cultural values,³⁹ we briefly compare the countries in our sample across six important facets: (1) power distance; (2) individualism/collectivism; (3) masculinity/femininity; (4) uncertainty avoidance; (5) long-term orientation; and (6) indulgence/restraint. As defined by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, power distance relates to a culture's approach to the (un)equal distribution of power and resources. Meanwhile, individualism/collectivism focuses on whether a specific person or a

³³ Estonia has about 1.4 million people and the Czech Republic has about 10.8 million (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2024).

³⁴ Lizcano Fernández 2005:185–186.

³⁵ Confucius lived in the fourth and third centuries B.C.

³⁶ There is no clear founder of Taoism as it appears multiple people and forces impacted the belief system over time. However, the *Tao Te Ching* (2024) is often attributed to Lao Tzu sometime during the period 770–256 B.C.

³⁷ Finland declared its independence from Russia following the Russian Revolution, i.e., in 1917. The thirteen American colonies declared their independence from Britain in 1776.

³⁸ As an example, one could examine the religion-based demographics of each country. The level of Christianity is similar (Finland: 65.5%; US: 67%), but the consistency of Christianity is quite different. In Finland, the population is 63.6% Lutheran (Statistics Finland 2024). Meanwhile, the US population is 33% Protestant, 22% Catholic, and 11% other Christian (Gallup 2024).

³⁹ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

general group should be emphasized more. Then, masculinity/femininity relates to a cultural approach that is more aggressive, competitive, and assertive versus one that is more focused on relationships, others, and quality of life, respectively. After that, uncertainty avoidance emphasizes the importance of predictability in a society. Also, long-term orientation deals with the temporal focus of a culture: whether it is on the past and present or on the future. Finally, indulgence/restraint addresses a society's propensity to enjoy life, leisure, and personal freedom versus utilizing self-control and hard work.

As noted in the table provided in Fig. 14.3, the power distance index for both Mexico (81) and China (80) are high.

Table Illustrating Comparative National Cultural Values for Seven Countries							
	Czech Republic	Lithuania	Estonia	Mexico	China	Finland	United States
Embeddednessⁱ	3.81	n/a	3.77	4.23	3.25	4.46	4.27
Affective Autonomyⁱⁱ	3.36	n/a	3.37	2.68	3.94	2.13	2.49
Intellectual Autonomyⁱⁱⁱ	4.23	n/a	4.45	3.80	4.64	3.58	3.89
Mastery^{iv}	3.79	n/a	3.98	4.02	3.84	3.60	4.12
Harmony^v	4.31	n/a	4.23	3.97	4.35	4.19	3.53
Hierarchy^{vi}	2.04	n/a	2.97	2.99	1.69	2.46	2.68
Egalitarianism^{vii}	4.58	n/a	4.77	4.39	5.20	4.68	4.73
Power Distance^{viii}	57	42	40	81	80	33	40
Individualism/Collectivism^{ix}	58	60	60	30	20	63	91
Masculinity/Femininity^x	57	19	30	69	66	26	62
Uncertainty Avoidance^{xi}	74	65	60	82	30	59	46
Long-Term Orientation^{xii}	70	82	82	24	87	38	26
Indulgence/Restraint^{xiii}	29	16	16	97	24	57	68

ⁱ Schwartz 1999.

ⁱⁱ Schwartz 1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ Schwartz 1999.

^{iv} Schwartz 1999.

^v Schwartz 1999.

^{vi} Schwartz 1999.

^{vii} Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

^{viii} Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

^{ix} Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

^x Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

^{xi} Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

^{xii} Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

^{xiii} Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010.

Figure 14.3: Table Illustrating Comparative National Cultural Values for Seven Countries

Mexico's rating can likely be attributed to the aforementioned centuries-old social strata on which Mexican society is still based.⁴⁰ With China, there has been a long history of rule by emperors⁴¹ which has laid the groundwork for the endurance of the authoritarian People's Republic of China (the PRC). Meanwhile, low in power distance is Finland (33) and this appears, as presented before, related to the country's level of egalitarianism.⁴² For individualism, highest in the sample is the US (91) while lowest is China (20). As both the person and an individual's property are fundamental aspects of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776) of the US, this is expected. Also, the considerable emphasis on collectivism in China is anticipated due to the previously mentioned aspect of harmony⁴³ which is supported by the nation's core teachings of Confucius and Lao-Tzu. Scoring high on masculinity are both Mexico (69) and China (66). There is little doubt that Mexico's results are based on the role of *machismo* in Latin culture.⁴⁴ However, China's score reflects a general trend that shows females tend to have less formal education than males in the PRC,⁴⁵ thus creating an inherent cultural as well as economic power dynamic rooted in its societal dynamics. Interestingly, the country that had the lowest ranking in Table 3 was Lithuania (19). This could be related to the central role women had in keeping the Lithuanian language, culture, and identity alive during the nation's Tsarist and Soviet occupations.⁴⁶

The contrast relating to uncertainty avoidance between emerging market countries is very noticeable. The country rating highest was Mexico (82) while China ranked lowest (30). Given the traditional influence of Catholicism's formal bureaucracy in Latin America, it is little wonder that



Figure 14.4: Reverse of 5 Litas Lithuanian Banknote (1993-2007)

⁴⁰ Lizcano Fernández 2005: 185–186

⁴¹ The first dynasty of rulers in China was established over 4000 years ago.

