

AGORA

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Policy of Contradiction
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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are thrilled to announce the return of Agora Magazine after a six-year hiatus! To say a lot has changed since our last issue would be a drastic understatement, and our latest edition comes amid a rapidly shuffling global landscape that threatens to reshape the world order.

One of the most important rights of American citizens is the right to vote — and vote they did, steering the nation onto a new course with the historic election of Donald Trump in November. The decisions made at the ballot box will reverberate far beyond the nation's borders; in this issue, we examine its impacts on U.S. policy in Israel with “Divided We Fall” by Aaron Shone, while Will Stover’s “BRICS Breaks Down Dollar Diplomacy” details the steps America needs to take to bolster its flagging dollar against the rise of transnational currencies. Closer to home, “It’s Time for Women in Mexico” by Jasmine Kwak sheds light on the policies of Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico’s first female president, while “Russia’s African Reach” by Africa deskhead Amalia Tormala discusses combating Russian paramilitary advances on the continent.

Whether it’s adapting to economic fluxes or responding to evolving warfare tactics, the decisions made by the United States reveal much about its priorities and values. With this issue, we are excited to once again provide a platform for the students of Paly to inform and express their opinions about American foreign policy, on topics that often overlook youth voices. You can find our articles on our online platform at palyagora.com. We would also love to hear your comments and questions on our latest issue in order to foster greater community discussion on these important issues, so please feel free to reach out to palyagoramagazine@gmail.com. Enjoy!

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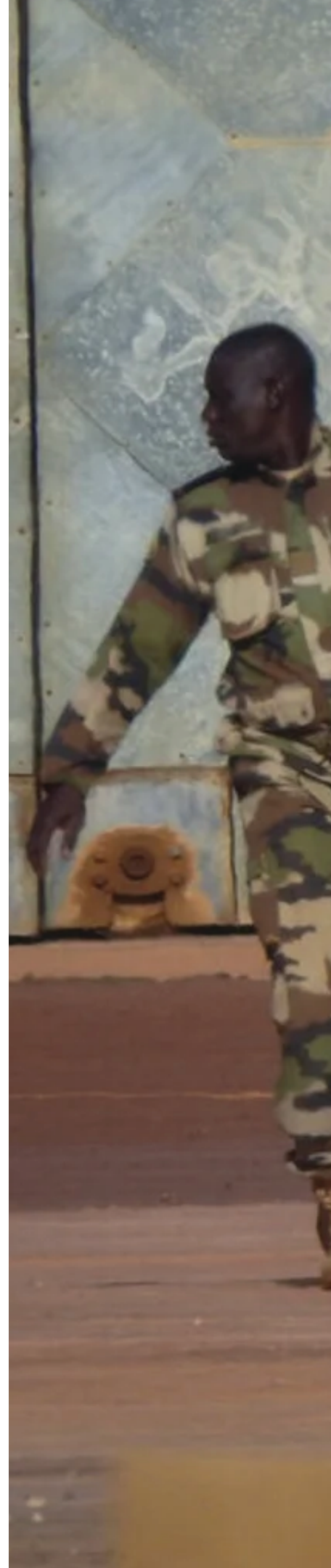
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Russia's African Reach

Wagner's African influence poses dangers to the U.S. as political stability on the continent falters

A shadowy force has been quietly reshaping the future of African democracies. Since 2017, the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, has escalated its influence across the continent by embedding itself within local conflicts, economies and governments. With limited intervention from the United States, Russia's hold on Africa is not only reshaping regional power dynamics but is also spreading anti-Western beliefs. To counter this, the U.S. must go beyond sanctions and actively promote democratic stability through economic aid systems and quickly offering support to African nations — specifically, post-coups — across the continent.

The Wagner Group, founded by Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, is an intricate and complex network of mercenary groups and businesses. According to NPR, Prigozhin died under suspicious means in a plane crash following his mutiny in June 2023. No indication was given as to the cause of the crash, as the Kremlin denied having any involvement in his death, per an August 2023 article from The Guardian. According to a 2023 report by the Congressional Research Service, the Wagner Group operates as a proxy for the Kremlin — Russia's government — bypassing international scrutiny to pursue Russia's interests abroad while receiving special treatment from the government. This is why the Kremlin uses Wagner to boost its foreign policy interests in Africa — specifically to undermine U.S. power, increase Russian influence and exploit African nations both economically and militarily.

Currently, much of the economic gain Wagner appropriates from Africa is used to fund the war in Ukraine, according to a 2024 BBC article. Specifically, gold mining operations have earned the Kremlin more than \$2.5 billion according to The Blood Gold Report.

As stated by the Congressional Research Service, through operations in Lib-

ya, Mali, the Central African Republic and Sudan, the Wagner Group offers critical services such as security, military training and mining management — deepening its ties across Africa. Most notably, Wagner provides African nations with trained soldiers who are ready to pursue relatively unchecked counterinsurgency operations. For example, in Libya, Wagner secured access to multiple significant oil fields to aid with energy output and Libyan smuggling operations in 2023. Through similar tactics, Wagner has managed to expand their African footprint to around 5,000 Russian soldiers, convicts and foreign nationals, according to a 2023 article from the Council on Foreign Relations.

Africa has also been subject to disinformation campaigns thanks to the Wagner Group. Since 2022, Russosphere, a Russian social media network known for defending Russia and the Wagner Group internationally, has swiftly gained traction across several African countries, according to a 2023 NPR article.

But Russosphere is only one example of the Kremlin's abundant disinformation campaigns in Africa. As of March 2024, 189 disinformation campaigns were active in Africa, and the Wagner Group was responsible for nearly half, as stated by a 2024 report from Africa Center. A newer channel, the "African Initiative," also focuses on spreading disinformation regarding the West, hosting offices in Burkina Faso and Mali. Though spearheaded by certain Russian officials, the organization enlists African journalists and bloggers to promote Russian ideas and detract from Western nations. Anti-colonialism ideas are one of the prima-

ry components of Russian disinformation campaigns. When successfully implemented, this concept, viewing any Western interference as a form of neo-colonialism detracts from the relationships between Africa and the West while encouraging the development of closer ties with Russia.

Furthermore, notably in the Central African Republic, the Wagner Group refers to Russian officials as "instructors" and has attempted to convince citizens that Wagner's goal is to establish peace. However, the Wagner Group has committed countless human rights abuses in the country, completely decimating villages and using unparalleled violence against citizens, including mass executions, rapes and child abductions. Since 2019, Wagner forces have been allegedly torturing civilians, account-

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ing for approximately 52% of all political violence targeting civilians in the CAR between 2020 and 2022. These acts provide individual mercenaries gain as well as secure the political control Wagner has over the CAR.

Additionally, according to the Human Rights Watch, the Wagner Group committed atrocities in Mali since December 2023, including executing dozens of innocent civilians during counterinsurgency operations drone strikes — caused by Mali's longstanding conflict with Islamist armed groups. Furthermore, the Wagner Group wasn't alone — they paired with Malian armed forces to commit these violations. This pairing makes it evident that Mali is being nudged toward a dictatorship, fueled by Russia's support of authoritarian leaders in Africa, which should instill concern in Washington.

To attempt to mitigate Wagner's control



FRENCH ARMY VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS/FAIR USE

Malian forces and Wagner fighters march through Northern Mali. The Wagner Group often didn't act alone in their military campaigns — they paired with Malian armed forces to commit these violations.

of Africa, the United States Departments of State and Treasury have designated the Wagner Group as a transnational criminal organization and levied sanctions under multiple executive orders. Despite these efforts, Wagner's influence continued unchecked. According to a 2023 NPR article, over \$2 billion laundered from Africa ventures into Russia, displaying how sanctions alone fail to restrict its reach or mitigate its destabilizing actions. The Department of the Treasury stated in a 2023 report that the Wagner Group has "meddled and destabilized countries in Africa, committing widespread human rights abuses and extorting natural resources from their people."

The Wagner Group's influence may not appear to be a distinct negative for African nations on a surface level. According to a 2024 BBC article, Chad has taken advantage of the military support and other resources Wagner offers. However, despite the current positives that Chad might be experiencing, its growing proximity to

Moscow is an alarming development for the United States as well as former ally, France.

What steps can Washington realistically take to counter the onslaught of anti-Western propaganda being spewed by the pro-Russian disinformation campaigns prevalent across the continent? For one, the United States should offer strong incentives to the African regimes currently

working with the Wagner Group. While the United States has tried to curb Russian influence through intelligence-gathering and sanctions, these efforts have yielded limited success, and direct military

confrontation with Wagner is neither feasible nor advisable. Instead, the U.S. must support African democracies through soft-power strategies, specifically economic investments and multilateral politics.

To encourage African leaders toward working with Western partners, the U.S. could provide targeted political and economic incentives. Politically, this should center around providing assistance to in-

crease civilian participation in government. Economic aid could be prioritized to rebuild the democracy system in the aforementioned way, covering security assistance as well as developmental assistance. Historically, the U.S. has seen success through these investments, such as in Ghana, where the U.S. Agency for International Development began regularly funding \$35 million a year since 1992 to support agricultural well-being, economic growth and education. Since 1992, when funding levels increased, Ghana has regularly been able to address corruption, poor governance and conflict, according to the USAID. By taking a non-violent but direct approach, as in Ghana, the United States can provide Wagner-controlled African nations with much needed stability — on an economic level as well as a diplomatic level — while providing a suitable alternative to Russian influence.

Without decisive action from Washington, Russia's grasp on Africa will only deepen, jeopardizing U.S. alliances and granting the Kremlin unchecked control over critical African resources. For the sake of African stability and American strategic interests, the U.S. must pivot to policies that support democratic resilience and offer African countries a viable, sustainable alternative to Russian influence.

Without decisive action from Washington, Russia's grasp of Africa will only deepen.



ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN/FAIR USE

Two men rest on a rock in Abu Nashab Salama, an area in North Darfur, Sudan. The area has seen frequent fighting between warring factions and ethnic groups throughout the years.

Sudan's Forgotten War

Decisive U.S. leadership is crucial for finding peace in Sudan

In a world increasingly defined by conflict and crises, it's very easy to wonder how we got here. After all, just a few years ago, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had not exploded and Russia hadn't made any formal incursions into Ukraine since 2014. With news channels flooded with updates on the conflicts in Ukraine and Israel, one major war has seemingly been forgotten in the international world — the civil war in Sudan.

The conflict dates back to colonial times, escalating following the country's independence movement from Britain in 1955. Since then, there have been three civil wars in Sudan, the most recent of which started in April 2023. So far, at least 15,000 people have lost their lives. Additionally, eight mil-

lion people have been internally displaced, and three million have been forced to flee the country entirely, creating the worst refugee crisis in the world.

The current war in Sudan has its roots in the 2019 military coup that removed president Omar al-Bashir, who had been in power since 1989. A transitional, hybrid civilian and military government was then established. In 2021, just two years later, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Sudan's military led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, arrested civilian members of the government. They did this with help from a powerful paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. The leaders of the two military factions then took full control

of the Sudanese government over the subsequent months. But this alliance between them didn't last. In April 2023, fighting broke out between the SAF and the RSF. The two groups are fighting over control of the country, both hoping to position their own leader as the head of Sudan. Since the beginning of the war, Sudanese civilians, especially those from non-Arab minority groups, have suffered enormously.

It is critical that the U.S. properly uses its influence in mitigating human suffering and stopping conflict from spreading in the already unstable Sahel.

As outlined by President Joe Biden in his statement on Sept. 17, the United States is focusing on addressing the humanitarian crisis and ongoing conflict between

the SAF and the RSF. This includes calling for peace, urging both factions to cease violence, protecting civilians and allowing unhindered humanitarian access to all areas of Sudan. The United States' position is an insufficient one. It should take a more active role in preventing arms from flooding into Sudan, and should work to restrict funding to the RSF.

The U.S. has determined that both sides, particularly members of the RSF, have committed war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in the region of Darfur, in western Sudan. Darfur has long been mired in

conflict, which escalated in 2003, when two main rebel groups — the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) — separately launched a series of uprisings against the Sudanese government, accusing it of oppressing non-Arab Darfuri communities and neglecting the region. In response, the Sudanese government, under al-Bashir, began a brutal counterinsurgency campaign. It armed and supported Darfuri Arab militia groups known as the Janjaweed. These groups became infamous for committing widespread atrocities, including mass killings, rapes, village burnings and forced displacements of around 2.7 million non-Arab people. The Janjaweed was later integrated as an official Sudanese paramilitary force, and became the RSF.

The U.S. Treasury Department has sanctioned 16 entities and individuals for contributing to the conflict, and further sanctions are under consideration. The Treasury is also focused on addressing the increasing influence of the Wagner Group, a Russian-funded mercenary group operating in Northern Africa, which Washington views as a means to inject a Russian military presence into the region.

Biden's statement criticizes both sides for delaying and disrupting aid delivery and calls for renewed negotiations to end the war. Additionally, the U.S. has provided over \$1.6 billion in emergency assistance to Sudan since the conflict began. Efforts are ongoing to secure more humanitarian routes into Darfur and Khartoum.

While these measures are a start, the United States, as the world's leading economy, should be obligated to enact sanctions and provide more direct aid to the affected population in order to alleviate the pressures faced by the Sudanese people.

Firstly, the shipment of weapons to the RSF needs to be addressed on an international scale. The RSF uses its connections

with arms trafficking units that exist in Sudan and neighboring countries to supply its troops. Shipments of fuel and ammunition come through across the border from Chad, Libya and the Central Af-

rican Republic. However, cutting off shipments would be a large and difficult goal for the U.S. to implement, especially considering the current climate in the region. A far more immediate solution would be ending weapons sales to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Recent reports have shown that the UAE has provided significant funding to the RSF effort in the war, worsening the conflict. The Emiratis have invested in acquiring land in Sudan over the past two decades, with a focus on agricultural products as well as Sudan's gold reserves, which the RSF has significant control over, giving the UAE a reason to support them in the conflict.

SAF troops have reported seeing RSF weapons transports stamped with the address of the UAE's logistic arm. These include armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and drone technology. The United Nations currently has an arms embargo in place on Sudan, and the UAE's blatant violation of this embargo should be taken more seriously. In October, the United States gave the UAE as much as \$1.2 billion in military support, including GMLRS guided-rockets systems, long-range ATACMS missiles,

as well as training and support for both systems. By selling weapons to the UAE, the United States is indirectly supplying the RSF, lengthening the war and funding atrocities.

The hardest hit area of this conflict has been Darfur, the homebase of the RSF. It has been ravaged by continuous fighting and instability. According to the UN Refugee Agency, over 600,000 civilians have fled to neighboring Chad. In September, UN officials called for rapid de-escalation in the region—especially in Northern Darfur. However, meaningful action by any country is yet to be made in a region that has been plagued by constant war, famine and fear for decades. Coordinating with Chad, the Central African Republic and the wider African Union is essential to creating a safe passage for those fleeing violence and will in turn strengthen the unity of the Sahelian states.

The United States and other leading nations should organize a demilitarized zone within fifty kilometers from the border with Chad, calling for all troops to be removed from Darfur, so that aid can be administered and safe migration can be made possible. Current attempts to supply food and medical care have been futile largely thanks to theft from the RSF in particular. The RSF previously looted a warehouse of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Gezira State, containing enough supplies to feed 1.5 million food insecure people for up to a month.

In order to bring peace and stability to war-stricken Sudan, the U.S. needs to

In order to bring peace and stability to a war-stricken Sudan, the U.S. needs to adopt a more decisive stance.

adopt a more decisive stance. It must not only address immediate humanitarian needs but also work to restrict funding towards the RSF and focus on a sustainable framework for peace in collaboration. This includes

strengthening alliances with the African Union to ensure the enforcement of arms embargoes, expanding humanitarian corridors, and supporting economic recovery for displaced populations. Additionally, withholding funds from foreign actors in Sudan such as the UAE will be critical in preventing future violence.