⁴² Schwartz 1999.

⁴³ Schwartz 1999.

⁴⁴ Heep 2014: 104.

⁴⁵ Tu and Liao 2005:625.

⁴⁶ Featured on the back of the post-1991 independence 5 litas banknote, the famous national sculpture by Rimša (1939) shows a mother secretly teaching her child from a Lithuanian language and culture book behind a loom (see Figure 14.4).

the Church provided a strong stabilizing force in Mexico amid the country's historical turbulence.⁴⁷ China's low score can, perhaps, be seen as a result of the cultural prevalence and pragmatic utilization in China of *guānxi* (关系)⁴⁸ to accomplish many life activities and milestones. The countries with the highest scores for long-term orientation are China (87), Lithuania (82) and Estonia (82). Given the combination of previous culturally related concepts, such as its long dynastic history as well as the notion of close, mutually beneficial personal relationships, it is little wonder that China is able to invest considerable time and effort in the future. In terms of the rankings for Lithuania and Estonia, they are both very small nations which have endured many centuries living under other countries' legal frameworks. Even though it existed as a Grand Duchy as early as 1236, the Lithuanian commonwealth with Poland in 1569 and then the last trilateral partition in central Europe⁴⁹ in 1795 saw Lithuania cease to exist as a formal nation until independence in 1918. Estonia was not a formal country until after World War I in 1918. Previously the area had been ruled, at various time, by the Teutonic Knights, by the Danish, Swedish, Germanic, Polish, and Russian empires⁵⁰ as well as the Soviet Union. Therefore, given the extended time that both Lithuanians and Estonians have had to wait for independence, it is very plausible that their high long-term orientation is reflective of their patience for results.⁵¹

As the lowest in long-term orientation, it could be said that Mexico (24) and the US (26) reflect a general mindset in the New World. Given the vast financial and natural resources unexpectedly presented during each country's colonial period, it is little wonder that—as a derivative of traditional European values—a cultural mindset reflecting immediate utilization would attempt to take advantage of the opportunities presented and imagined. The final Hofstede (2010) measure, indulgence/restraint, had indulgence highest with Mexico (97). This is reflected in the strong impact of cultural festivals in the development of communities in the country and in the building of relationships in an atmosphere of enjoying life and leisurely activities.⁵² In contrast, Lithuania's and Estonia's scores (both 16) indicate a very high level of cultural restraint. This emphasis on self-control and delayed gratification undoubtedly has at least two sources: (1) the previously mentioned delay in gaining nationhood; and (2) the purges in each country conducted at Stalin's behest.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ohan 2001: 53.

⁴⁸ Loosely translated, it refers to the personal, social, and business relationships one uses for mutual benefit. The concept has two parts: *guan* (关), meaning "closed/caring", and *xi* (系), referring to a "system".

⁴⁹ This was a geopolitical strategy coordinated by Austria, Prussia, and Russia at the end of the eighteenth century to alter the balance of power in central Europe.

⁵⁰ Urban 1975; Urban 1981a; Urban 1998.

⁵¹ Urban 1993 observed how coins facilitated commerce in what is now Estonia as early as the fourteenth century. In addition, Urban 1981b found evidence in Russow's historical chronicling of a strong national identity among the Estonians as early as the 16th century. Throughout the extensive period during which they were subject to various different political systems, Urban 1998 indicates they maintained a durable cultural character.

⁵² Solano Morales 2024: 201.

⁵³ Implemented in the 1940s and 1950s, it is widely known that Stalin deported to Siberia over 100,000 men, women, and children deemed a threat to the Soviet Union.

Seven Cultures, Seven Societies: National Characters on the World Stage

Reflecting on these seven non-US cultures, each has its own unique history, character, and energy. However, as we have presented throughout, there are some commonalities that can have a possible impact moving forward. No doubt, each of the seven countries briefly presented here left an indelibly special place in our hearts. Their distinctiveness helped us to see more clearly the vivid and constructive tapestry which can exist when the world is at its best. In the following, we hope to capture a simple slice of each country's character.

To varying degrees, the Czechs, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Finns perceive the Russian (and related Soviet) government as a colonizer. While the Czechs were a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before World War I and benefited from a certain level of autonomy, the Lithuanians, Estonians, and Finns were well in the grip of the Russian Empire and endured a considerable level of attempted assimilation: discouraging the public use of the local language and requiring that only the Cyrillic alphabet be used instead of the Latin characters of each language's tradition. However, soon after the end of World War II, the Czechs found themselves a part of the great Soviet experiment that sought to balance eastern Europe against the western European democratic governmental and capitalistic economic systems.

The Czechs consider Good King Wenceslaus (Václav, in Czech), of Christmas carol fame, to be an early important influence on the nation. Although missionaries Cyril and Methodius—with their Christian traditions from Byzantium—are credited with introducing the faith to the country in the 9th century, when Christianity was not yet divided between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West, King Václav started orienting the Czechs toward Roman Christianity due to an increasing Germanic influence. Even though King Václav has a profound place in Czech history, the life of Jan Hus (1370–1415) captured the passion and perseverance of the nation's character. Seeking to reform the Church from within, Hus drew from the groundbreaking perspectives of John Wycliffe (c. 1328–1384). Considered a heretic because of his reformist teachings, Hus was burned at the stake in 1415.⁵⁴ In executing Hus, religious authorities clearly underestimated the impact of Hus among the Czechs. As a result, the nation revolted and the Hussites, led initially by a one-eyed general named Jan Žižka (1360–1424), fought in armed conflict against the Church for nearly two decades before the rebellion was defeated.

As noted by the special relationship Mozart had with the people of Prague,⁵⁵ the Czechs were a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Before their exit from this Empire after World War I, a widely known and endearing dark comedy and satire, *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek (1883–1923),⁵⁶ included many topics which examined the pointlessness of armed conflict. With nationhood established in 1918 during a euphoric era of nationalist self-determinism, Tomáš Masaryk (1850–1937) became a critical figure as the country's first president. However, as a second world war became more and more likely, Hitler's temporary appeasement at the expense of the Czechs relinquishing the heavily fortified Sudetenland border regions was considered an unspoken national betrayal. At the end of World War II, the Czechs came under the Soviet umbrella for over four decades. Seeking to modernize and liberalize the Soviet system, the head

⁵⁴ Hus, in turn, greatly influenced Martin Luther's work nearly a full century later.

⁵⁵ Freeman 2021: 329–331.

⁵⁶ Hašek 1923.

of the Communist government, Alexander Dubček (1921–1992), led a movement with the motto of having “socialism with a human face”. However, this perspective was seen as a threat to the Soviet approach and it was summarily crushed by other, more conservative Soviet-friendly countries aligned with Moscow. However, throughout these turbulent and unpredictable events, the Czechs were still able to maintain their uniqueness through the music of Bedřich Smetana (1823–1884) and Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904), but also with the work of dissident writer and future president Václav Havel (1936–2011) amongst others.

Even though all three Baltic States endured more severe policies under the Soviet occupation after World War II, they were able to retain their very distinct national cultures and still band together for a common purpose.⁵⁷ For instance, in 1989, to protest the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany,⁵⁸ about two million citizens of the Baltic States supporting independence held hands for fifteen minutes to connect all three capitals⁵⁹ as a human chain in an act of peaceful defiance to create what became known as *The Baltic Way*. Their activities were accompanied by an overall so-called Singing Revolution⁶⁰ which began in 1988 and continued until independence was achieved for all three countries in 1991.

Finland has had its own experiences with the Russian government. As part of the Swedish Empire,⁶¹ Finland’s administrative center was located in Turku, a town in the far southwest corner of the country. However, when the Russian Empire gained Finland in 1809, the Finns gained some autonomy but the capital was moved to Helsinki so it could be closer to Russia proper.⁶² Soon after, Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) emerged to inspire the Finns as a nation through his music compositions. Noticing the change among the populace, the Russian authorities began to actively discourage such nationalistic displays. In response, the titles of Sibelius’s works were changed and obfuscated to evade governmental attempts to suppress them.⁶³ At the end of World War I, Finland achieved independence but, soon after the start of World War II, the ethos of the Finnish national character, *sisu*,⁶⁴ was tested like never before. Vastly outnumbered in personnel and equipment, the Finns halted an attempted invasion by the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 in what became known as the Winter War. The result was a treaty in which Finland agreed to remain neutral toward Nazi Germany. After World War II and throughout the Cold War Finland continued

⁵⁷ Lieven 1993.

⁵⁸ The August 23, 1939, secret agreement was a non-aggression treaty which gave the Soviet Union the ability to absorb the Baltic States.

⁵⁹ Tallinn, Estonia; Riga, Latvia; and Vilnius, Lithuania.

⁶⁰ Vogt 2005: 26.

⁶¹ Relative to their experience with Russia, the Finns have had a quite amicable relationship with the Swedes. So much so that, in addition to Swedish as a necessary part of a Finnish schoolchild’s second language education, there is a considerable Swedish minority in the western part of the country to this day.

⁶² St. Petersburg, the empire’s capital, was a mere 250 miles away from Helsinki.

⁶³ This was particularly true of Sibelius’s *Finlandia* which conjured nationalist imagery of resistance to what had become perceived as occupation by the Russian Empire (Riley 2017). Alternative titles for *Finlandia* included *Happy Feelings at the awakening of Finnish Spring*, and *A Scandinavian Choral March* (Wikipedia n.d.).

⁶⁴ While many translations attempt to capture the essence of the concept, *sisu* is close to an internal toughness to persevere against all odds (NATO 2025).

to maintain a policy of non-alignment, a strategy called Finlandization.⁶⁵ Following the end of the Cold War in 1991, Finland joined the EU in 1995. Then, due to a resurgently bellicose Russian government, Finland joined NATO in 2023.