The U.S. has determined that both sides have committed war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

A Nation Without a Home

The Chagos Islands was unjustly stripped of sovereignty and cultural identity to become a geopolitical asset

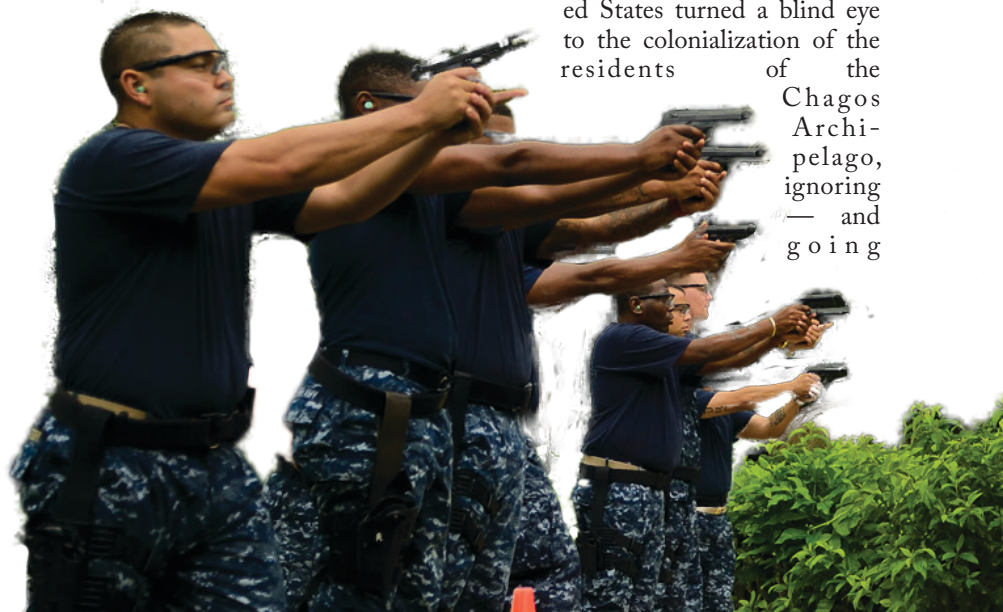
Is the eviction of 2,000 Chagossians not enough? To lease Diego Garcia to the United States for military purposes, in the 1970s, the United Kingdom justified quietly expelling the residents to Mauritius and Seychelles, where they faced extreme poverty and discrimination. Further adding insult, the U.S. still retains control of Diego Garcia: making it the last remaining island of the Chagos Archipelago left to be returned.

After months of delegation, the government of the United Kingdom's recent agreement to relinquish sovereignty of the Chagos Islands back to Mauritius serves as a painful reminder to many Chagossians forcefully displaced just some 50 years ago. Though Mauritius — the last of Britain's African colonies — was ceded in 1968, prior to being granted its independence, the United Nations reports in 2024 that, "Britain was found to have unlawfully separated ([Mauritius]) to form a new colony on the Chagos archipelago named the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)". The United Kingdom's first acquisition of the archipelago occurred during the global anti-colonialism movements, such that it was a strategic choice to build the military compound on Diego Garcia, the largest island of the archipelago with a small population size that would be easier to remove. The U.N. claims that the United Kingdom, for decades, "falsely declared that Chagos had no permanent population so that it would not have to report its colonial rule to the U.N." As a power that has time and time again raised "the legitimacy of the international liberal order" against other nations, the United States should uphold its pledge of sacrosanctity to the Chagossian people who have been subject to inhuman eviction.

The Chagos Archipelago is inherently at a disadvantage when negotiating with the comparatively massive power that both the United Kingdom and the U.S. wield. The International Court of Justice has the ju-

risdiction to preside over such disputes between nations. Historically though, the ICJ, the primary judiciary body of the U.N., has often ruled in opposition to previously colonized states, rather than in their defense. In the South West Africa case (Liberia v. South Africa), for nearly a decade, the ICJ rejected the joint claims of Liberia and Ethiopia against South Africa that it had violated its duties as a mandatory power: to administer, develop, and provide welfare for the native population. Under this ruling, South Africa exploited the Mandate, responsibilities granted to Allied victors after World War I, which allowed for its continued colonialism of South West Africa (Namibia). The overturning of this declaration — albeit after years — marked immense growth within the ICJ. In his book, "The Last Colony: A Tale of Exile, Justice, and Courage," Philippe Sands remarks it as "a first step to making it a place to which a former colony might turn, in (the) future, to free itself from continued colonial domination".

Nitya Labh, writer for Foreign Policy and Chair for strategic affairs at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, reports in 2024 that Diego Garcia is at the forefront of Washington's Indian Ocean strategy, given its location "(as) a critical theater for global trade and geopolitical competition." It is precisely its location that makes the United States' future negotiations for renewing its lease of the Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia so highly controversial. According to the World Economic Forum in 2021, the United States' attachment to Diego Garcia is in place partially to halt the nation's reliance upon our Indo-Pacific Ocean competitor China, who forged a free-trade agreement with Mauritius back in 2019. Since then, Mauritius has received growing investment from China, climbing to nearly \$2 billion as of 2024, in the forms of real estate and city infrastructure. Furthermore, earlier this year in September, the signing of a bilateral currency swap agreement between the two nations suggested an even closer relationship between the two nations. The United States turned a blind eye to the colonialization of the residents of the Chagos Archipelago, ignoring — and going



as far as to support — the brutal eviction of all Chagossians remaining on the islands back in the 1970s. Labh states that, in exchange for the military base on Diego Garcia, the United States gave the United Kingdom a “\$14 million discount on U.S.-made nuclear weapons.”

Currently, the United States’ foreign policy decisions regarding the islands are split between military ambitions and rules-based international order. The United States had imposed this very same order upon China, in the act of protecting the Philippines and the South China Sea from subjugation. In 2016, according to a report by the Center for Preventative Action, the Philippines declared under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that its historic entitlement to the South China Sea was violated by China’s increasingly hostile actions of militarization. Though the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague deemed the Philippines’ claims to be valid on almost all accounts, China — a co-signer on this treaty recognizing its authority — refused to partake in any of the court proceedings. Following this in 2020, due to China invoking its sovereign maritime rights in the South China Sea beyond its exclusive economic zone the U.S. joined to attack China for its negligence of one of the highest courts of international ruling. According to the Hofstra Law Faculty Scholarship in 2023, in doing so, this “exemplifies how the United States government saw endorsing international law (and an international institution) as a way to criticize China and Chinese policies.” In a press statement given in 2024 by the U.S. Department of State Spokesperson Matthew Miller, the United States again called for China to conduct its claims and actions in accordance with international law.

The United States’ perpetual reliance upon international rulings

to condemn other countries, specifically China for its militant actions and treatment of the Uyghur minority, reveals its fundamental hypocrisy — its complicity in the cruel and unusual treatment of Chagossians violates every principle of sovereignty and human rights that the United States supposedly stands for. Thus, the most moral action forward is to rebuild Chagossians’ independence through supporting the communities’ decades-long requests. In 2024, Chairperson Marie Isabelle Charlot of the Chagos Islander Movement, called for the extensive reconsideration of current treatment of Chagossians by the United Kingdom, and spoke of the betrayal of Mauritius and the United States failure to protect a group of sovereign peoples, which has caused egregious pain to the community. Charlot specifically called for the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to establish a designated Chagossian desk for a consistent point of contact, to reallocate funds for distribution amongst community members outside of heritage visits, and to ensure exclusivity for directing financial resources to Chagossian community members. U.S. Navy Reserve Officer Blake Herzinger wrote in 2021 that, in persistently backing the wishes of this population, Washington will also be able to protect its long-held interests: fervently main-

taining rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and commitment to humanitarian rights worldwide. While the decision of the United States’ to release Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia in a decade’s time would be devastating to our international security, our current stance is fatal to our movement in every single aspect of foreign policy.

If the United States does not declare a strong stance in defense of the Chagosian Archipelago’s universal right to sovereignty, then we are no better than our adversaries in refusing to acknowledge international order.



Gun qualification course aboard U.S. Navy Support Facility Diego Garcia Dec. 20, 2013.



SHEALAH CRAIGHEAD/FAIR USE

President Donald Trump and El Salvador President Nayib Bukele participate in a 2019 bilateral meeting. Trump and several fellow Republican politicians has applauded Bukele's harsh methods to crack down on crime.

El Salvador's Crime War in the Name of Security

The severe acts raise questions about the cost of security in a nation that risks losing its humanity while fighting for peace

Violence, human rights, and instability. In El Salvador, debates surrounding these issues have intensified as the country emerges on the global stage. The current president, Nayib Bukele, has created a campaign against gang violence characterized by widespread crackdowns on crime, gaining both domestic and international attention. Though Bukele presented himself as a decisive leader when it comes to the topic of gang violence, and thousands of citizens admire his efforts, even going as far as to emigrate back to El Salvador from the United States, the repercussions of his policies have cast a dark shadow over the nation, raising concerns over justice, accountability and the rights of the innocent.

In previous years, El Salvador was a

country marred by extensive gang violence and crime. In 2015, El Salvador was deemed the "Homicide Capital of the World." Due to the violence, many El Salvadorans sought solace and asylum in the United States. For most, despite the present challenges in their home country, the long-term goal was to return to El Salvador one day. Soon enough, their wishes would be granted in the form of a president with an iron fist.

Bukele, first inaugurated in 2019, campaigned on ridding El Salvador of its gang violence that has terrorized civilians since 2015. However, since then, the average rate of homicides has been dropping steadily each year. After his first term, Bukele implemented projects for urban infrastructure, revitalization of city centers, and an exten-

sive employment scheme. However, his plan notably lacked a long-term solution to crime. Now, Bukele set out for re-election. The only problem: the El Salvadoran Constitution states that a president cannot be elected for two consecutive terms in a row. While this election was not constitutionally defensible, the result was wildly popular, as polls done by NPR indicate that 70% of the country supports him. However, with this re-election came the crime crackdown El Salvador was waiting for.

The striking anti-criminal methods put in place since 2022 — identified by mass arrests and prolonged, even unjust detentions — aimed to dismantle the powerful gangs that held a grip over the country. In some instances, according to the New York Times, young children had to hike through

the forest on their way to and from school because the gang violence was so awful. In March of 2022, Bukele declared a nationwide state of emergency, which allowed him to expand presidential powers for the past two years, yet he is only supposed to apply for one month.

Since the state of emergency was declared, over 81,000 people have been arrested in Bukele's campaign to clean El Salvador. While this number is certainly staggering, it has proved to be effective — El Salvador's homicide rate has declined by 70% by 2023, according to Reuters. As a result of the reduced crime rate, many immigrants who sought asylum in the United States have returned, a push created by the El Salvador embassy in the United States, going so far as to create a hashtag for this movement: #MigracionInversa.

Despite the clear streets and lack of gang violence, the implementation of these anti-criminal methods has led to the unjust imprisonment of countless individuals who, in some cases, are not affiliated with criminal organizations at all. José Miguel Cruz, the research director of the Latin American and Caribbean Center at Florida International University who spent decades studying the criminal underworld in El Salvador, claims that around one-third of incarcerated El Salvadorans are presumed to be innocent. Families have been torn apart; people have been kidnapped in the middle of the night, never to be seen again, and countless loved ones are involved in a mess they were never meant to be involved in. In most cases, family members who sought answers regarding their missing loved ones were turned away by officials who weren't allowed to disclose any information. Often, families don't know if their loved ones are in the country or even alive.

Not to mention the thousands of adolescents under have become wrapped up in this mess. According to a Human Rights Watch report in July, there have been alarming cases of abuse of minors and adults alike, arbitrary arrests and violations of due process. All of these instances highlight the collateral damage that comes when leaders prioritize quick results over integrity.

However, this kind of quick and effective crime crackdown is proving to be desirable for some politicians in the United States. Senator Tom Cotton and Representative Matt Gaetz traveled to El Salvador to see the prisons firsthand, returning to the United States with hopes of establishing a clean-up system similar to the one Bukele established. Donald Trump Jr. and Tucker Carlson even went as far as to attend Bukele's inauguration. Carlson went on to later interview Bukele in such a manner it was clear he greatly admired the president.

According to anti-immigration and pro-Trump representative Gaetz, a supporter of restrictions against immigration, this style of crime crackdown would be beneficial in high-crime cities such as Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles. However, if this solution is implemented in a similar way to El Salvador, any beneficial results gained will come at the expense of people's basic freedoms and discrimination from law enforcement agencies, setting a dangerous precedent.

Additionally, some political analysts see similarities between Bukele's charismatic and draconian approach and Donald Trump's populist and ruthless policy. Given the cult-like following each leader has been able to amass, despite the policies that strip certain people of their rights, they still maintain their popularity.

On the other side of the political aisle, the Biden administration has been known to show support for Bukele and his policies in hopes of stemming the flow of El Salvadoran immigrants traveling to the United States. Given the effectiveness of Bukele's clean-up being shown by the decreased migration of El Salvadorans, the Biden Administration has lessened their criticism of Bukele as their immigration concerns outweighed concerns surrounding the degradation of El Salvador's democracy, according to AP News.

After the success of his crackdown on crime, Bukele announced that his next target is price gougers. In a threatening announcement, Bukele stated, "Well, I'm going to issue a message to the importers, distributors and food wholesalers: stop abusing the people of El Salvador, or don't complain about what happens afterward." However, due to the complicated system in which food is transport-

ed within El Salvador, many sellers cannot afford to decrease the price of their goods. As economist Rafael Lemus states, "In the short term, it will not have any effect. What it will have, in the long term, is a certainty that it will be cheaper to bring imported products if those from abroad have more competitive prices."

Despite this fact, Bukele declared that all prices must be decreased overnight, gaining the support of everyday shoppers. In fact, most El Salvadorans have complicated feelings surrounding Bukele. He is certainly an effective leader, but his effectiveness sacrifices key parts of democracy and everyday life.

The United States' current policy on the matters at hand in El Salvador is less than optimal. Despite the benefits of decreased migration into the United States, the Biden administration should have upheld its commitment to defending democracy abroad and stepped in before Bukele consolidated so much power. Now that the damage has been done, the United States needs to work with humanitarian organizations to ensure the 81,000 people being held are subject to a fair and impartial trial to find an effective way to keep the peace in El Salvador while maintaining the rule of law.

As the world is moving into a new age of democracy, one where populist leaders make harsh promises that are difficult to maintain, Bukele has proven himself to be a charismatic leader with a draconian strategy to win over the people. In years where the line between being an effective leader and being an authoritarian leader is blurrier than ever, it's critical to keep in mind that the democracies of the world are at stake when a charismatic leader turns towards authoritarianism and no other countries are willing to intervene.

Over 81,000 people have been arrested in Bukele's campaign to clean El Salvador.

The Biden administration has shown support for Bukele in hopes of stemming the flow of immigrants.

Amazon Ablaze

Protecting the rainforest through economic investment

Biden became the first-ever U.S. President to visit the Amazon Rainforest on Nov. 17, visiting an ecosystem in crisis. Brazil is ablaze, and there is one major culprit: climate change. As Brazil faces one natural disaster after another, the world watches helplessly. The Amazon rainforest remains in danger despite a shift in Brazilian policy following the arrival of president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. While Lula has passed laws prioritizing the fight against climate change, consistent change is yet to be seen.

Brazil is one of the most instrumental nations when it comes to climate change, hosting the world's largest carbon sink in the Amazon rainforest. As the Amazon burns from forest fires, the carbon stored in trees goes into the atmosphere and creates a greenhouse effect, accelerating climate change. That makes it only more critical that we protect the rainforest to combat climate change.

In order to keep Brazil on a progressive path, we must support Lula's climate goals, which have been much better than former President Bolsonaro, who, according to Vox, "stripped enforcement measures, cut spending for science and environmental agencies, fired environmental experts, and pushed to weaken Indigenous land rights." To do this, there needs to be continued aid and more investment in Brazil's clean energy sector, which will allow for more progress to be made by its government and potentially reap benefits for the U.S. economy.

According to the World Resources Institute, "Nearly one-quarter of the forest in Brazil has already been lost." This is mainly being done to clear space for practices such as agriculture, which harms the environment. "The region's economy, and Brazil as a whole, rely heavily on farming, mining and other resource-intensive activities that deplete the Amazon." Climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels also damages Brazil's ecosystem, making it

more susceptible to droughts, flash flooding and wildfires, creating a vicious cycle of burning and emissions that has endangered Brazilians.

Turning the tide is crucial for the planet's future, and America has made climate change an administration priority under President Joe Biden. According to The World Resources Institute, Biden ran in 2020 on the "most ambitious climate action platform of any major presidential candidate in U.S. history." He went on to sign the Inflation Reduction Act, "the most comprehensive climate legislation the U.S. has ever seen. The law invests hundreds of billions of dollars in clean energy, electric vehicles, environmental justice and more." It has shifted the U.S. economy to a climate focused future. When Trump enters office, he must extend this ambition to the world to protect the rainforest.

The return of Lula has led to vast improvements in Brazil's actions towards climate change. According to Think Landscape, his government has combated climate change by doubling infraction notices for land grabbing, reactivated the Amazon Fund and even decreased deforestation in the Amazon by 50%. While this is significant progress, Lula's administration has shown inconsistencies in environmental policy.

However, the progress made in the Amazon is largely offset by the increased deforestation in the Cerrado, a critical, yet undervalued area of Brazilian territory. Despite increased regulation, deforestation in the Brazilian Cerrado, a large savanna, surged by nearly 45 percent last year compared to 2022 and reached its highest level since 2019, according to Think Landscape. This issue is likely to worsen, partly because

Lula has been unable to prevent Brazil's conservative senate from planning to increase oil exploration and passing laws restricting indigenous land rights.

To be a world leader against climate change, the United States must form a strong partnership with Brazil. However, in the past 20 years, Brazil has developed an economic dependency on Chinese exports, according to Foreign Affairs. "Both are indispensable. The United States is Brazil's biggest investor and China its biggest trading partner" In addition, China depends more and more on Brazil's oil production, a resource their economy is heavily reliant upon, harming efforts in climate progress.