There is a heightened nationalist-based bond between the Finns and Estonians. This is partially due to a relatively common history vis-à-vis Russia (and the Soviet Union) as well as Sweden. However, unlike Lithuania,⁶⁶ both Estonia and Finland are Finno-Ugric countries.⁶⁷ In addition, the two countries' capitals are just across the Gulf of Finland from each other.⁶⁸

Table Illustrating Comparative National Anthem Information for Seven Countries

	Czech Republic	Lithuania	Estonia	Mexico	China	Finland	Saudi Arabia	United States
National Anthem Title	<i>Where My Home Is</i>	<i>National Song</i>	<i>My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy</i>	<i>Mexican National Anthem</i>	<i>March of the Volunteers</i>	<i>Our Land</i>	<i>Chant of the Saudi Nation</i>	<i>The Star-Spangled Banner</i>
Anthem Significance or Theme	nature-focused incidental music from comedic play	poetically condensed nation-based concept	poetically condensed nation-based concept	refers to nation's battle victories and homeland defense	recalls fight against Japanese invasion of Manchuria	nature-focused nation-based poetically condensed concept	emphasizes God's importance, Islam's centrality, and King's long life	recalls British attack on Baltimore fort
Year Lyrics Written	1834	1898	1869	1853	1934	1848	1984	1814
Anthem Lyrics Author	Josef Kajetán Tyl	Vincas Kudirka	Johann Voldemar Jannsen	Francisco González Bocanegra	Tian Han	Johan Ludvig Runeberg	Ibrāhīm Khafājī	Francis Scott Key
Anthem Music Written	1834	1898	1848	1854	1935	1848	1947	1773
Anthem Music Composer	František Škroup	Vincas Kudirka	Fredrik Pacius	Jaime Nunó Roca	Nie Er	Fredrik Pacius	Abd al-Raḥman al-Khaṭīb	John Stafford Smith
Other Anthem Notes			same melody as Finnish national anthem			melody also used for Estonian national anthem		same melody as British social club song

Figure 14.5: Table Illustrating Comparative National Anthem Information for Seven Countries

⁶⁵ This term was coined with derogatory connotations in West Germany during the Cold War. However, it must be noted such global geopolitical commentary is much easier to make when the criticism is made from behind NATO's defenses. Politicians should be mindful that Finland borders Russia and, at the time, had little hope of assistance from NATO.

⁶⁶ Lithuania is considered a Baltic country in the linguistic and cultural sense of the word. Like Latvia, Lithuania's Baltic language is most similar (though very distantly) to Slavic languages and, thus, has an Indo-European lineage.

⁶⁷ In comparison to Lithuania and Latvia, Estonia (like Finland and, more removed, Hungary) is a Finno-Ugric people. In contrast to the Indo-European tradition with its origins in the eastern European steppes (Mallory 1989:185), Finno-Ugric languages have their origins mainly in the northern Ural Mountains (Campbell 2004: 405).

⁶⁸ The distance between Tallinn, Estonia, and Helsinki, Finland, is about 50 miles.

Therefore, a close relationship between the two nations was bound to occur. One very strong indication is found in the table provided in Fig. 14.5 as Estonia's and Finland's national anthems use the same melody, albeit with different titles and different lyrics. This fundamental kinship between the two nations can be thought of as forged to form a durable and lasting cultural relationship.

However, a unique Estonian character emerged at about the same time as in Finland. This corresponded with an aggressive policy in the Russian Empire to assimilate the local population. As in Finland, this created a national cultural response in which artists such as the Estonian writer Lydia Koidula (1843–1886) created nation-based work in the arts such as poetry, prose, and theater to manifest an Estonian identity. With its independence in 1918 after World War I, Estonia had its first opportunity to exert its distinctiveness as a nation-state. However, it was short lived as World War II wreaked havoc and, by its conclusion in 1945, Estonia was once again under the dominion of Russian-speaking superiors—this time as part of the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ As the Cold War quickly accelerated to an end and the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Estonia regained its independence in 1991.

For the nearly five decades of Soviet occupation, Estonia was able to sustain itself with Finland's help. Starting in the 1960s, broadcasts by Finnish television stations had made it possible for the northern section of Estonia to watch Western programming without interference from the Soviet censors.⁷⁰ To serve as a reminder of their similarity as well as the Estonians' own nationhood, the melody of both countries' national anthem (prohibited in Estonia during the Soviet period) was transmitted in the morning and in the evening at the beginning and at the end of every day's broadcast on Finnish national radio.⁷¹ Also, there were multilevel relationships and considerable investments made by Finnish businesses in the Estonian economy during the Soviet period.⁷² This laid the groundwork for Estonian and Finnish companies in 1991 and after to intensify their commerce activity and subsequently for Estonia to join the EU in 2004. In addition, given its past history specifically with Russian-led bureaucracies, Estonia sought protection from Russia and membership in NATO.⁷³ To complete its transition to western Europe, the country began participating fully in the organization's activities in 2004.⁷⁴

As mentioned earlier, Lithuania had a much different history than Estonia. In fact, this could have greatly influenced the different assimilation policy undertaken in Lithuania vis-à-vis that experienced by Estonia and Latvia.⁷⁵ For context, the first documentation of the country's existence in the historical record is in 1009,⁷⁶ before Lithuania was Christianized. This long history implies that, during the Soviet period, Lithuania, unlike the other two Baltic States had a deeper

⁶⁹ As with the Russian Empire before it, the Soviet Union conducted a cultural strategy intent on assimilating eastern Slavic culture with Estonia's. So effective was its implementation that, to compare, ethnic Estonians comprised about 90% in 1944 and then about 61% in 1989 (Estonian Ministry of Justice 2005: 21).

⁷⁰ Lepp and Pantti 2012: 77.

⁷¹ Miljan 2015: 314.

⁷² Stöcker 2016: 459–462, 465–468, 470–473.

⁷³ Volker 2010.