In comparison, the U.S.'s reputation in Brazil isn't great. According to Foreign Affairs, "Brazil has been disappointed

by U.S. conduct in the last 20 years. Brazilian Policymakers have long felt that Washington has neglected their country and Latin America more broadly, with the region only receiving U.S. attention when a major foreign power—nowadays China—tries to extend its influence there."

Fortunately, there have been positive steps forward in recent years. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, The United States and Brazil signed an economic cooperation agreement in 2011. A more extensive one focused on the climate is necessary for further progress.

Of course, Biden has also made commitments to Brazil. He pledged \$500 million to the Amazon fund, of which the U.S. government has already paid almost \$100 million. To combat the wildfires, Biden has sent relief aid. He also increased the budget and extended the Partnership for the Conservation of Amazon Biodiversity, a

These wildfires start a vicious cycle.



Palácio do Planalto/FAIR USE

On Sept. 20, President Biden and President Lula met up at the United Nations General Assembly to discuss the Partnership for Workers' Rights, symbolizing a turning point in Brazil-U.S. Relations.

bilateral agreement to help Brazil achieve its climate goals.

He has also made efforts to improve the relationship between Brazil and the United States. Biden went on a climate focused visit to the Amazon rainforest on Nov. 17, announcing new efforts for the Amazon and showing his continued commitment to Brazil.

While current actions taken by the Biden admin-

istration have led to significant improvements, much more progress needs to be made in order to stop climate change in the long term. It's already had devastating impacts in Brazil, and despite progressive laws passed under Lula, it is clear that the situation isn't getting better for people in Brazil. The impacts will affect the whole world.

The United States cannot afford to let Brazil slip back into the days of Bolsonaro. In order to keep Lula in power, Brazil needs to have faith in its government, and with the current crisis that's nearly impossible. According to Reuters, Lula currently

has 36 percent approval ratings. The United States needs Lula to stay in power to continue on the progress that's already been made, which can be achieved by bolstering Brazil's economy, specifically by implementing a trade

agreement similar to NAFTA that prioritizes an increase in investment in Brazil's clean energy sector. Economic success and fighting the climate crisis will resonate

with voters in Brazil. Improving the economy would not only improve public opinion of Lula, giving him more power to solve climate issues, but also allow Brazil to have more spending power, which it could then use to address the wildfires.

According to the United States Customs and Border Patrol, NAFTA, or the North American Free trade agreement ended tariffs between the U.S, Canada and Mexico, breaking down barriers for "cross border investment." An agreement that encourages free trade and private investments in Brazil's already advanced clean energy

sector will lead to the development of technologies that will cut carbon emissions and grow both countries' economies.

China has been a global leader in developing clean energy technology, and the U.S. needs to catch up. Not only to reach its climate goals, but to prove it can be a leader on the global stage in the fight against climate change.

If properly implemented, this agreement will shift Brazil's economy to become less reliant on climate-harming methods. Just as the IRA fostered economic growth in an environmentally conscious way, opening trade and encouraging more investment in Brazil from our private sector will bolster both economies. Economic success will also improve Lula's approval ratings, preventing policy backsliding from the Brazilian government by helping his chances of reelection.

This, along with continued aid to combat the initial threat of wildfires and the existential threat of climate change, can make a real difference in saving the environment, helping our relations with Brazil, and fostering economic growth. By taking action, we will assert our position on the world stage, showing to both allies and adversaries that we can still influence global politics.

The United States cannot afford to let Brazil slip back into the days of Bolsonaro.

It's Time for Women in Mexico

The key potential differences between Mexico's first female president and her predecessor

On Mexico's election day, June 2, Claudia Sheinbaum made history as Mexico's first female president. Her rise to the presidency takes place amid numerous pressing concerns, including tension with the United States surrounding border security and immigration policy, mass organized crime and the second highest femicide rate in Latin America. In a country where citizens are less satisfied with their quality of life than the majority of OECD countries, it remains to be seen whether Sheinbaum will be able to champion effective policies — especially regarding crime and violence, immigration, and gender-related issues.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Mexicans rated their satisfaction with life on average as a 6 out of 10, which is lower than the OECD average of 6.7. It's clear why Mexico scores lower; public safety and the economy continue to be crucial issues to the Mexican public, with only 42% of Mexicans feeling safe when walking alone at night compared to the OECD average of 72%. Mexico's average adjusted disposable income per capita is also lower, at \$16,269 per year compared to the OECD average of \$30,490.

Crime & Violence

Sheinbaum's political mentor and former President of Mexico, Andrés López Obrador, is considered by many to have taken a relatively lenient approach to managing cartels. In 2022, for example, he commanded the Mexican army to hold off from attacking cartel gunmen because the country should "also take care of the lives of the gang members, they are human beings."

Although he also swore that he would cooperate with the United States to combat drugs, Obrador recently doubled down on his pro-peace stance in 2024, stating that he "won't fight Mexican drug cartels on U.S. orders" Cartels in Mexico control large amounts of territory, extorting money from civilians in exchange for protection. However, cartels also create jobs and provide a pathway to social mobility, especially in regions with poor economic conditions. This complex dynamic between cartels and the populace may help explain why Obrador is often considered to have taken a relatively lenient approach to managing cartels.

On Oct. 7, Sheinbaum unveiled her strategy to curb cartel activity and violence. Though differing slightly from her predecessor's plans, her approach largely shares the same structure and key ideas. Her plan involves decreasing violence in the 10 deadliest cities in Mexico while simultaneously increasing intelligence and investigative work. She refrains from retaliation, maintaining Obrador's indirect and friendly approach of dealing with cartels. However, it is unclear if this approach will be able to create significant change, with a former head of the Drug Enforcement Administration's foreign operations Mike Vigil remarking that the strategy is "more of the same." A potentially troubling assessment, especially given that the Mexican Institute of Statistics and

Geography considers Obrador's presidential term to have been the "most violent" in Mexican history.

Immigration

The U.S.-Mexico border is a point of great tension between the United States and Mexico. According to the Pew Research Center, 45% of Americans view the border situation as a "crisis" and 32% view it as a "major problem." Obrador previously proposed a solution that would require the United States to pledge \$20 billion a year to poor countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to improve their economic conditions,

claiming it would reduce the number of immigrants coming into the United States. He also sponsored programs such as "Sowing Life" and "Youth Building the Future," both of which are intended to help nearby countries develop; "Sowing Life" is a program focused primarily on reforestation and poverty reduction, while "Youth Building the Future" connects youth with companies, institutions and businesses.

As she takes office, Sheinbaum must address the issue of immigration. Mexico is, as of Sept. 2024, the United States's main trading partner. With over \$800 billion worth of goods being exchanged, maintaining relations is crucial to the economic success of both countries. Furthermore,

Only 42% of Mexicans feel safe when walking alone at night, compared to the OECD average of 72%.



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Claudia Sheinbaum speaking at an event in Bicentenario Park, Mexico City. Sheinbaum is a vocal advocate against gender discrimination.

both Democrats and Republicans in the United States view current border policies as subpar, though they disagree on how to improve it. Thus far, Sheinbaum has been taking a harsher approach regarding law enforcement compared to Obrador. Omar García Harfuch, who is known for drastically reducing homicides in Mexico City, was appointed as Mexico's security minister. Nevertheless, her migration ideology is similar to Obrador's, placing an emphasis on combating the root issues that cause migration such as poor economic development.

Femicide

Mexico has the second highest femicide rate in Latin America, second only to Brazil. Approximately 10 women are killed

every day, and 40% of women 15 or older report having been victims of violence in their lifetime. During his presidency, Obrador received

“The same thing happens with the calls the metro gets about sabotage or bombs.”

Andrés López Obrador

harsh criticism from many for insensitive remarks; in 2020, he claimed that 90% of domestic violence calls to emergency services are fake and that “the same thing happens with the calls the metro gets about sabotage or bombs.” On International Safe Abortion day in 2021, he insisted that people ought to be more skeptical of feminism “because two years ago, when the feminist movement began, many women participated. But you started to realize that they had become conservative feminists only to affect us.” In this quote Obrador not only implied that feminism started just two years ago, but also implied that its present-day purpose was to oppose

his administration.

Sheinbaum's approach has been the opposite. During her campaign, she emphasized her identity as a mother, grandmother and woman by promoting the hashtag #EsTiempodeMujeres, which translates to “this is women's time.” She maintained this image during her inauguration, stating that she is “a mother, a grandmother, a scientist and a woman of faith, and from today, by the will of the Mexican people, the president.” On Oct. 7, she announced several proposals to combat gender violence and discrimination. These proposals include initiatives to guarantee equal pay and gender parity in governmental cabinets. In order to accomplish these goals, Sheinbaum must implement additional regulations and Constitutional reform.

Despite their clear differences, Sheinbaum's main policy proposals remain incredibly similar to those of her predecessor. In a time where Mexico is deeply mired in political, economic and social crises, Sheinbaum now faces a critical choice: will she continue to follow in the footsteps of her predecessor, or will she step out of his shadow?

The Global Shadow of Hindu Nationalism

How India's caste system exists in our own Bay Area

In June 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the oath of office for an unprecedented third term, cementing his dominance in India's political arena. Under Modi, India's political landscape has been deeply molded by religion — specifically, Hindu nationalism. Modi, who has held office since 2014, is a member of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). His political group promotes Hindutva, an ideology that emphasizes Hindu customs, heritage and ideology as central elements of Indian culture. According to The Guardian, Hindutva pushes the belief in the “the establishment of the country as a Hindu, rather than secular state.”

The concept is also closely tied to Hindu nationalism, which states that Indian identity is inseparable from the Hindu religion. The ideology is significant given that over 80% of the Indian population is Hindu, while 14% is Muslim.

The strong connection between Hinduism and politics has significantly impacted social norms in India, leading to the poor treatment of non-Hindu minority groups and reinforcing the Indian caste system. Although California is the first American state to pose a ban on the caste system, according to BBC News, the caste system continues to exist in places outside of India, embedding itself in communities abroad. One such place is our own Bay Area.

Modi's government has been censured for aggravating religious divisions between Hindus and minority groups, such as Muslims and Christians. Critics claim that in his campaign speeches, Modi has exploited these groups to promote Hindu nationalism.

“Indian Prime Minister Modi and BJP leaders made blatantly false claims in their campaign speeches against Muslims and other minority groups,” Elaine Pearson, Asia Director at Human Rights Watch, said. “These inflammatory speeches, amid a decade of attacks and discrimination against minorities under the Modi administration, have further normalized abuses against Muslims, Christians and others.”

Additionally, Human Rights Watch analyzed Modi's campaign speeches and have found at least 110 of his campaign speeches to include Islamophobic remarks intended to undermine the political opposition.

Under Modi's leadership, many laws — passed seemingly to support Muslims and other minority groups that exist in India — remain discriminatory in nature against Muslims in the country. For example, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) facilitates the citizenship process for six religious minority groups from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians — by shortening the citizenship requirement from 11 to six years of living or

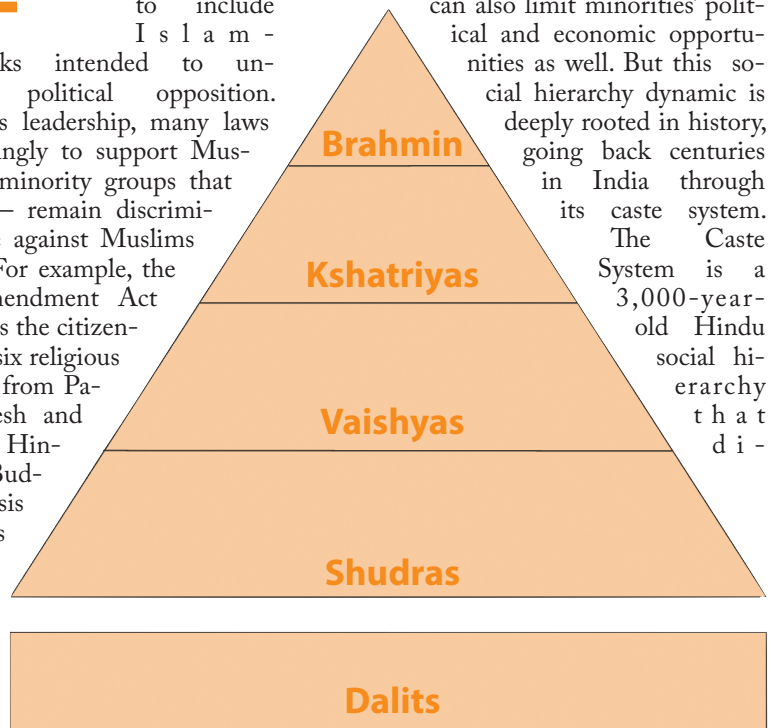
working in India, according to BBC News. Modi's government claims CAA gives sanctuary to people fleeing religious persecution.

However, opponents of the law claim that it is exclusionary and violates the secular principals in India's constitution, which state India “shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them” (Article 15) and that “all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion” (Article 25). If the law was truly aimed at protecting minority groups, it would have included Muslim religious groups who have faced rampant persecution.

The marginalization toward minority groups contributes to what pundits call a “Hindu-first nation,” where minority racial and religious groups face strong discrimination, according to Reuters. This can also limit minorities' political and economic opportunities as well.

But this social hierarchy dynamic is deeply rooted in history, going back centuries in India through its caste system. The Caste System is a 3,000-year-old Hindu social hierarchy that di-

Under Modi, India's political landscape has been deeply molded by religion — specifically, Hindu nationalism.



vides groups based on their karma (work) and dharma (duty). Within the caste system, justified by religion and upheld by tradition, individuals are expected to follow the roles assigned to their caste in hopes of advancing to a higher caste in their next life.

The Caste System is a social hierarchy that is passed down through generations, dictating an individual's profession and limiting their marriage. At the top you have the Brahmin who are priests and scholars. Next, you have the Kshatriyas, who are considered Warriors and rulers. Next you have the Vaishyas, merchants and traders. Following you have the Shudras, Laborers and service providers. On the bottom of the caste, you have the Dalits, or the Untouchables .

Dalits, traditionally referred to as "Untouchables," continue to face systemic discrimination despite legal protections. Some examples of this mistreatment include: segregation in public spaces, education discrimination, physical violence and workplace discrimination according to The Diplomat.

According to National Geographic, Untouchables are assigned the worst jobs and live in constant fear of public humiliations and beatings.

Within the caste system, justified by religion and upheld by tradition, individuals are expected to follow the roles assigned to their caste in hopes of advancing to a higher caste in their next life.

The Caste System is a social hierarchy that is passed down through generations, dictating an individual's profession and limiting their marriage. While the caste system was originally reserved for Hindus, nearly all of India's population identify with a caste, regardless of religion.

According to the Pew Research Center, "caste segregation remains prevalent in India. For example, a substantial share of Brahmins say they would not be willing to accept a person who belongs to a Scheduled Caste as a neighbor."

Indians migrated to the United States during the post World War II period and the early 20th century, according to the Migration Policy Institute. As they began to settle in communities, elements of the caste system remained with them. This pattern is particularly apparent in the Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, where the Indian population is prevalent — comprising 31% of residents in 2022, according to Silicon Valley Indicators. Although caste hierarchies are less visible in the U.S.,

they still exist in subtle ways.

In 2020, Apple updated its general employee conduct policy to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on caste, stating:

"We have a comprehensive policy that prohibits discrimination or harassment based on race, gender, age, ancestry, caste, and other characteristics, and we investigate all complaints thoroughly."

This update followed increasing reports of caste-based discrimination in Silicon Valley, particularly among Indian employees working in the tech industry. Complaints from Dalit employees included 33 at Facebook, 20 at Google, 18 at Microsoft, 24 at Cisco, and 14 at Amazon, along with reports from workers at smaller firms and non-tech sectors. These cases highlight how caste-based prejudices have persisted in workplaces despite migration. For many Dalits, moving to the Bay Area, home to a significant Indian population and numerous Fortune 500 companies, was seen as an opportunity to escape caste-based oppression in India. However, workplace tensions often mirror the caste dynamics they sought to leave behind.

The policy update by Apple followed a lawsuit filed in 2020 by California's Civil Rights Department against Cisco. The lawsuit involved a Dalit employee who accused two higher-caste supervisors of blocking his career advancement and retaliating against him when he

plained. This case, which underscored the persistence of caste-based discrimination in the tech sector, sparked broader discussions about caste equity in Silicon Valley and led companies like Apple to revise their policies, according to Nasdaq.

The Cisco dispute was the first U.S. employment lawsuit that forced tech companies to address caste discrimination.

The relationship between religion, politics and caste in India is complex and long-standing. Under Modi's government, where powerful Hindu nationalism beliefs play a central role in determining policies and social norms, the importance of the caste system has been revitalized. Its impact has affected not just India but also America — impacting social dynamics and professional opportunities in Silicon Valley. Recognizing and addressing this issue is imperative for forging more inclusive and equitable societies, both in India and across its global diaspora.



China's Electric Future is here

Is a trade war under protectionist economics worth impeding domestic

Since 2014, Chinese electric vehicles have been dominating the global market in terms of both price and quality, according to MIT Technology Review. U.S. companies, on the other hand, can't keep up due to restrictive government policies, and trade restrictions prevent Americans from buying these cheaper, better models.