⁷⁴ It is worth stating that, upon visiting a local Estonian family's home, we noticed that an Estonian translated copy of *The Good Soldier Svejk* was on their public bookshelf. This provides an indication that Estonia was willing to draw from an amalgam of resources to maintain its identity centered on passive resistance during the Soviet period.

⁷⁵ Estonian Ministry of Justice 2005.

⁷⁶ Based on the writings related to St. Bruno of Querfurt on his travels throughout the region (Baranauskas 2009:28).

cultural well from which to draw strength. This led to an implicit cultural capacity, absent in Estonia and Latvia that, in the face of overwhelming odds, enabled Lithuanians to engage in the Soviet system with less concern for their national survival.⁷⁷ This relative positive societal attitude, from Moscow's perspective, made Lithuania undoubtedly seem less threatening than the other two Baltic States. As a result, the Soviet presence in Lithuania was considerably less hostile.

Lithuania had a noteworthy history beginning with Grand Duke Mindaugas (c.1203-1263) who became leader of the pagan Lithuanians in 1236, was baptized in 1250 or 1251 and then was granted the title of king by the Catholic Church in 1253. Lithuania was thus the last country in Europe to accept Christianity. Later, after reverting to paganism for a period of time, a dynastic union with Poland was achieved in 1386, when Vytautas the Great (c.1350–1430) emerged as another critical national figure. In fact, with increasing support from Poland, Lithuania, during a protracted civil war, was able to defeat the Teutonic Knights and its local sympathizers in decisive battles at Grunwald⁷⁸ in 1410 and at Ukmergė⁷⁹ in 1435.

Throughout this period, under Vytautas' leadership Lithuania expanded southeastward to its greatest extent and extended from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Then, in 1569, the union with Poland became more formalized and the two nations arranged as a commonwealth, which led to increased Polish influence on Lithuanian territories over the next two centuries. The combined country remained an important player in central European affairs until its final partition in 1795. After their absorption into the Russian Empire, Lithuanians maintained a sense of national identity, as mentioned earlier. This was maintained and fostered with the work of artists such as Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) who, like Sibelius in Finland, composed orchestral pieces that captured aspects of the Lithuanian spirit during the nation's occupation.⁸⁰

Mexico, meanwhile, has had a long and contentious relationship with the US. With a background highlighting the cultural achievements of the Aztecs and Mayans prior to the defeat of the Aztecs in 1521 by the Spaniards led by Hernán Cortés (1485–1547), Mexican culture is an amalgamation of indigenous and Spanish influence that continues to this day,⁸¹ with several dozen languages spoken in the country⁸² and with an ethnically mixed population created by these historical forces.⁸³ By the time Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the westward expansion of the US was already underway. This led to a long, border-based relationship in which the two countries have been intertwined for over two centuries.

The first flashpoint could be attributed to both countries' dealings with the Texas region. While its aspirations for independence went unrecognized by Mexico, the Battle of the Alamo⁸⁴

⁷⁷ This general perspective was noted in the Lithuanian government's open willingness to extend citizenship to Russian-speaking inhabitants after independence restoration in 1991 (Aptekar 2009: 520). This was contrary to the policies in Estonia and Latvia which required language proficiency for citizenship.

⁷⁸ Urban 1999.

⁷⁹ Housley 1992: 363.

⁸⁰ Two of his most famous pieces, *In the Forest* and *The Sea*, harken back to distant and naturalist historical motifs.

⁸¹ Solano Morales 2024: 196-197.

⁸² Lizcano Fernández 2005: 191.

⁸³ Lizcano Fernández 2005: 196, 198, 199, 218, 228. This is noted in the demographic data from the end of the 20th century indicating that people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry were 70% of the Mexican population, 15% were of European ancestry, and 14% were of indigenous ancestry (Lizcano Fernández 2005: 218).

⁸⁴ The remains of the fort survive in San Antonio, Texas.

in 1836 was an integral part of the formation of the Texas identity⁸⁵ and led to the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the US annexation of Texas in 1845. As a result of this armed conflict, the US also gained Utah, Nevada, California, and most of Arizona.⁸⁶ Subsequently, the rest of Arizona was acquired by the US through the Gadsden Purchase in 1853.

Afterward, Mexico and the US had a checkered relationship. Given the long border stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, many opportunities arose for interaction and animosity. For instance, the film *Like Water for Chocolate*⁸⁷ follows a family in the 1910s which lives on both sides of the Mexico/US border in the Texas region. Following some of the relationships that develop, even though a national boundary separates different parts of the family from each other, the film demonstrates the potential constructiveness resulting from such circumstances.

That stated, significant cross-border migration has seen US employers seeking a Mexican-based workforce for some time. Driven partially by the turmoil and change of the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920,⁸⁸ demand in the US for workers from Mexico was at an unprecedented high through the 1920s, only to drop considerably for the next five decades.⁸⁹ However, as Mexican workers tended to stay in the US, their children became American workers of Mexican descent. This led to movements, such as those led by César Chávez, to pressure for better wages and improved working conditions. Recognizing the close business ties that had developed over the years, NAFTA, which bound Mexico to the US closely economically, was enacted in 1994. Then, to replace NAFTA, the USMCA took effect in 2020.