China accounts for over half of all global Electric Vehicle sales. Data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers shows the number of EVs sold annually in the country grew from 1.4 million in 2020 to 9.5 million in 2023. In comparison, annual EV sales in the U.S. grew from 0.3 million in 2020 to 1.25 million in 2023. Furthermore, EVs are much cheaper in China than in the U.S.; the average price of a new EV in China is about \$34,400 compared to about \$55,242 in the U.S..

CHINA'S EV PLAYBOOK

In the early 2000s, the Chinese auto-industry was struggling in a global market dominated by U.S., German and Japanese automakers. Zeyi Yang, contributor on the MIT Technology Review, explains that despite being a manufacturing powerhouse, China could never have been able to compete with foreign car makers on internal-combustion vehicles.

Moreover, hybrid-car innovation was already being led by countries like Japan. Thus, the Chinese government decided to take a big risk and invest in a relatively new field: fully electric vehicles. This decision was also motivated by the desire to become more energy-independent, as China was — and still is — one of the world's largest oil importers. The government also had pub-

lic health concerns over excessive pollution in big cities.

The decision paid off: China now leads the world in EV innovation and adoption. One of the primary reasons behind the disparity between Chinese and American EVs is China's superior battery technology, as the battery cell of an EV can

account for up to 40% of the vehicle's total cost, according to the World Electric Vehicle Journal. China's rapid battery innovation can be attributed to both economic policies supporting companies and driving consumer demand as well as supply chain dominance ensuring cheap and reliable manufacturing.

Beginning in 2009, the Chinese government began implementing various policies to stimulate the EV industry, such as

providing subsidies, cheap loans and cheap land leases to build factories. Stricter standards on battery quality were set to encourage battery advancement.

In addition, local governments contracted companies to electrify bus and taxi fleets, creating an artificial market before public consumer demand had built up. This boosted innovation and expanded production, leading to better and cheaper EVs.

The government fueled demand with consumer benefits like sales tax exemptions, discounted charging, and favorable parking. From 2009 to 2023, the government gave an estimated \$230.9 billion to the industry through programs such as these.

Though consumer subsidies were phased out in 2022, the demand had already been established. In July, China hit a new milestone: over half of new car sales in the country were now electric.

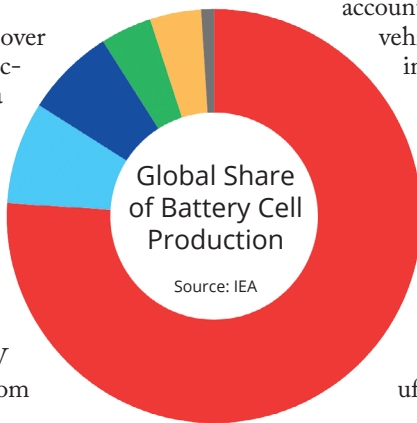
Once the industry was well-established, the government began forcing foreign companies like Tesla to use Chinese-made batteries if they wanted to sell cars in the country, further ensuring China's technological and economic control over EV batteries.

Meanwhile, China also dominates every step of the battery supply chain — from mining the raw materials to assembling the final battery. According to the New York Times, when averaging the five primary minerals and four major parts in a battery, China refines 74% of the world's minerals and manufactures 81% of battery parts.

This makes it nearly impossible for foreign automakers to manufacture EVs without cooperating with China on some level. This gives the country immense economic control: China decides who gets the raw materials and batteries, and at what price.

RESTRICTING TRADE (AND INNOVATION)

As it stands, U.S. automakers are struggling to make affordable EVs due to gov-



China Europe U.S.
Korea Japan Other



— and the U.S. is Keeping it Out

innovation, gatekeeping consumers and sacrificing climate goals?

ernment trade restrictions with China. U.S. consumers are prevented from buying these cheaper EVs, which limits market growth and impedes the adoption of sustainable transportation.

In February 2023, for example, Ford announced plans to build a new battery plant in Michigan using technology from CATL, the largest battery manufacturer in the world. If completed, it would be the U.S.'s first battery plant that manufactures LFP batteries — a new, cheaper type of battery. However, the project is now under investigation by the U.S. House of Representatives, which cites security concerns regarding Ford's partnership with CATL, a Chinese-based company.

In a letter written to Ford's CEO, two House Representatives raised concerns that if Ford becomes overly reliant on China for critical resources needed to manufacture EV batteries, it would hinder domestic competition — which the U.S. hopes to expand — and leave American EV-makers vulnerable to Chinese government policies.

The U.S. has been investing into EV technology as well, but it will take time to fully transition. Currently, most automakers still focus on inter-

nal combustion vehicles, which are much more profitable, though the trend is changing.

Regardless, the U.S. will likely have to transition to electrically-powered vehicles anyways if it is to meet its climate goals. So, the government faces a tough decision: keep its distance from China and attempt to expand domestic competition or go electric and support environmental sustainability.

ONGOING SOLUTIONS

Lithium Iron Phosphate (or LFP) is a new battery technology that could bypass China's dominance of the mineral supply by replacing the two most expensive minerals — nickel and cobalt — with iron and phosphate, both of which are not only less expensive but also abundant in North America, leading to lower transportation costs and a more secure supply chain.

Due to lower costs, U.S. automakers see LFP as a way to provide consumers with affordable options. For instance, Tesla aims to provide alternatives to China's low-priced EVs at a mere \$25,000 using LFP tech.

The LFP industry is still growing, but currently, 99% of LFP cathodes are manufactured in China, according to the New York Times. This makes competing with China on new battery technology extremely difficult, not to mention U.S. policies that prevent bilateral cooperation between Chinese and American companies.

While the U.S. could loosen its trade restrictions and increase cooperation with countries in Europe and North America in an attempt to gain a foothold in the LFP industry, the effectiveness of these policies is not clear.

The U.S. has also tried implementing many of the same economic policies that first built up China's EV market. For example, the federal government is offering up to 7,500 dollars in tax credit to consumers who buy new EVs. But there's a catch: the vehicle must be made in North America, which leaves consumers with less advanced models that often still cost more.

That's not to say that economic policies have no effect. American EVs are becoming cheaper as companies continue to innovate and demand rises. By 2029, the World Economic Forum projects EVs will have a net-positive profit. By 2040, 85% of new vehicle sales in the U.S. are projected to be electric.

Even so, this may be too slow. To reach the U.S.'s objective of having net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, all of new vehicle sales in America must be electric by 2035.

The U.S. likely has the potential to reach this goal, but as long as American automakers are barred from cooperating with Chinese EV-makers, battery innovation will remain slow and prices high. Ford in particular is projected to lose \$5.5 billion this year on its EV models.

THE NOT-SO-HARD TRUTH

No matter how profitable traditional internal-combustion cars are currently, EVs are the future of transportation. Not only are they vastly more climate-friendly, they also have better fuel efficiency, performance and longevity, and are quickly becoming cheaper to manufacture, buy and maintain.

If the U.S. is to reclaim its competitive position in the EV sector and reach its climate goals, the government must permit and encourage cooperation between American and Chinese companies. If the government cares more about national security and attempting to thwart Chinese economic growth through trade wars, however, then consumers, auto-companies, and environmental activists alike will all remain dissatisfied with costlier, technologically-inferior EVs.

The U.S. must prioritize the sustainability of its transportation and energy and accept that cooperation with China on some level is unavoidable.

By granting U.S. companies access to state-of-the-art technology, EVs will rapidly become the cheaper option and adoption will become widespread, propelling our country and the world to a cleaner, more sustainable, and more cooperative future.



GOODRON/FAIR USE

BRICS Breaks Down Dollar Diplomacy

A new reserve currency redefines international trade and portends the downfall of U.S. dollar hegemony

The United States and the dollar have held a longstanding dominant role over global trade and economics. The oil trade is pegged to the dollar, while the global currency exchange — through SWIFT — is transacted in dollars. Now, this dominance has met an unprecedented challenge from a newly emerging international economic alliance called BRICS. Founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa in 2009, the BRICS reconvened in Kazan, Russia on Oct. 24 for their annual summit.

Aiming to build a more united global south and develop economic partnerships, this BRICS coalition wants to shift away from the US-centric world order, and are actively seeking to de-dollarize because of the fluctuations in the dollar in recent years.

The BRICS summit on the 24th discussed shifting to a multipolar new world and the possibilities of developing an alternative currency for international trade to replace the dollar as the world's main reserve currency. In a Joint Statement published upon the conclusion of the summit, the BRICS countries highlighted “the need to reform the current international financial architecture” and their mission to reform the international financial institution to make them “more inclusive and just”. Going forward, they agreed to “welcome the use of local currencies in financial transactions between BRICS countries and their trading partners”, in a comprehensive shift away from the dollar that allows for more economic freedom among these countries.

Throughout history, the stability of our political system and the U.S. dollar have incentivised most countries and banks to adopt the dollar as the currency for international trade. Central banks have loaded

up on the dollar to stabilize their currencies, facilitate trade, and handle external debt obligations, which are often dollar-denominated. According to the International Monetary Fund, this has led to a widespread demand for the dollar; with about 60% of the world's foreign exchange reserves being held in dollars. The US recognizes the demand and has used it as diplomatic leverage, a term coined as “dollar diplomacy”.

This strategy was initially used by former president William Taft and his Secretary of State Philander Knox, to “not only improve financial opportunities, but also to use private capital to further U.S. interests overseas.”, per the US Office of the Historian.

Dollar diplomacy has served the US many political purposes. Secretary of Treasury Janet Yellen said in July 2024 that the US has “very powerful sanctions that are available because of the important role of the dollar in international transactions, the ability to cut off foreign banks or other businesses or individuals from the ability to transact through the US Financial system and to participate in the dollar.” The power of the dollar is further exhibited in the Ukraine-Russia War. The US used the dollar to punish Russia and confiscate Russia's private assets. Although the act was to penalize Russia's invasion in Ukraine, it

triggered fears of weaponization of the dollar and resulted in calls of de-dollarization.

Another trigger is the onset of an economic slowdown. The US Federal Reserve has increased our interest rates to all-time high to counter inflation. While the higher interest rates greatly benefitted the US to improve our economy, it has angered the countries dependent on the dollar and has

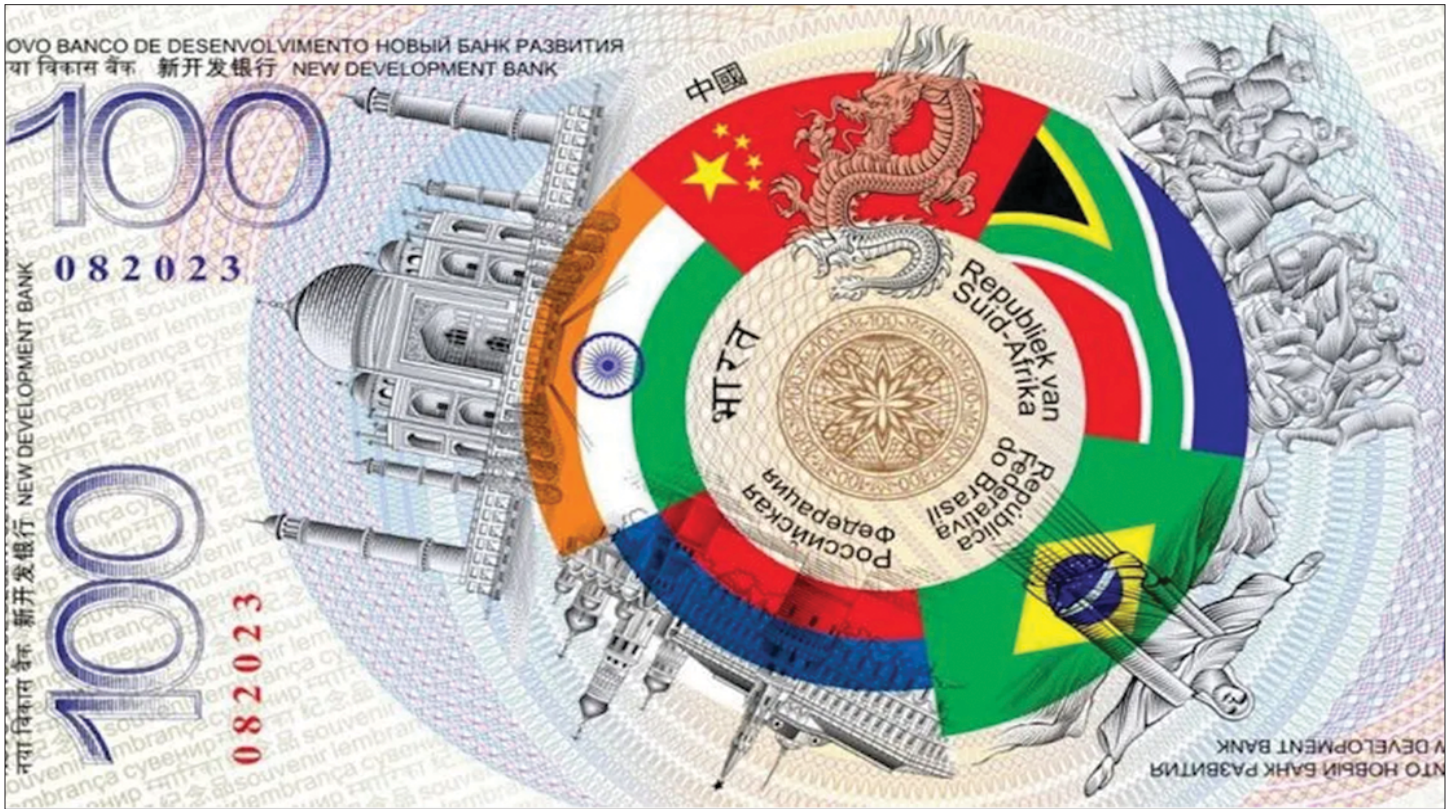
accelerated the call for de-dollarization among BRICS countries to stabilize their economy. De-dollarization will reduce America's financial and diplomatic supremacy and will lead to a shift in how global trade is conducted.

Currently, any country without access to the dollar is isolated and unable to trade in-

ternationally. The BRICS coalition is considering to trade in a BRICS currency or to transact in a BRICS Pay system that will move away from SWIFT. Such a new global currency system is a fundamental paradigm shift that will have profound impact on the US supremacy and world order.

Following the end of World War II and the Bretton Woods agreement in 1945, the US has maintained its supremacy through the control of the US dollar. With the shift to a BRICS currency or BRICS Pay system, the dollar will no longer be the monopoly in international trade. More currencies for transactions will lead to fluctuation in exchange rate, which will diminish the competitiveness of U.S. exports and imports. At a diplomatic level, as Secretary Yellen pointed out, de-dollarization will reduce

The US has very powerful sanctions that are available because of the important role of the dollar.



SCREENSHOT OF X POST FROM SCOTT RITTEER/FAIR USE

At the 16th BRICS Summit in October 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the creation of a new international payment system called “BRICS Pay,” and unveiled the first ever BRICS dollar, designed to reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar and circumvent Western sanctions.

the effectiveness of sanctions. The BRICS Joint Statement in Kazan states clearly that they are “deeply concerned about the disruptive effect of unlawful unilateral coercive measures, including illegal sanctions, on the world economy, international trade, and the achievement of the sustainable development goals.” The calls for de-dollarization is a wake-up call for the US to rethink how it works with its trading partners, and how it will continue to maintain its diplomatic presence around the world.

In the post WWII era, the US uses its economic authority to raise the interest on US Treasury Bills and Bonds to pay off its increasing debt and to offset its rising inflation. According to The Street, since 2020, the US has increased interest rates from an all time low 0.5% to 4.325%. The US’s high inflation has led to exacerbated interest rates causing

economic instability among countries that are dependent on America’s interest rate cuts to rejuvenate their domestic economy. A slower-than-expected rate cut and unexpected increases in interest rate continue the global south’s concerns in stabilizing their economies.

The US is at a critical point. Its economy is struggling with a growing trade deficit. China is emerging with a forceful challenge on electric vehicles, AI and energy production capacity. Democracy is facing multiple war fronts in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Losing currency dominance will further hinder America’s ability to respond to global issues. However, since the Presidential Election, rhetoric surrounding tariffs to avenge de-dollarization has been at its

all-time high. Using tariffs as a tool to correct trade imbalance does not change the outlook on the US economy. It does not solve the root cause of why some countries wanted to de-dollarize. The push for de-dollarization is an act of skepticism towards America’s economic and political might. America needs to rethink how it wants to inject its leadership around the world: How can we regain global confidence in our leadership? And, how far can repressive supremacy keep us going? What can we learn from the win-win diplomacy in the Global South?

BRICS is just the tip of an iceberg. It is a powerful indicator that America’s post-WWII model of engagement and globalism is facing resistance. America must find a new path in response to the new circumstances, looking at how it uses foreign aid, and trade to a level of mutual benefit with its trading partners. The US still leads ahead of China in global competition, but it needs to find ways to expand it. Encouraging the use of the dollar rather than forcefully imposing it can serve as a mutually beneficial way to counter de-dollarization and ensure future US supremacy.

Losing currency dominance will further hinder America’s ability to respond to global issues.

Asian NATO Proposal Should Remain a Dream

Japan's newly elected prime minister Ishiba's push for a NATO-like alliance in Asia would push allies away

Amid growing concerns over tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan, Japan's new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba proposed creating a NATO-like alliance in Asia to counter Chinese expansion and aggression. The Asian NATO would include binding, collective defense measures such as NATO's Article 5, which mandates that an attack on one will be an attack on all. This proposal is just one layer of Ishiba's aggressive anti-China foreign policy. The U.S. now faces a key decision: whether to support this alliance or to pursue more alternate strategies in the Indo-Pacific. To maintain stability in the region, the U.S. must focus on strengthening small partnerships and reject the idea of an Asian NATO.

Currently, U.S. policy in the Indo-Pacific involves bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Australia. These security alliances revolve around the idea that bilateral collaboration will deter Chinese attacks. Additionally, the United States participates in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a diplomatic partnership that includes the United States, Australia, India and Japan. The Quad serves to facilitate communication between countries located near the Indian and Pacific Ocean. Historically, America has avoided formalizing a NATO-like alliance in Asia, instead opting for more flexible partnerships with individual countries. According to the United States Agency for

International Development, the U.S. supports a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and provides humanitarian, economic and security support to select allies. Unlike NATO, these partnerships allow the U.S. to adapt quickly to global affairs because they do not include binding mandates such as NATO's Article 5.

If successful, the alliance could create greater stability in Asia by deterring conflict in contested areas like Taiwan and the South China Sea. However, if it fails at its goals to unify key players or alienates economically interdependent countries, it runs the risk of undermining regional stability and forcing weaker nations closer to China's orbit. Here's a

breakdown at how this initiative might affect different sectors in the region:

Japan: As the proposal's architect, Japan views the alliance as a necessary measure to ensure its security from China and reinforce ties with the U.S., especially if nuclear-sharing arrangements come into play. It's important to note that the Liberal Democratic Party, a pro-Chinese political group, in Japan lost their long-time majority in recent elections. Instead, Ishiba will work with a coalition government, which will include members who are both for and against China. Japan's leadership under Ishiba is actively pursuing this alliance to maintain stability and reduce reliance on

solely bilateral security agreements with the U.S.

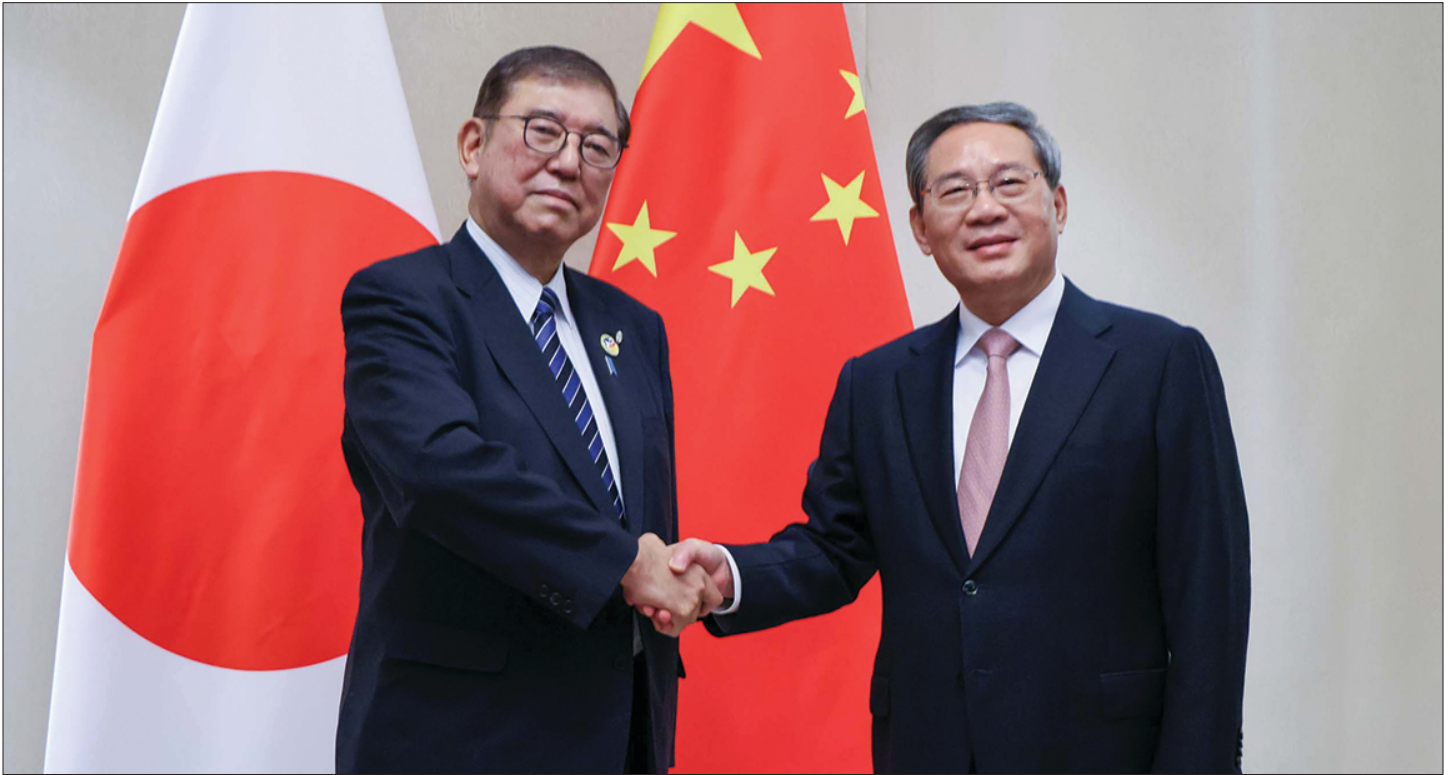
South Korea and the Philippines:

Both countries stand to gain strategically from U.S. protection by reducing their reliance on China, though they also stand to lose economically if they join an Asian NATO due to their dependence on China. According to the Peterson Institute for International Economics, since 2017, South Korea's exports to China have been larger than that of the United States and Japan combined. However, last year, South Korea's exports to the United States and Japan combined overtook that of China for the first time since 2006. Furthermore, Vincente Rafael, a history professor at the University of Washington, said "The Philippines is economically dependent on its trade relations with the United States." This partnership is also why, 30 years after the Philippines moved to end permanent U.S. military presence, the country gave the U.S. access to four new military bases last year to deter Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

India: According to Reuters, India has explicitly rejected the possibility of joining Asian NATO, citing its commitment to independent foreign policy. When speaking at the U.N. regarding the prospect of an Asian NATO, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said "We have ... a different history and different way of approaching." India's rejection weakens the cohesiveness and strength of the Asian NATO by removing a major military and political force from the equation.

Southeast Asia: Southeast Asian countries have responded differently to Chinese aggression and expansion. Vietnam has outwardly rejected Chinese investment

**These security alliances
revolve around the
idea that bilateral
collaboration will deter
Chinese attacks.**



PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN'S OFFICE/FAIR USE

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Vientiane, Laos. After the proposal was announced, China warned Japan to be “cautious in its words and deeds” and said the Asian NATO “hyped up the non-existent ‘China threat.’”

over national security concerns. In August of 2024 for example, Vietnam sped up efforts to expand islands and reclaim land in the South China Sea, according to the Washington Post. However, countries such as Thailand and Cambodia are economically dependent on China. According to the Lowy Institute, their “hands are tied.”

China: China vehemently opposes an Asian NATO, viewing it as a direct threat. After the proposal was announced, China warned Japan to be “cautious in its words and deeds” and said the Asian NATO “hyped up the non-existent ‘China threat.’” This alliance could further escalate Sino-American tensions.

United States: After Ishiba’s proposal, Daniel Kritenbrink, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific dismissed the proposal, saying it was too early to discuss the idea.

The proposal will likely escalate tensions with China and force Asian countries to choose between pleasing China to protect their economies or siding with the United States for security. Instead, the United States can focus its attention on creating and strengthening existing smaller, multilateral security alliances that

emphasize collective security without formalizing strict alliance obligations. These alliances increase security cooperation between countries in Asia without outwardly threatening China’s claims. For example, these multilateral security alliances could look like the American–Japanese–Korean trilateral pact (JAROKUS), which serves as a security pact between Japan, South Korea and the United States. Through this agreement, the US is able to coordinate military responses with its partners in Asia while minimizing the risk of Chinese retaliation.

Those who support an Asian NATO argue that a strong alliance would serve as the most powerful deterrent against China. They also argue that only a mandated security agreement would deter China, as discussions or more flexible commitments seem too weak.

However, an Asian NATO at this stage would be more likely to split alliances than strengthen them, by forcing countries to pick a side.

In choosing a response, U.S. policymakers must balance deterrence with de-escalation. An Asian NATO presents multiple challenges that would undermine regional

An Asian NATO at this stage would be more likely to split alliances than strengthen them, by forcing countries to pick a side.

unity instead of strengthening it. By employing more flexible, smaller multilateral partnerships over rigid and broad alliances, the U.S. can support regional allies while minimizing the risk of conflict. Thus, through these multilateral partnerships, the US can simulta-

neously support stability in Asia and retain its flexibility. In a region as unstable as Asia, tides could turn with a single decision. Thus, the U.S. must prioritize its adaptability in the Indo-Pacific.

North Korea Unveils its Uranium Facility

North Korea's release of photos revealing its nuclear facilities is threatening global peace

If a nuclear missile were to hit California, the center of global technology in 2025, how much do you think your life would change? You might respond by saying that it would bring significant changes to your life, or you might dismiss it as something unlikely to happen. But what if this scenario is not as far off in the future as you think? Nuclear weapons are powerful enough to completely destroy a city. Given the destructive power of nuclear weapons, the international community has implemented the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) “to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear energy”. According to this treaty, countries are restricted from possessing nuclear weapons, with the exception of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council—the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Russia, and France.

However, there is a country that does not adhere to this treaty, ultimately withdrawing from the NPT: North Korea. Since the 1950s, the militaristic regime has been developing and possessing nuclear weapons that are not permitted, posing a threat to the international community. In September 13, 2024, new photos of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un touring a uranium enrichment facility (location and date were not released) used for producing weapons-grade nuclear material have raised concerns about North Korea's nuclear capabilities. Although the specific date of his visit has not been disclosed, reports indicate that the purpose of the visit was to establish a long-term plan to increase the production of weapons-grade nuclear materials. According to a new analysis by a Royal United Services Institute (Rusi), UK-

based think tank, North Korea has enough weapons-grade nuclear material to develop enough nuclear weapons to more than double its existing nuclear stockpile. North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons poses a threat to not only security in Northeast Asian countries but also to global peace, as North Korea can launch missiles across the Pacific relatively unchecked. Therefore, the North Korean nuclear issue is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed.

The United States has not had diplomatic relations with North Korea since the declaration of DPRK in 1948. Current U.S. policy toward North Korea aims to ensure peace on the Korean Peninsula, which includes pursuing complete denuclearization.

Over the past few decades, the U.S., many of its allies and the United Nations Security Council have imposed a variety of sanctions to restrict funding for North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. North Korea is prohibited by UN Security Council resolutions from engaging in any activities involving ballistic missile technology, including efforts to launch a satellite into space using a rocket. However, North Korea continues to reject these sanctions and persists in its nuclear development.

So, what is the reason Kim Jong Un is publicly showcasing photos of nuclear fa-

ilities and developing nuclear weapons? First, many analysts suggest that domestically, the regime's economic difficulties, stemming from corruption under Kim Jong Un's regime, are being masked by military achievements such as nuclear weapons, in an effort to suppress public discontent. Internationally, a South Korean agency, National intelligence service has speculated that North Korea's unveiling of its uranium facilities likely represents a sign of defiance

toward Washington in the lead-up to the U.S. presidential election. North Korea may also be attempting to negotiate with the next U.S. administration under better conditions; Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, stated that these

Showcasing nuclear technology could serve as a “message to the next administration that denuclearizing North Korea will be impossible.”

photos of Kim Jong Un touring nuclear facilities and showcasing nuclear technology could serve as a “message to the next administration that denuclearizing North Korea will be impossible,” adding that the unveiling could also be “a message demanding that other countries recognize North Korea as a nuclear state.” North Korea may be attempting to negotiate with the next U.S. administration under better conditions. Additionally, the strengthening of its relationship with Russia has raised concerns in the West. Since the sending of North Korean soldiers to Russia, there are



KNCA/FAIR USE

On Sep. 13, photos were released showing Kim Jong Un speaking with officials at a uranium facility. The specific date of the visit and the exact location were not disclosed.

concerns that Russia, desperate to win the war against Ukraine, may illegally exchange North Korean military personnel and weapons for key technologies that will aid North Korea's nuclear development. If this is true, it would be a clear violation of the UN Security Council resolution on North Korea.

The top priority for the Trump administration in dealing with the North Korea issue is to halt the progress of the North Korean regime's nuclear and weapons programs. Additionally, given the high likelihood that North Korea could threaten major U.S. cities with nuclear weapons, it is also essential to find a way for North Korea to rejoin the NPT. Some analysts speculate that North Korea may have other hidden sites for enriching uranium. On September 9th 2024, Kim Jong un announced plans to exponentially expand the country's nuclear arsenal in his speech marking the 76th anniversary of the establishment of the North Korean regime. Therefore the United States should thoroughly monitor North Korea's internal nuclear development activities in coordination with its allied countries. Also, the Trump administration will need to monitor and hold accountable the instanc-

es of illegal transactions involving nuclear development technologies between Russia and North Korea that violate the NPT. Additionally, the international community must enforce existing sanctions against North Korea more rigorously. In the meantime, efforts to bring North Korea back to NPT treaty negotiations should be continued. The UN has indicated that dialogue with North Korea is necessary regarding the nuclear issue.

The North Korea nuclear issue is directly connected to global peace, and since nuclear weapons are extremely important and dangerous, it can be said that the entire world is involved in this matter. Countries closely linked to North Korea's nuclear issue, par-

ticularly the United States and South Korea, are expressing even greater concerns. North Korea is increasingly emphasizing its nuclear weapons as symbols of national prestige and power. The various U.S.-led international sanctions have failed to halt

North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs. Nevertheless, the U.S. must seek to identify and sanction any secret nuclear development facilities and work towards facilitating North Korea's return to the NPT. Since no one wants North Korea to hold the world in its hands and threaten our daily lives, the world must strive for the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The top priority for the Trump administration in dealing with the North Korea issue is to halt the progress of the regime's nuclear weapons programs.

Containing Foreign Threats in the Pacific

The United States' rebuilding of deactivated military bases in the Pacific is not only for defense, but for offense

Following World War II, hundreds of small islands and atolls in the central Pacific were left under the control of the United States. At that time, these islands were strategically important for the U.S., due to the island hopping tactic — raiding an island, setting up a base, then using that base to jump to the next enemy-held island — that was used. Additionally, many of these islands served as forward operating air bases, where planes could land and quickly rearm until another island was captured and a new base was set up. This also led to an effective logistical chain; transport aircraft could now hop from island to island, dropping off crucial supplies. However, many of these islands were operationally deactivated and handed over to the civilian governments on the islands after the war, with the exception of Tinian in the Northern Mariana Islands being used as an occasional training ground and Peleliu in Palau as an emergency landing point for Aircraft. Wake Island and Kwajalein atoll however remained active, being used as an air base and Army Garrison respectively. Many other islands and atolls were used for nuclear testing. Currently, islands such as Guam host important U.S. Air Force bases and regional command points.

However, the closing of these islands meant there was a large gap in the central Pacific from Guam to Hawaii that the U.S. had to monitor. This became a major issue, as the U.S. had no means of surveilling the area without frequently flying long range patrols or sending ships to patrol the area.

In the 2010's, a geopolitical shift occurred where Russia was no longer deemed an existential threat to the U.S. as much as China. As a result, the Department of the Defense conducted a tactical shift, focus-

ing on a potential large-scale Pacific war. In particular, the Congressional Research Service's 2023 report on the Pacific war and strategic positioning emphasizes the idea of logistical supremacy — the ability to strategically launch forces from different points in the Pacific. Through this method, U.S. forces stay far enough from China where their ballistic missiles can't reach them, but close enough where U.S. Air Force aircraft are within range of China to complete strike missions.

This, coupled with U.S. naval supremacy in the Pacific and the openness of allies to allocate space for U.S. forces, results in a perfect mix for the United States — able to contain and deter any actions by China from all sides. Rebuilding these islands will bolster US defense capabilities and strengthen our ties with our allies, it is safe to assume these foreign policy moves are a good thing.