Another country which has extensive trade ties with the US is China. With its first organized dynasty beginning around 2100 B.C., mainland China has a very rich cultural heritage. In order to provide protection against nomadic tribes to the north construction of the Great Wall, the most widely known monument of the country, began initially around 770 B.C., but moved forward in earnest in 221 B.C. with the establishment of a unified China under the rule of the Qin Dynasty. Throughout the imperial dynastic period, additional culturally significant architectural feats were accomplished. Most impressive could be considered the Forbidden City in Beijing on which construction began in 1406.⁹⁰

Given this deep history as a large country, mainland China has a strong national identity. This was most readily seen in the Boxer Rebellion of 1899–1901, which was a conservative movement against many of the international forces influencing the country at the time. Taking place after the Opium Wars of 1839–1842 and 1856–1860, this two-year period is seen as a nationalist attempt to reject foreign and Christian control in mainland China.⁹¹ Once the empire was replaced in 1912, China entered a turbulent period which eventually led to a civil war

⁸⁵ Walker 2015: 47–56.

⁸⁶ This was due to the Mexican Cession of 1848.

⁸⁷ A 1992 feature film distributed by Miramax that is based on the 1989 novel by Laura Esquivel.

⁸⁸ Benjamin 2000.

⁸⁹ Borjas and Katz 2005: 2. It should be noted that, in 1910, immigrants from Mexico only comprised about 2% of the total immigrant workforce in the US (Borjas and Katz 2005:48). By 1920, this had increased to almost 3% (Borjas and Katz:48). A steady increase in this statistic saw Mexican immigrants as 5% in 1950, about 17% in 1980, and about 30% in 2000 (Borjas and Katz 2005: 48; Gutiérrez 2019: 16). From there, the percentage of migrants from Mexico was steady until toward the end of the 2010s when it dropped to about 25% (Gutiérrez 2019: 16).

⁹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization 1987.

⁹¹ Hammond 2023: 131.

between the so-called nationalists and communists. Starting in 1927, the conflict was interrupted by Japan's invasion in 1936 and did not resume until the end of World War II in 1945.⁹² Afterward, the civil war reached its conclusion in 1949, with the communists under Mao Zedong (1893–1976) taking the mainland and the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) escaping to Taiwan.⁹³

After consolidating power, Mao decided to embark on the so-called Great Leap Forward of 1958–1962 to improve agriculture and industrialize the country.⁹⁴ However, the inefficiencies which this cultural overhaul created initiated the Great Chinese Famine around the same time.⁹⁵ Then, to rid the country of apparent capitalist-supporting forces, the Cultural Revolution began in 1966. Instead, this brought about ten years of chaos and turmoil until Mao's death in 1976.⁹⁶ The resulting impact of these two decades on the PRC was quite profound as many of the country's traditional cultural norms, values, and traditions were upended and undermined.

Taking a cue from Nixon's strategic visit to China in 1972, China's new leadership opted to begin engaging with the US and other Western countries in a more proactive fashion starting in the late 1970s.⁹⁷ This led in the 1980s to many economic liberalization policies similar to those found in Soviet-led countries.⁹⁸ Along with many nations with similar politically socialist leaders, a growing democratic movement emerged in 1989. However, contrary to most of the countries of eastern Europe, the political reforms demanded by the Tiananmen Square protesters were ended militarily.⁹⁹ Still, after regaining the former Western colonies of Hong Kong in 1997 and Macau in 1999 under a "one country, two systems" approach, the government determined that these territories could retain some autonomy.¹⁰⁰ Going further, China continued moving its economic system toward a version of capitalism to become a primary manufacturer in the global economy¹⁰¹ after joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. This well positioned the country to have a greater influence on the global stage through such projects as its Belt and Road Initiative. Started in 2013, this worldwide project has the goal of improving financial, digital, and other infrastructure, creating more business opportunities, and increasing China's influence in the global economy.¹⁰²

While the KSA was formally established in 1932 after King Abdulaziz unified many areas of the western, central, eastern, and southern Arabian Peninsula, the country has much richer cultural traditions than its recent nationhood might imply. Modern influences start with the emergence of the Islamic prophet Muhammad at the beginning of the A.D. 600s.¹⁰³ Muslims generally consider Muhammad as the last messenger of God following in a long tradition of

⁹² Lew and Leung 2013: 3, 6–8, 9–12.

⁹³ Lew and Leung 2013: 3.

⁹⁴ Perkins 1991: 483, 486.

⁹⁵ Gráda 2007: 5, 28–30.

⁹⁶ Tao, Berci, and He 2006.

⁹⁷ White House Historical Association 1979.

⁹⁸ Most noteworthy of these were the policies of *perestroika* ("restructuring") and *glasnost* ("transparency") undertaken in the Soviet Union by Gorbachev.

⁹⁹ Roth 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Hu 2023: 176.

¹⁰¹ Marsh 2011.

¹⁰² Jin 2023: 281–282.

¹⁰³ Watt 1998: 5.

important Judeo-Christian figures such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus.¹⁰⁴ Along with this influence of Islamic thought and culture has come an ornateness that is associated with the interior and exterior of many famous mosques¹⁰⁵ and complexity in music that have influenced the KSA and elsewhere.¹⁰⁶

While the people of today's KSA have nomadic cultural origins,¹⁰⁷ the emergence and spread of Islam with the Umayyad dynasty soon after Muhammad's death saw the religion's influence spread well to the west and east. By A.D. 750, the Muslim world occupied territory from nearly all of the Iberian Peninsula to the western fringes of southern Asia and included the Arabian Peninsula, as well.¹⁰⁸ Later, in the 16th century, the Ottomans began contending for the area of present-day KSA.¹⁰⁹ This precipitated a response from the local peoples in 1727. Led by the Saud dynasty and accompanied by the puritanical Sunni Muslim Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhaab (1703–1792),¹¹⁰ the first Saudi political government was established on the peninsula in 1744.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire held many parts of present-day KSA and the rest of the peninsula was controlled by nomadic tribes influenced by the Al-Rashid family.¹¹² After a power struggle and banishment to Kuwait, the Saud family returned to the country in 1902.

Just before World War I, the Saud family gained the support of many tribal Wahhabis and took strategic areas from the Ottoman Empire.¹¹³ After World War I, the Saudi family continued its conflict with the Al-Rashid family. Emerging victorious in 1921 and, with the continued help of the Wahhabi tribes, the Saudis established a more unified kingdom on the peninsula in 1926.¹¹⁴ At this point, the leaders of the Wahhabi movement wanted to expand their religious influence both inside and outside the new kingdom. However, since the Wahhabis' main tenet was much more Islamic fundamentalist and focused locally, the modernization efforts and encouragement of non-Muslim foreigners made by Abdulaziz Saud put them in conflict. Finally, in 1929, the fundamentalist Wahhabi leadership was defeated and subsequently eliminated.¹¹⁵ This laid the groundwork for the current conditions in the KSA.

Though there was a significant British presence in the affairs of the KSA early in the 20th century,¹¹⁶ the US has maintained more enduring and deeper unique relationships in the country over time due to a variety of factors. First, in the 1920s and early 1930s, before petroleum was discovered in the region, US companies commonly assisted the different struggling tribes¹¹⁷ to

¹⁰⁴ Peters 2003: 9.

¹⁰⁵ Peterson 1996: 195–197

¹⁰⁶ Urkevich 2015: 62–94, 181–218.

¹⁰⁷ Gordon 2005: 4.

¹⁰⁸ Lindsay 2005: 2.

¹⁰⁹ Bernstein 2008: 191.

¹¹⁰ Harris, Mews, Morris, and Shepherd 1992: 369. Al-Wahhab gave rise to the Wahhabi form of Islam with considerable influence in the KSA today.

¹¹¹ Bowen 2007: 69–70.

¹¹² Al-Rasheed 1997: 81.

¹¹³ Dekmejian 1994: 131.

¹¹⁴ Wynbrandt and Gerges 2010: 182.

¹¹⁵ Lacey 2009: 15–16.

¹¹⁶ Murphy 2008: 5–8. See also Harrod's paper in this volume.

¹¹⁷ El-Ghonemy 1998: 56.

locate and drill for water,¹¹⁸ a resource much more valuable for survival and livelihood in the desert.¹¹⁹ Then, once oil was found in the 1930s, Standard Oil of California (later Chevron) entered into an agreement with the Saudi government to form Aramco in the 1940s.¹²⁰ With Aramco transitioning from US to Saudi ownership over time,¹²¹ Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990–1991 saw many Western-aligned countries led by the US accomplish two objectives: (1) prevent Iraq from attacking the KSA; and (2) dislodge Iraq from Kuwait. In short, these three significant cross-national collaborations indicate the distinctive relations between the US and the KSA that currently exist and have laid the groundwork for continued interactions.

There is little doubt the KSA is currently seeking to have a greater influence on the global stage. Rather than utilizing the traditional historical approach used by nation-states which is typically more militaristic, the KSA is largely deploying a strategy of cultural diplomacy. The country holds a large degree of socio-cultural power in the Middle East and Arab world that well exceeds its position in the energy industry.¹²² As the primary regional alternative to Shia Iran, there are two aspects that contribute to this strength. First, by drawing away from recent fundamentalist influences and launching its Saudi Vision 2030 initiative,¹²³ the country's domestic culture of social cohesion, quality of life, opportunity, and tolerance¹²⁴ serve as an example to the region. Then, in the international context, the Saudi government typically focuses on respecting and solving multilateral problems in a cooperative way to adhere to commitments that may be necessary and/or expected,¹²⁵ and models the policy of modelling an example for other nations.

The strategy does not stop there. In addition to two of its Riyadh soccer clubs being the most searched sports teams on Google,¹²⁶ the country is making almost \$40 billion in investments to build the country as an esports hub.¹²⁷ Even more, the KSA supported the formation of the LIV¹²⁸ Golf organization in the 2020s to act as an alternative to the PGA in professional golfing.¹²⁹ So threatening was the LIV to the sport's established business model that the PGA¹³⁰ opted for the slow process of merging.¹³¹ Still, perhaps the greatest anticipation for the country was its awarding of the FIFA¹³² World Cup in 2034.¹³³ Should they continue on the present trajectory, the KSA will have the opportunity to showcase its balanced modernization efforts currently underway and potential successes to come.

¹¹⁸ Jones 2012: 231.

¹¹⁹ Oleson 2016.

¹²⁰ Aramco 2025.

¹²¹ The company, as a result, officially changed its name from Aramco to Saudi Aramco.

¹²² Gallorotti and Al-Filali 2014: 233.

¹²³ Alghannam 2024: 2.

¹²⁴ Gallorotti and Al-Filali 2014: 237.

¹²⁵ Gallorotti and Al-Filali 2014: 237.