Additionally, this shift affects doctrine amongst the branches of the military, where the Army and Air Force now take center stage in the Pacific war when it was once thought the Marine Corps and Navy would be the core branches at play. As a result, the Marines serve as a spearhead, the Army as the logistical bridge and overpowering force, the Navy as containment of the oceans, and the Air Force as containment of the sky. With more forces, more land is needed to house their operations. The U.S. is investing in rebuilding old WWII island

outposts as air bases, air defense sites and staging grounds. Notably, the Air Force is rebuilding the air base on Tinian Island, and the Marine Corps and Navy are rebuilding the Air base at Peleliu. These islands hold extreme strategic importance, both in the past and the present. In 1945, Tinian was the island where the Enola Gay and Bockscar launched to drop the first atomic bombs on Japan, as it was a key island as it was within the range of U.S. bombers.

Tinian's location is centrally located in the eastern Pacific, close to China, Japan, Australia and Hawaii.

This enables strategic airlifters such as C 130's, C17's, C5's to fly in easily without worrying about the range they

can fly to other bases. Bombers such as B52 Stratofortresses, B2 Spirits, B1 Lancers and soon the B21 Raider would be able to easily take off for strike missions without the range or refueling factor. Fighters such as F15C/E/EX Eagle, F22 Raptor, F35 Lightning II and the F16 viper, could take off for strike missions from a safe forward base on these islands closer to their targets. Tinian also has a deepwater port, allowing naval vessels to refuel and replenish safely.

Peleliu works the same way. The site of a bloody World War 2 battle ground, the island has a marked history, with the Navy and Marine Corps running flights out of the island routinely during WWII. After the 1950s, the island was mostly aban-

Rebuilding these islands will bolster U.S. defense capabilities and strengthen ties with our Allies.



BRANDON MARRERO/FAIR USE

A group of Marine Engineers deconstruct part of a wall on Peleliu from the 7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, as part of Peleliu Civic Center restoration project in July to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Peleliu.

done, with facilities being deactivated. It was only until mid-2024 where the first fixed-wing military aircraft landed on the refurbished field. The purpose of the island is to be used as a staging ground and air base for the Marines, Air Force and Navy.

Peleliu's location allows Marine Corps amphibious warfare doctrines to be used effectively, as infantry and light armored reconnaissance can quickly be shuttled through the island to other staging points in the Pacific. Peleliu is slightly farther from Asia, but benefits from an added layer of defense being its own distance from China, and it being within the range of the Philippines, a major U.S. ally.

The rebuilding of these islands is extremely important to U.S. Foreign policy as a whole, asserting U.S. control in a contested region against a large, existential threat. Placing the U.S. military's Pacific command on China's doorstep would restrict China's aggression in the South China Sea and would give the U.S. an upperhand in the case of another Pacific war, being able to quickly strike and destroy Chinese stra-

tegic positions. These islands also provide defense to the United States, as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)

anti-ballistic missile defense systems can be installed. These anti-missile systems will not only shoot down any Chinese nuclear or ballistic missile launches but also deter other regional actors such as North Korea from acting aggressively.

In terms of naval power, the building of bases on these islands also strengthens U.S. naval dominance in the Pacific by impeding Chinese naval movements with the use of

coastal artillery and anti ship missiles. Furthermore, these new bases can now support carrier strike groups, transport ships and naval squadrons. With these islands, more defense cover can be given to these formations while they are in transit, giving them the ability to capitalize their offensive capabilities. While some have questioned the importance of new islands if the United States already has a monopoly on Pacific territories, more territory results in more land protected and covered. Navy ships can prioritize patrolling far off areas, as the islands serve as a level of effective defense in themselves. Ultimately, the building of these islands is another step the US is taking to protect the national security of itself and its allies in a more dangerous world.

Placing the U.S. military's Pacific command on China's doorstep would restrict China's aggression in the South China Sea.

A Nation in Limbo: Myanmar's Endless War

*The Myanmar Revolution enters a new phase
but America is nowhere to be found*

As opposition forces united against the military junta rule, after three years the Myanmar Revolutionary War finally entered a new phase. In February 2021, military leader of Myanmar Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, and his forces, the Tatmadaw, overthrew the democratic parliamentary government in a violent coup. The rebels then formed the State Administration Council and commenced brutal crackdowns on civilian protesters, destroying people's villages and homes, and arresting more than 8,000 journalists, medical workers, and politicians in the process. In addition, Myanmar is in economic turmoil, and all work toward a stable government and poverty reduction over the last decade has been undone. Millions of people are facing hunger and thousands are fleeing over the border to Thailand and India. But this isn't the first time this has happened.

Myanmar's history is fraught with violence. After gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1948, Myanmar established a parliamentary democracy and formed a new constitution in 1974, adopting isolationist foreign policy and socialist economic programs. Unfortunately, this brought about a financial crisis, shifting Myanmar to a black market economy and later causing widespread corruption, food shortages, and major protests.

In August of 1988, the army killed 3000 civilians, displaced thousands more, and eventually formed a new military junta in 1989. A military "junta" is a military or political group that rules after taking power by force.

In 2007 the "Saffron Revolution" took place. Anti-government citizens sparked by the fuel price hikes protested against the government. In 2008, a new constitution

was formed, giving major military powers to the people, leading to the junta disbanding in 2011. Myanmar then formed a republic which lasted until February 2021, when the Tatmadaw overthrew the government.

Myanmar's constant state of chaos is a product of its ongoing ethnic and economic struggles. With over 100 ethnic groups recognized by the state, ethnic divisions created under British rule have led to groups such as the Bamar (68% of the population) gaining a privileged status. Owing to 8 decades of violence, Myanmar is currently in the world's longest continuing civil war.

After Hlaing overthrew Myanmar's republic and established his SAC, his military junta detained several members of the National League of Democracy. For two years, it was a battle of attrition, thought impossible for the National League of Democracy to win.

However, the war has now entered a new phase. Ousted NLD members formed the National Unity Government, which aims to defeat the military junta, unite ethnic groups, create a stable post-junta Myanmar agenda, and gather support from foreign powers. In September, the NUG officially declared war on the military junta.

Opposition forces have formed alliances, and different ethnic armed groups are rallying against military rule. In early April, the Karen National Union, an ethnic armed group in support of a federal

government and equal rights, announced the capture of Myawaddy, a town on the Myanmar-Thai border that processes several billion dollars worth of trade annually. In addition, resistance forces have launched an attack on the capital, Naypyidaw, firing several rockets and drone attacks on military facilities. As of April, the NUG has claimed that around 60% of the country is in control of resistance forces.

Currently, the United States has taken a relatively weak stance on the conflict in Myanmar. The US has maintained a distant relationship and even placed economic sanctions on Myanmar even though Chinese influence in the region is high. For decades, China has been Myanmar's closest ally and trading partner and has even integrated it into its Belt and Road initiative. It has also pushed for ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, to lead

an international response to the coup.

With the Obama and Trump administrations, efforts were made to reduce sanctions and ease relations. In 2012, President Obama became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Myanmar, as he extended "the hand of friendship" to reconcile. Toward the end of his term, he issued an executive order to eliminate all sanctions against Myanmar.

The Trump administration effectively continued the policy changes made by President Obama, without making significant changes. They intend to mainly support the

**Owing to 8 decades of
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FREE MALAYSIA TODAY/FAIR USE

In February, Myanmar's military junta made major changes to their conscription policy. In April, 5,000 new soldiers were recruited, and approximately 60,000 soldiers are being recruited each year.

economic reforms in Myanmar, and counter growing Chinese influence in the region. However, by 2014, many people questioned whether the new American policy had an effect, as Myanmar's economy was still showing signs of regression.

President Biden did the opposite. Soon after his inauguration, the junta's crackdown on the civilians led to the Biden Administration

sanctioning the regime, and seizing \$1 billion in assets. Ever since then, nothing has been accomplished, other than lip service talk of restoring democracy.

Overall, the U.S. can do a lot more to support Myanmar. First, the White House should officially recognize the National

Unity Government as the lawful government of the people of Myanmar. This will allow America to deny the military junta legitimacy within ASEAN and also pressure

Only increased effort by the U.S. to support democracy in the region will finally lead to peace.

ASEAN itself to formally meet and recognize the National Unity Government. To add on, other countries in Europe have already voted to recognize the NUG, and many ASEAN

already pushing representatives are ing their governments to follow along. Next, the U.S. should increase aid towards the NUG, while continuing to sanction members of the junta. The U.S. should also increase pressure on Singapore, a member of ASEAN and the larg-

est investor of Myanmar to sanction the junta. They should also sanction oil and gas revenues; Myanmar's greatest source of income. Recognizing the NUG and sanctioning the junta can potentially have other benefits, such as releasing frozen assets that can be used to purchase aid or relief supplies, and if the U.S. establishes ties with the various ethnic armed forces fighting the junta, it could potentially decrease Chinese influence in the region, as China has often contacted these forces.

Unfortunately for the NUG, the military junta is still going strong, backed by superpowers such as Russia and China. Towns captured by the NUG have been taken back by the junta, resulting in thousands of people fleeing across the Thai border. In February, the junta activated a military conscription law, which aims to recruit 60,000 new personnel per year. The NUG has worked hard but only increased effort by the U.S. to support democracy in the region will finally lead Myanmar to peace.

Panda Diplomacy Revived

Pandas arrive at San Diego Zoo, herald new era of Sino-American cultural relations

In early August, the San Diego Zoo celebrated the opening of a new exhibit for the newest pair of pandas loaned to the United States, Yun Chuan and Xin Bao. For more than 40 years, China has loaned pandas, animals as important to Chinese culture as the bald eagle is to American culture, to U.S. zoos.

At the San Diego panda exhibit's opening ceremony, Chinese Ambassador Xie Feng acknowledged the significance of 45 years of formal diplomatic relations between China and the United States, stating that the anniversary's coincidence with the arrival of the pandas sends a message: "China-U.S. cooperation on panda conservation will not cease, our people-to-people exchanges and subnational cooperation will not stop, and, once opened, the door of China-U.S. friendship will not be shut again." In the past few decades of increasingly tense U.S.-China relations, the question has been whether that door has started to slowly creak shut. When China sent a panda cub to Washington D.C.'s National Zoo in 2013, China's then-ambassador to the United States, Cui Tiankai, published an opinion piece for the Washington Post in which he acknowledged panda diplomacy: "Many people don't realize it, but there are actually two Chinese ambassadors in Washington: me and the panda cub at the National Zoo." As unofficial cultural ambassadors, diplomatic efforts involving pandas can provide important insight on the symbolic future of the China-U.S. friendship.

For the past few years, there had been speculation that China would not be extending any of the several leases of pandas it has on loan to U.S. zoos due to three ongoing areas of contention between the two countries: trade relations, technological competition and dispute over Taiwan. This seemed to be the case when in 2019, China did not extend the United States' loans



SAN DIEGO ZOO WILDLIFE ALLIANCE/FAIR USE

California Governor Gavin Newsom and Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. Xie Feng cutting the ribbon at the San Diego Zoo's new panda exhibit in August.

of pandas at San Diego Zoo and Memphis Zoo. In October 2023, the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. returned their three pandas as well.

China's recent renewal of the U.S. panda loans breaks the trend of how China has conducted panda diplomacy with various governments over the past few decades, and signals China's softening attitude towards America.

China's practice of loaning pandas to other countries has consistently reflected its political interests since the inception of the People's Republic of China in 1912. In the 1950s, it gifted pandas to North Korea and the Soviet Union. Not only does China use panda loans to strategically build diplomatic ties with other countries, once the pandas arrive in a country, they can often generate soft power for China by serving

as symbols of Chinese culture. By accepting pandas in their zoos, governments publicly show goodwill toward the Chinese government, and the popularity of the panda exhibits subtly improves public opinion of China.

A 2013 Oxford University study on panda diplomacy proposes that it has historically been utilized by China during three different phases. During the first phase between 1957 and 1983, a key period of the Cold War, China used pandas to "build strategic friendships." It had gifted pandas to the USSR and the United States, countries which China perceived as its "militant revolutionary rival" and its "major ideological adversary" respectively, in an attempt to create a triangular power balance and prevent conflict between the three world powers.

The PRC first gifted a pair of pandas to the U.S. in April 1972, shortly after President Richard Nixon’s landmark trip to China marked the beginning of modern U.S.-China ties after twenty-five years of no contact. The visit heralded an era of detente, where after a week of meetings between the two governments and tours around major Chinese cities for the U.S. government officials, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai offered to send two pandas to the U.S. as a gift. President Nixon reciprocated by gifting China two musk oxen. A couple years later in 1979, the two countries officially established diplomatic rela-

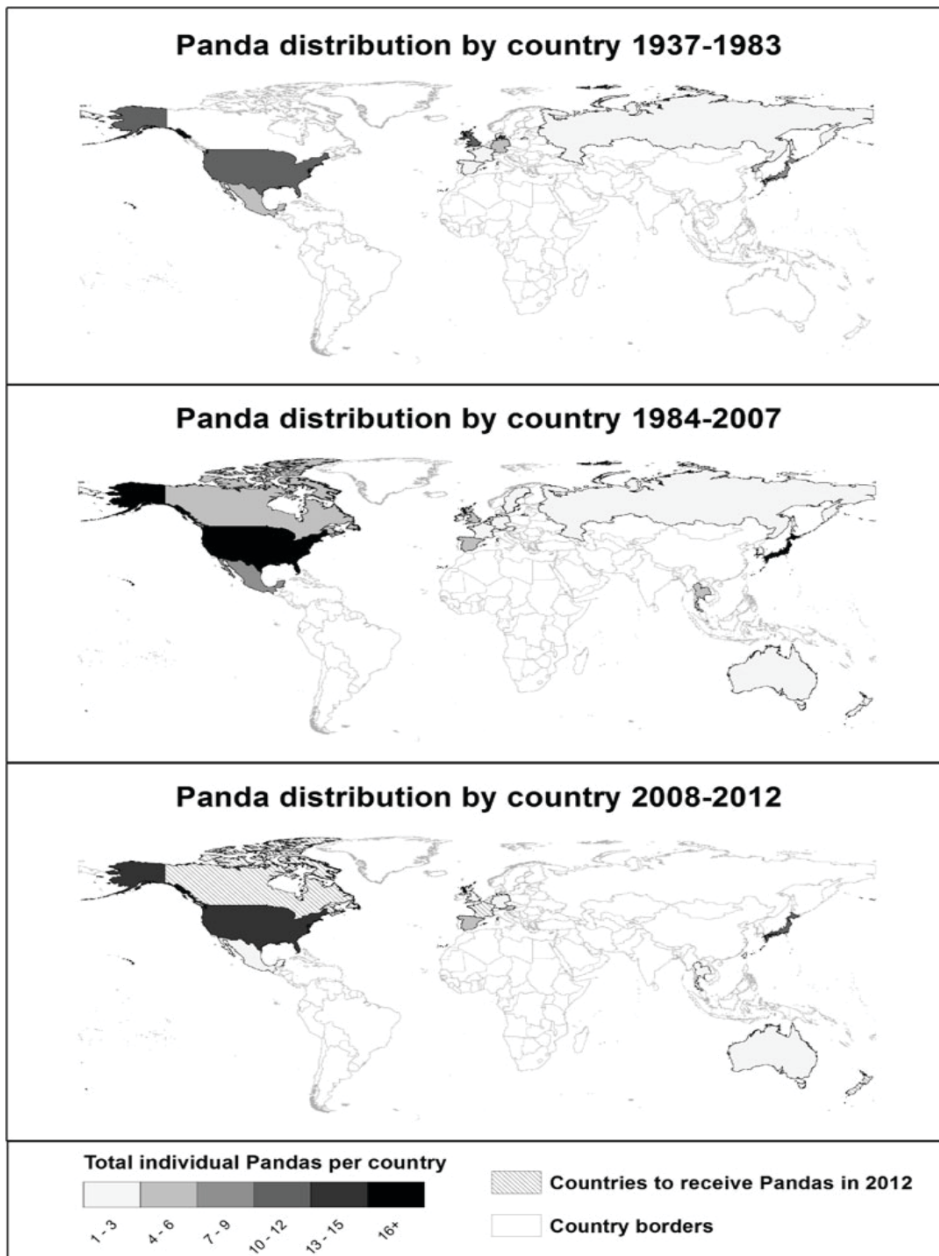
tions. From then until 2023, there had always been at least one pair of pandas in an American zoo.

In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping became chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and enacted market reforms that began the rapid economic growth of China. In this spirit of being more open to Western investment, China switched from gifting pandas to loaning them to other countries instead, usually for ten years at a time with a loan fee of about \$1 million per year and the requirement that China retain ownership of any cubs born during the lease term. However, China’s selection of countries

that could accept panda loans became no less deliberate; on the contrary, China began to use pandas to strategically reinforce bilateral relations and reward support from other countries, especially support for the One-China policy. In the 2010s, countries like Austria and Finland received panda loans after publicly recognizing China’s One-China Policy, while China canceled the delivery of a panda to the Prague Zoo after Czech government officials met with Tibet’s exiled government in March of 2023.