¹²⁶ Legends 2024: 8.

¹²⁷ Legends 2024: 7.

¹²⁸ LIV is a reference to the Roman numeric system noting 54, the number of holes at an organization event (Harig 2022).

¹²⁹ Beall 2022.

¹³⁰ Professional Golfers' Association (of America).

¹³¹ Dethier 2025.

¹³² Fédération Internationale de Football Association.

¹³³ Colman 2024.

A Conclusion: 1990s Eastern Europe Versus 2020s Middle East and Beyond

Perhaps the best ending to this cross-national examination across three decades is to venture back to the country of this journey's beginning. On the Old Town Square in the capital of the Czech Republic, Prague, sits the Jan Hus Memorial as shown in Figure 2. Introduced in 1915, a full 500 years after his martyrdom, the location serves as a very powerful symbol of Czech national identity. However, true to form, in the face of overwhelming odds and a vastly superior opponent, the essence of passive resistance – which has been practiced for millennia in similar conditions – is found inscribed: “Love each other and wish the truth to everyone.”¹³⁴



Figure 14.6: Front View of Jan Hus Memorial on Prague Old Town Square in Prague, Czech Republic.

Science tells us that a vast majority of the biological differences between groups of people are contextual and based on conditions such as sunlight, rainfall, ground conditions, and weather. The humanities tell us something similar: based on the migration of humanity over time, languages, normative traditions, and governing systems are related, generally, based on their proximity – or lack thereof.

The crux? For reasons of survival, we have been acclimated to identify differences. This approach served us well 10,000 years ago when our species lived in conditions very far removed from the present day. Which plants would kill our small group? Which plants would help our group live to the next day? Which animals had enough meat for us to not starve? In effect, humanity used its basic capabilities of discernment to survive. However, today we are faced with an altogether different challenge.

Due to the dual forces of globalization and information technology, the belief systems of the world which developed largely in isolation for most of history are now being increasingly accelerated toward each other. Because they had little contact with other belief systems,¹³⁵ each region told itself its way was the “right” way because there were few other options to inform otherwise. Now, we are starting to have the difficult discussions that can lead to conflict – and to possible understanding.

In fact, it has become clear, especially most recently in our experience in the KSA that there are underlying currents in any social system in which its members are seeking to improve themselves and their lot in life in some way, shape, or form at the very least—in whatever way that may be defined. However, destructive tactics and strategies to achieve this goal serve no useful purpose because they only breed more resentment and destruction. This leads back to the inscription on the Jan Hus Memorial: “Love each other and wish the truth to everyone.”

There have been many discussions over the years and centuries about the several different forms of love as expressed by the ancient Greeks. In fact, there is debate concerning the

¹³⁴ The inscription on the monument reads in Czech: *Milujte se pravdy každému přejte.*

¹³⁵ This was aside from tangential commercial activity.

precise number of expressions of the concept to this day. Still, there are some upon which most can agree: *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.¹³⁶ However, depending on the time and context, there can be different meanings and interpretations for each of these three concepts of love. The first usually refers to some relation to passion. The second deals much more with love as friendship. The third addresses concepts akin to the love of doing good works. While *eros* can be used for negative objectives,¹³⁷ to be true to the inscription on the Jan Hus Memorial, the actions must be constructive in nature.¹³⁸ The same can be said for seeking, establishing, and maintaining friendships, but also doing good works both large and small when the opportunities arise.

Through the millennia, humanity has been conditioned to seek out differences to survive. Even today, we are trained to identify patterns of differences to deliver value for companies and customers. However, taken in the aggregate, the different branches of physical and social sciences tell us we are more similar than different. Starting from a fixed origination point on the global, *homo sapiens* branched out over time in isolated groups and adapted physically to their new environments. However, they also developed unique belief systems attempting to explain the unknown and the divine. Along with this came normative and linguistic similarities and differences.

Still, considerable parallels can be found across cultures from disparate places with enjoyment and respect for cultural artistic production in the form of music, dance, poetry, prose, and drama. Physical sciences go one step further and indicate that the members of the *homo sapiens* species are over 99% genetically identical.¹³⁹ As any statistician knows, this is well within the threshold of statistical significance. Therefore, in short, both the social and physical sciences are telling us we should be paying much more attention to our similarities than our differences.

There seem to be few alternatives to enact international societal understanding as envisioned by the Quakers and the Peace Corps. However, it would seem the process by which to weaponize peace is through love. As mentioned earlier, the ancient Greeks gave us a multitude of tools to accomplish this. Now that the globe is continuing to become a much smaller place perceptually, it may be the time to begin using the implements of peace in earnest.

¹³⁶ Richardson 1943: 173–174, 178–179.

¹³⁷ Perhaps among Christianity's seven cardinal sins, the most relevant in this case could be pride, greed, wrath, envy, and lust. Drawing from the equivalent in Hinduism, the most applicable of the six enemies of the mind might be ego, greed, anger, jealousy, and desire/lust. Then, turning to Buddhism, among the five poisons, pride, jealousy, and attachment could apply. As can be noted, many of the world's belief systems have corollaries which accomplish similar tasks.

¹³⁸ To accomplish this, possibly the most relevant of Christianity's seven capital virtues would be charity, diligence, kindness, patience, and humility.

¹³⁹ Abrams 2023 at 16:39 in presentation.

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