The arrival of this newest panda pair in the U.S. seems almost anachronistic, defying the past decade of increasingly tense Sino-American relations as the two governments continue to face off on trade, technology, and geopolitics. Since the 2010s, when the United States’ trade deficit with China reached \$295.5 billion — making the U.S.’s the highest trade deficit of any country in the world and more than double the next highest trade deficit — the U.S. has enacted various restrictions — and tariffs worth more than \$50 billion — on Chinese exports and companies in the U.S. in an ongoing effort to reduce American investments in China and reliance on Chinese trade. Throughout the 21st century, the U.S. has sparked disapproval from China for granting shelter to Chinese dissidents and for being in contact with governments exiled and not recognized by China, such as the governments of Tibet and Taiwan, despite the United States’ continued affirmation of the One-China policy. And just last year, President Joe Biden ordered a ban of U.S. investments in three sectors of China’s technology industry.

As relations between China and the U.S. continue to grow more unstable over economic and geopolitical issues, the arrival of the pandas at San Diego Zoo signals renewed efforts in cultural diplomacy between the two countries and, potentially, China’s strengthened interest towards more amicable overall relations with the United States. At a time rife with political polarization and various mainstream cultures’ embrace of overgeneralized cultural stereotypes, it is more important than ever that cultural diplomacy efforts continue — even in spite of countries’ differing political interests. As Sino-American relations experts point out the makings of a second Cold War, cultural diplomacy must be recognized and strengthened in order to avoid a second Cultural Cold War.



Graphic by Kathleen Buckingham and Paul R. Jepson.

French Frenzy: the Politics Behind France's Elections

Surge in far-right politics, a declining young voter turnout, and Macron's risky decisions in France's 2024 Elections

The quinquennial European parliamentary elections took place in France this June, where the country elects 81 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from a range of political parties. MEPs act as representatives of France in the European Parliament, deciding on laws and legislation that impact the entire European Union. As a recent rise in far-right movements threatened current President Emmanuel Macron's centrist government, France braced itself for a potential political deadlock.

Expected to win, Macron's centrist Ensemble party has

been the incumbent political party for the past 7 years. After triumphing over Marine Le Pen's far-right party Rassemblement National (RN) twice during the past two presidential elections, Macron's party has historically dampened the far-right's power for the past decade.

However, on June 9, E.U. election results revealed that Marine Le Pen's far-right party had won the most votes

while securing 30 of the 81 seats, with Macron's centrist party trailing with 13 seats. This marked the first time since the Vichy regime that a far-right party gained such power in France. In the hearts and minds of many citizens, the specter of the World War II French puppet regime led by Philippe Pétain brings back the horrors of the Holocaust and the collaboration with Nazi Germany.

Consequently, just one hour after results were released, Macron dissolved the parliament and set legislative elections for June 30 to fill all 577 seats in France's National Assembly, using the powers granted to the president under Article 8 of the French Constitution. Macron's call for a snap election was a way to question the French people about their voting choices. This time around, his plan was to listen to the people: if the RN were to come out on top, he would respect their decision and let the RN govern for the remainder of his term. Betting on the RN's inability to govern, this would have given Macron an opportunity to prove to French citizens that people that putting the RN into power would be catastrophic in time before elections with higher stakes: the French



Marine Le Pen speaks at Equinoxe in Paris on April 22, 2012.

RÉMI NOYON/FAIR USE

are set to elect a new president in 2027 for a 5-year term, and, as is usually the case after presidential elections, their representatives in the National Assembly as well.

Unlike in the United States, France's electoral system allows for a greater representation of third-party candidates. Contrary to the European Parliamentary elections, French legislative elections spread over two rounds of voting. On election day, a representative from any political party may be on the ballot. All candidates winning at least 12.5% of the total votes must go through a second round.

However, if one of the candidates has won 50% of the votes, that candidate is declared the winner and no second round is called. If none of the candidates have reached the 12.5% mark, then only the top two move on to the second round. This past June, second round elections determined the distribution of parties in the French National Assembly.

In these elections, a new left-wing coalition, the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP), emerged, uniting Jean-Luc Mélenchon's far-left party La France Insoumise, the Socialist Party, the French Green Party, and the French Communist Party. This coalition signified the left's attempt to dampen the right-wing party's rising power, as the elections were split into three main parties: Macron's centrist party, the left-wing coalition, and the right wing RN. With the NFP gaining momentum, many far-left and centrist candidates outside the coalition pulled out from the race after the first round, aiming to prevent RN from gaining an absolute majority and potentially placing RN leader Jordan Bardella as prime minister. On July 7, results confirmed that the NFP had won 182 seats, the most out of any political party, overcoming the RN's 142 seats.

A week later, former Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced his resignation, leaving Macron to appoint a new PM. Traditionally, the prime minister is selected from the party with the legislative majority. However, as no party had won the requisite 289 seats for an overall majority in the 577-seat assembly, Macron broke tradition by appointing Michel Barnier from the

conservative Les Républicains party after months of negotiation. Barnier, best known as the E.U.'s top Brexit negotiator, holds a hard-line stance on immigration, shared by other conservative members like promptly appointed Minister of the Interior Bruno Retailleau and, of course, by Marine Le Pen and the RN. This alliance with conservatives has nudged Macron's centrist policies slightly rightward, and, as a consequence, is already creating tensions in Macron's new government. Left-wing supporters took to the streets to protest after outrage erupted, claiming that Macron avoided acknowledging the left's victory by choosing Barnier as PM, calling it a "power grab".

Macron's ultimate goal remains to counter the rising power of the far-right, shown by recent wins for far-right leaders like Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Herbert Kickl in Austria. Barnier's uncompromising approach on immigration is familiar among members of the far-right all around the world, including in the United States with Trump's strict policies on immigration along the southern border. This

strong stance also pleases Le Pen, as her party is known for being anti-immigration and nationalist. How did the far-right party achieve power in the French European parliamentary elections given their controversial and extreme policies? In the case of these elections, where the RN secured a victory, a notable factor to consider is that the European election had a lower voter turnout, particularly among young people. Statista data shows that only 50% of French citizens voted in the European elections, 62% of those aged 18-24 abstaining, while 62% of voters 65 and older participated. Low youth turnout has been a key factor in the rise of far-right movements globally, showing the importance of

youth participating in democracy. The RN has historically been seeking votes from the middle and older generation, as 35 to 40% of people aged 50 to 70 voted for the far-right in this past election. Since there has been a current trend in the abstention of young voters, far-right parties have been able to gain power, leaving left and centrist parties to be voted out. As recent far-right movements have gained power globally because of low youth voter turnout, it is important to recognize the significance of our democratic right to vote in order to avoid intense political paralyses that cause potential instability of strong democratic governments.

While Barnier's appointment was controversial, given his conservative stance, Macron saw him as a compromise. According to Article 49 of the French Constitution, a motion de censure or a majority vote of no confidence allows the National Assembly to vote out an executive decision, which has historically led to the resignation of the government. This impacted Macron's decision because Barnier is a figure the far-right might work with rather than immediately oppose, while his negotiating experience could ease potential clashes with the left. Macron's selection of Barnier helped end a two-month political deadlock, main-

taining his goal of centrist leadership despite the challenges of coalition governance. However, Barnier's appointment risked alienating Macron's left-wing supporters, who saw it as appeasing conser-

vatives.

Throughout the past few months, Macron has made a series of risky decisions: calling for snap elections and appointing a prime minister not from the winning left-wing coalition. These events have antagonized left-wing supporters and energized far-right leaders. Macron's move has deepened political divides, potentially lessen the impact of any calls from centrists like Macron to vote for them in order to counter the far-right, which the left has been voting to oppose for decades.

Only 50% of French citizens voted in the European elections.

Over 62% of French citizens aged 18-24 abstained in the European elections.

Democracy on Edge

As right-wing populism spreads across Europe, the U.S. must decide whether to take a more active role in preserving democratic values or risk undermining its global alliances

From France, to Austria and Hungary, right-wing populism is gaining ground, challenging the liberal democratic values that have anchored the continent since World War II. The warning signs are unmis-

takable: electoral gains by far-right parties, the erosion of press freedom like what we've seen under PM Giorgia Meloni in Italy, and climbing hostilities towards immigrants and minorities. These movements have tapped into an influential mix of economic frustration and cultural anxiety.

Workers in these countries share a growing sentiment that the system has failed them. Many see their wages stagnant as cost of living rises while elites prosper, their traditions fade as societies change, their voices drowned out by bureaucrats in distant Brussels. This rightward drift threatens more than just domestic politics. It strikes the framework of democratic values, open markets and multilateral cooperation that has fostered a precedent of peace and prosperity. As Europe's democracies are wobbling, autocrats worldwide are taking

notes. For the United States and other democratic allies, the stakes could not be higher — the survival of an international system seven decades in the making hangs in balance.

The U.S. is currently walking a tightrope in Europe. While Washington has historically championed democracy across the Atlantic, the current hands-off approach to Europe's rising right-wing movements might be too cautious. Sure, the U.S. is still backing the E.U.'s liberal policies through diplomatic channels, but it still remains largely on the sidelines as populism gains ground.

Right-wing leaders Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Giorgia Meloni in Italy are winning over voters—ultimately gaining traction by hammering the E.U. on everything from immigration to economic fairness. They're tapping into the real frustrations people have with Brussels. Their anti-E.U. message is starting to crack the unity Europe needs to tackle big global issues like rising geopolitical tensions, and economic instability. That's a major stumbling block for the U.S., since it depends on a reliable EU as a partner in trade and security.

Donald Trump's recent victory has significant implications for European politics and international relations. Trump's return to power will most certainly embolden right-wing leaders like Orbán and Meloni, who have already expressed enthusiasm for his leadership style and political ideology. The Trump administration's renewed skepticism toward traditional alliances and international institutions will likely just complicate U.S.-European cooperation. His previous presidency strained NATO relationships and challenged E.U. unity on issues like trade, defense spending and climate policy. This second term could further



VEGEL DANIEL/FAIR USE

weaken the transatlantic partnership at a crucial moment when democratic institutions face increasing pressures.

At the same time, European right-wing movements may find renewed momentum, seeing Trump's victory as validation of their own nationalist agendas. His presidency could provide both moral and practical support populist parties pushing against EU integration, immigration and liberal democratic norms. The alignment of American and European populist leaders may create a more coordinated challenge to the postwar liberal order that has shaped European democracy for decades.

As right-wing movements gain momentum across the continent, America's strategic interests demand more than diplomatic pleasantries and occasional statements of concern. The stability of the E.U. requires tangible American investment in Europe's democratic infrastructure. This means expanding E.U. initiatives that combat disinformation and strengthening independent courts while building deeper connections with European civil society groups fighting corruption. The U.S. can do this by providing funding for independent journalism, supporting grassroots organizations through training and resources, and partnering on programs that reinforce judicial independence and the rule of law. The stakes are clear: a fragmented, increasingly authoritarian Europe would devastate American interests and embolden adversaries. The time for passive support has passed and Washington needs to step up not as a lecturer but as a partner invested in Europe's democratic future.

Beyond diplomatic gestures, Washington needs to tackle foreign influence head-on, especially to counter adversarial interest. The Kremlin's media operation keeps pumping out content that fuels Europe's far right, and America cannot afford to stay passive. Smart strategy means partnering with European intelligence agencies to spot and block digital attacks on democratic institutions before they take root. It means investing strategically—especially in

Eastern Europe, where populist messages resonate among those feeling abandoned by Brussels. While direct involvement in European elections remains off-limits, Washington can absolutely show up as democracy's steadfast defender. When America commits fully to democratic values, it strengthens pro-democracy movements across the Atlantic. After all, nothing speaks louder than putting real resources behind our

principles.

Critics warn that deeper American involvement could inflame nationalist tensions in Europe, where questions of sovereignty run deep. But there's a better way forward — working multilaterally with NATO and EU channels rather than going it alone. Others argue that the U.S. should prioritize pressing challenges in China and Russia instead of Europe. That misses the point. A fractured Europe weakens America's global hand, especially as populist movements threaten to unravel decades-old alliances. The reality is simple; protecting democracy in Europe

and countering China aren't competing priorities, they're two sides of the same coin. A united, democratic Europe remains our strongest partner in facing down authoritarian influence worldwide.

Ignoring Europe's rightward lurch is a gamble America can't afford to take. A Europe pulled apart by populist forces deals a body blow to American interests and decades of vital partnerships. This surge toward authoritarianism threatens to replace democratic values with raw nationalism, undermining fundamental citizen rights. By taking decisive action now, Washington can help ensure that Europe's democratic foundation holds firm, preserving a world order that has served both sides of the Atlantic for generations.

A Europe pulled apart by populist forces deals a body blow to American interests partnerships.





REMI NOYON/FAIR USE

Marine Le Pen speaking at the Equinox after placing third in the first round of the 2012 French presidential elections.

Another Day, Another Politician on Trial

How the National Rally's embezzlement trial may affect French public opinion, 2027 presidential election

According to the Connexion, former French presidents Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) and Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) have both been previously found guilty of some combination of corruption, embezzlement, “fake jobs,” bribery or violating spending limits. There are several parallels between French and American reactions to financial trials against influential political figures. In May, former and future U.S. President Donald J. Trump faced

a landmark hush money trial and was convicted on 34 counts of falsifying business records. Adjacent to Jacques Chirac’s case in which the former president was granted immunity from prosecution while in office, the July 1 Supreme Court ruling in *Trump v. United States* appears to imply that presidents have complete criminal immunity regarding actions relating to core and exclusive presidential powers, presumptive immunity for other official presidential acts

and no immunity for unofficial acts.

As the former leader of France’s far-right political party stands trial for accusations of embezzlement of European Union funds, there is far more at risk than just public image or money. The National Rally, a right-wing nationalist French political party founded in 1972, is currently experiencing its most successful and lucrative year to date. The French Parliament consists of two chambers: the National Assembly

and the Senate. Unlike the United States' two-party system, France has a multi-party political system. This year, the RN had its most successful election campaign to date — securing 37.3% of the popular vote and 142 out of 577 seats in the National Assembly, according to the New York Times. Having placed second and third in the two previous presidential elections, this recent success, albeit not in a presidential election, offers new hope for the party's presidential aspirations in 2027. However, the potential consequences of an embezzlement trial involving the NR may severely impact their chances.

It has been alleged that twenty-five top officials of the National Rally, including former leader Marine Le Pen, used money reserved for EU aides to instead pay staff of the National Rally. Although the NR has already paid the EU one million euros since the trial began, the EU's legal team requests an additional 2.7 million euros according to CNN. If found guilty, potential punishments for each official on trial include being barred from running for political office for ten years, up to ten years in prison and fines up to one million euros, according to France 24.

The upcoming presidential election in 2027 will be competitive, with incumbent President Emmanuel Macron of the Renaissance party stepping down due to term limits. Without an incumbent — who often enjoys a significant financial advantage during campaign season, elections are generally considered more competitive. As a result, it is an opportunity the NR can not afford to lose. To maximize their chances of victory, the NR will need to concern themselves with maintaining a positive public image amidst the potential consequences of a guilty conviction.

The NR's views on the EU and similar past events suggest a guilty verdict will do little to sour public opinion. Many NR voters already have a negative view of the EU, viewing it as corrupt and anti-democratic. Some even feel the EU is a nuisance that

involves itself in matters where it does not belong. Voters may even support the embezzlement, reframing it as a French political party using a corrupt organization's money to support French interests. And thus far, Le Pen and her defense have fed into this narrative. Euronews reported that Le Pen has accused the trial of being overly political and unjust, suggesting that criticism of the EU is the reason they are being persecuted.

Furthermore, embezzlement trials and accusations of financial fraud have become par for the course in French politics, with major figures from all across the political aisle having faced similar accusations. According to the Guardian, centrist and the Democratic Movement's leader François Fillon was found guilty of embezzlement and using public funds to pay his wife for doing nearly non-existent "work." This is especially significant considering Fillon has been a close ally of Macron, allowing the NR to highlight perceived double standards and selective prosecution, reinforcing the narrative of persecution. On the left,

the major party France Unbowed has also been investigated for creating "fake jobs," although no charges were made. The reaction of the American public to Trump's convictions may help us gain a glimpse into the potential reaction of French voters if Le Pen is found guilty. Public perception of Trump following his convictions has been relatively unchanged among his core supporters, who view the verdicts with skepticism and often attribute them to political views and bias. Polls conducted by POLITICO/Ipsos found that although the convictions negatively affected the Independent Party's views on Trump, overall opinions on Trump barely changed. Many Americans also had doubts about the fairness of the conviction, with around half of the general public believing the trial was politically motivated and only ten percent of those with a positive view of Trump believing that the trial was not politically motivated. It is likely to see a similar reaction among NR's supporters if they were found guilty, with their main base expressing suspicions of political interference.

The growing immunity of political elites from legal consequences threatens the fundamental principle of equal justice under law. While ordinary citizens in both the United States and France face devastating, lifelong consequences — including social stigma and limited employment prospects — for criminal convictions, politicians facing serious charges continue to draw massive support and campaign donations.

Only 10 percent of people holding a positive view on Trump believe his fraud trial was not politically motivated.



TERESA SUÁREZ/EPA

On Oct. 14, 2024, Marine Le Pen appeared in a Paris court to face charges related to embezzlement of EU funds.

Drone Dilemma

Sustainable investment in Ukrainian domestic drone production

In the battlefields of Ukraine, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles have become increasingly popular for both sides due to their low-cost and effectiveness. With drone warfare now defining the conflict, America sought to address this through changes to military aid, as displayed in a recent \$800 million package reported in October by the New York Times. The aid package aims to expand Ukraine's ability to domestically manufacture drones, a shift from previous aid that prioritized the purchasing of American-made arms. However, this decision should not be taken lightly. The US must weigh the benefits of moving the production of UAVs and other arms to Ukraine and consider its consequences, at home and abroad.

According to the United States Department of State, the US has provided over \$64.1 billion as of October 21, 2024 in military assistance to Ukraine since the start of the war, including many American-made UAVs. Aid given to Ukraine essentially acts as government stimulus funding of the private sector; Much of US support funds Ukraine's ability to purchase UAVs from the US military, and when the US military replenishes these sold units, the investment goes back to American defense companies, benefiting American jobs and businesses. However, in the recent \$800 aid package, funds go towards military production in Ukraine instead of the US. Enabling Ukrainian drone production means that funds do not return to the American defense industry, which means we are giving

Ukraine a free handout at the cost of our domestic economy.

Despite these concerns, supporting Ukrainian production of UAVs has its advantages, with the first being that Ukrainian companies have an edge over the US in the production of drones. According to the Wall Street Journal, American drones have been known to be more expensive and difficult to repair compared to Ukrainian drones. Building production facilities in close proximity to the battlefield allows drones to be utilized almost immediately, whereas drones from American companies which must be packaged and shipped long distances, which can lead to inefficiency, higher costs, and a longer wait time before they are activated.

Another advantage to increasing Ukraine's domestic production of drones is its political implications. Currently,

US military aid packages rely on Congressional approval. Aid must be passed through Congress as a bill and is often bundled with other potentially contentious pieces of legislation, decreasing the odds of it being approved. In April, Reuters reported that a combined aid package to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan was delayed by months of deliberation in the House and Senate. By expanding the production of UAVs in Ukraine, Ukrainian drone production can decouple from the unpredictability of American politics, lessening the effects of any Congressional gridlock and increasing reliability in drone deliveries. Ramping up Ukrainian production provides consistency in the benefits

of aid and makes Ukraine less dependent on a continuous stream of arms and drones from the US and other allies.

Other political implications of the shift in structure include its potential as a workaround to aid limits imposed by the US government. According to the New York Times, long-range missiles and drones supplied by the US have extensive use restrictions, preventing them from striking targets in Russian territory. Because of this, Ukraine currently lacks the ability to respond offensively to Russian attacks or cut off supply lines. However, Ukrainian-made UAVs are free of these restrictions and can be used within Russian borders, such as when the Associated Press recently reported the use of Ukrainian drones to strike military depots and other targets in Russia.

Aside from its strategic and political advantages, boosting Ukrainian production and development of UAVs also helps our ally develop knowledge and experience with drone tactics and countermeasures. As drone warfare cements itself as a staple of modern warfare, these lessons will prove to be valuable in the future — not just for Ukraine, but also the U.S. and other allies.

Although maintaining Ukraine's access to UAVs is important, we also have to consider American interests. According to Reuters, the US has already used structured loans to provide aid to Ukraine that allow for Ukraine to spend the money on what it believes is best, whether that's increasing domestic production or purchasing foreign weapons. And, no matter where it's spent, it will eventually be paid back to America. If future drone manufacturing aid is given with a loan structure, America can ensure that the aid does not negatively impact its economy. Although loans would initially need approval by Congress, once they are implemented,

**The US has provided over
\$64.1 billion as of October 21,
2024 in military assistance to
Ukraine.**



A Ukrainian soldier deploys a surveillance drone into combat near the frontlines. Drones have become indispensable for real-time intelligence, giving Ukrainian forces a critical edge on the battlefield.

Ukraine can use the funds to expand drone production as they see fit.

Overall, the potential shift in drone manufacturing from the United States to Ukraine has many implications for both countries' futures. The tactical advantages, decision-making autonomy and the

development of technology in Ukraine must be considered in any decision. We suggest that aid packages should be structured around the principles of sustainability and also mutual benefit. This can be done through loans and investments that ensure benefits flow back to American industry.

We believe that with the proper execution, investing in Ukrainian drone production provides Ukraine the greatest advantage on the battlefield while also lowering the risks of sacrificing American interests in the process.

Putin's Press Ploy

*What it takes to preserve democracy
in an authoritarian state*

Since Putin's rise to power in 2000, press freedom in Russia has seen a steady decline. Despite the right to freedom of the press outlined in the country's constitution, journalists and other media workers are frequently labeled as criminals and are censored or arrested. In extreme cases, journalists have even faced assassinations, with 80% of such incidents between 2012 and 2022 resulting in impunity. This erosion in press freedom has accelerated in recent years; in 2014, the country ranked 148th among 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. Today, it sits at 162nd.

While Russia's constitution provides for press freedom, U.S. policy acknowledges that these rights are routinely violated. The Russian government has made substantial efforts to suppress independent media, forcing news outlets like *Novaya Gazeta* and *Meduza* to suspend operations in Russia and labeling them, along with their journalists as "foreign agents." And on the internet, authorities have transformed Roskomnadzor, the country's media oversight agency, into a censorship machine that blocks any website deemed to justify extremism or terrorism, without the need for a court decision. In this climate of repression, officials are also currently detaining 23 European journalists under a variety of charges, including terrorism, extremism, disseminating knowingly false information, spying, treason, and much more.

But as the battlefields in Ukraine rage on, many American journalists still venture into the conflict zone, determined to report the truth despite facing censorship, intimidation, and other threats.

In response to these challenges, the U.S. government has actively discouraged all American citizens, including journalists, from traveling to Russia since the onset of the military offensive. The U.S. Embassy &

Consulates in Russia emphasizes the importance of a free and independent press as a cornerstone of democratic societies, stating that "the United States strongly condemns Russian authorities' continued attempts to silence, intimidate, and punish journalists." In addition, the United States urges the Kremlin to respect and uphold the freedom of the press as right outlined in the Russian constitution.

The suppression of free press is a symptom of a broader issue of diminishing democratic values. Throughout the war, the United States has provided Ukraine military aid as well as over \$20 billion in economic aid, exemplifying its commitment to defend democracies under siege. But now, the challenge lies in upholding democratic principles in countries like Russia, where the United States needs to arm the Russian public with the truth, not spin.

American policymakers are left with a limited range of options. Firstly, exposing Russian citizens to more objective reporting on the military campaign, including the attacks on civilians, could influence the Russian public. But doing this would also require efforts aimed at countering disinformation by supporting the independent press in Russia. A recent leak containing internal documents of the Social Design Agency — a private Moscow firm responsible for much of the disinformation campaigns on social media apps — showcased the extent to which

these operations have been worked on; over 3,000 individual files gave observers a glimpse into the goals, tradecraft, and bureaucratic procedures driving these operations. In fact, between mid-May and mid-June, the SDA pushed out 3,161 social media comments promoting its Bild forgeries and 3,277 links to its Daily Mail fakes. The United States can also enhance its current sanctions on Russia as a deterrence that could potentially disrupt the operation of disinformation networks.

At the forefront of all American concerns is addressing apathy among the people of Russia. As Alexei Navalny, the prominent Russian dissident killed, once stated, his struggle for justice represented "the final battle between good and neutrality." Russians need to be made aware of the growing number of journalists facing charges

and how their government has consistently attacked free speech. Additionally, awareness needs to be raised regarding how the Russian state essentially editorializes all of its media and influences public perception, effectively criminalizing true independent journalism.

But there is hope. Early in the invasion, data from Apple App Store and Google's Play Store showed that twelve of the twenty top apps in Russia were VPNs, apps that allow users to access information that would typically be censored by the government. Many social media companies, such as X and Facebook, have even created

While Russia's constitution provides for press freedom, U.S. policy acknowledges that these rights are routinely violated.



AFP/FAIR USE

Dmitry Muratov, Novaya Gazeta's editor-in-chief, won Nobel Peace Prize in 2021. Novaya Gazeta is one of the many independent news outlets whose operations were suspended in Russia following the country's military offensive into Ukraine.

privacy-protected versions of their services that work through specialized browsers that masks online activity, while news sites across the world have begun disseminating Russian translations of their news on social media, with the New York Times and the Washington Post even sharing their English-language reporting on Telegram, Russia's fifth-most downloaded app. The United States should support VPNs operating in Russia, reducing the cost for Russian citizens to access accurate and unbiased information. They should also continue supporting websites that disseminate information throughout.

The United States must also be more cautious with its use of sanctions. Increasing punitive measures can have unintended consequences, such as severing Russians from the internet during a time when they crave information. In addition, although the price cap did help reduce Russian oil and gas revenue in the months after its implementation, its effectiveness in the long

run has been unclear. The International Monetary Fund estimated that Russia's GDP actually increased by 2.2% in 2023 due to massive war spending, a higher growth rate than even America.

As much as the United States should support journalists and accurate media for the citizens of Russia, they also need to ensure its own citizens receive accurate information.

Furthermore, other levels of disinformation also have to be countered. In an interview, Putin has made claims that the United States isn't as democratic as it pretends to be, citing the arrest of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange as evidence. Putin even explained the cor-

ruption behind the electoral college system. Clearly, the United States should not allow such allegations to be unchallenged.

America has a crucial role in supporting free press globally. Though America has already issued strong condemnations of Russia's actions toward Ukraine, it needs to do more to aid Russian access to authentic journalism and further combat Russian disinformation campaigns.

To truly champion the ideals of democracy globally, the emerging directive for American policymakers is becoming increasingly clear. Simply put, the answer to the erosion of democracy is, indeed, more democracy.

Though America has already issued strong condemnations of Russia's actions toward Ukraine, it needs to do more.

Oil, Alliances and Warfare

The Middle East's delicate balance

In a small, densely populated region thousands of miles from the world's largest capitals, conflicts erupt with alarming frequency—and their effects are felt across the globe. The Middle East, long a flashpoint for political tensions, has an enormous influence on global affairs, sparking fiery debates, campus protests, and diplomatic crises.

Over the past twelve months, there has been an endless outpouring of news from the Middle East, focusing on the Israel-Hamas conflict in the Gaza Strip. Last October, the Gaza-based terrorist movement, Hamas, executed an invasion in which they killed 1,200 people and took 251 Israelis hostage. Since then, Israel has responded with a barrage of airstrikes in an attempt to subdue Hamas militants, unfortunately killing over 43,000 Palestinians in the densely populated Gaza strip. While the U.S maintains its support of Israel, the war has resulted in massive uproar across the world, including within the U.S, with some believing it to be a genocide. The United States needs to increase in presence within the Middle East as a mediator to prevent a wider conflict.

Multiple Arab countries and organizations have responded to Israel's continued bombardment of Gaza, particularly Iran and its proxies, including the Lebanese political party Hezbollah and the Houthis, a Yemeni group. Israel has also engaged in a war with Hezbollah along the Israel-Lebanon border since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza. This has escalated in recent months, with Israel carrying out two waves of attacks involving explosive pagers within Lebanon. Additionally, in November 2023, the Houthis began bombarding cargo ships passing through the Red Sea, disrupting international trade. Almost 25 percent of European imports and 10 percent of Eu-

ropean exports from the Middle East and Asia travel through the Red Sea. While a United States-led international fleet has been able to disable many attacks, commercial ships are continuing to be targeted and many remain hesitant to use the waterway, creating major concern over trade and shipping through the duration of the war.

The region is becoming increasingly polarized, with countries either taking the side of the United States and Israel or that of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. But as the epicenter conflict reaches its thirteenth month, there has been a significant shift in both the focus and attitude of the war. The assassination of a top Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, at the Iranian presidential inauguration, not only reduced Hamas's strength but also incited a major uproar from Iranian proxies including Hezbollah, a much stronger opponent.

This conflict has the potential to erupt into a greater war throughout the Middle East which would endanger countless lives and undoubtedly send shockwaves across the globe.

Israel has begun a head-on ground invasion, in which they are attempting to drive Hezbollah away from the Israeli-Lebanese border, to create a buffer zone. There's a possibility of a large-scale aerial campaign, specifically with drones, that could be used to target both Hezbollah and Iranian military sites and ammunition stockpiles. This alternative might be more likely as it would

minimize the involvement of Israeli civilians, it would, however, harm civilians on the other side. Israel has proven resilient against missile barrages, intercepting almost all of the hundreds of Iranian rockets with help from the United States and Jordan. Although this campaign might be less damaging to Hezbollah, it could still prompt a ceasefire between the two. A non-violent resolution isn't out of the question, however. Thus far, negotiations between the sides haven't been very effective. Envoys from

Israel, Egypt, the United States, and Qatar met in Doha on Oct. 28 to discuss an end to the conflict, but negotiations were largely unsuccessful due to disagreements over Israel's future presence within the Gaza Strip. The United

Rising oil prices would have on a chain effect in the manufacturing ability of nations across Europe.

States strongly supports the two-state solution, however, it will need to intervene so that the two sides can enter into negotiations. Without an adequate consensus, the threat of war will always be present.

In the event of a greater conflict, the supply of global crude oil would be impacted. Estimates from the research firm Clearview Energy Partners suggest a direct attack on Iranian infrastructure and reserves could see a price increase of \$13 per barrel, while a scenario in which Israel blocked Tehran's strategic Strait of Hormuz could raise that to \$28.

Rising oil prices would have a chain effect on the manufacturing ability of major nations across Europe, with nations like Germany in particular already suffering a



TED EYTAN/FAIR USE

Demonstrators call for an end to U.S. support for Israel during a rally advocating for Palestinian liberation and justice in the ongoing conflict.

decline in business productivity from high energy prices due to the Russo-Ukraine war. Iran, however, would be perhaps the most affected by such a crisis, as a lock-down of its facilities would place a significant burden on its economy. Crude oil and petroleum exports account for 23% of its wealth, with Iran's oil companies earning about \$53 billion in net oil exports in 2023. Such a crisis would put a strain on other Iranian industries, and its people would likely suffer from economic insecurity in addition to the war.

Additionally, disruption in key trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal could cause a worldwide recession, with developing economies being hit the hardest. Analysis from the International Monetary Fund found that current disruptions in product and supply out of the Middle East would significantly hamper global growth which is projected to be

2.7% in 2025, well below the 2010-2020 average of 3.1%.

The U.S. needs to more effectively utilize its relationship with its Arab allies of Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to put pressure on Hamas to surrender and release all hostages. Netanyahu has stated that Israel won't stop its campaign in Gaza until all hostages are returned, so the United States

and its allies need to work with Israel to ensure this happens as quickly and safely as possible. The U.S. should also look to address the Lebanese government, which has fallen into the shadow of

Hezbollah, to dismantle the paramilitary group's control. While anti-U.S. sentiment is apparent in certain parts of Lebanon, many strongly disapprove of Hezbollah and the U.S. has expressed interest in working with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to restore the government's 'sovereignty'. Additionally, Hezbollah has been significantly weakened over the past two months

following Israeli attacks and the demise of their leader Hassan Nasrallah. The introduction of the new 'progressive' Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian is also seen as a seed of hope for the West. Pezeshkian is a reformist, not only advocating for women's rights in Iran but also in favor of increasing ties with Europe.

Given these developments, the U.S. should capitalize, increasing funding towards the LAF and offering an olive branch to Pezeshkian, to establish better relations with Iran and squeeze Hezbollah out of power.

Overall, the stakes are very high: a broader war could destabilize the Middle East for years to come, strain international alliances, and create a humanitarian crisis that extends far beyond the borders of Israel, Gaza, and Lebanon. For the United States and its allies, balancing support for Israel with efforts to prevent a wider war will remain a delicate and urgent challenge. The United States should encourage Israel to end its military operation, while increasing its influence in the region as a mediator, engaging with different actors to introduce a diplomatic solution before oil turns to blood.

A broader war could destabilize the Middle East for years to come.

Divided We Fall

How the conflict in the Middle East caused Kamala Harris's loss in the 2024 election and what it means for Democrats

In the early hours of Wednesday, Nov. 13, students and adults alike woke up to the news that Trump won the 2024 election. For many, especially those residing in the Bay Area, they found the results surprising as they expected Harris to win in a landslide.

With the recent emergence of Trump's Project 2025, these results have caused many Paly students to voice their concerns about threats to individuals' rights and liberty of minority groups and women — specifically, issues like the right to abortion. In the weeks following the election, experts have theorized

and examined the causes of Trump's victory. According to veteran Republican pollster Frank Luntz, in the final stretch of her campaign, Harris focused on the dangers of a Trump presidency, however, “Kamala Harris lost this election when she pivoted to focus almost exclusively on attacking Donald Trump” because voters wanted to learn more her plans and policy. This strategy ultimately caused her to overlook another key issue for certain issues: the conflict in the Middle East. In March, Gallup's polls

found that 75% of Democrats disapprove of “Israel's military actions in the Middle East,” and despite majority support among Republicans, it has decreased from 71% to 64%. Yet, before the election, the Democrats barely touched on the issue aside from calling a ceasefire as they didn't take any tangible action to de-escalate violence in the region and ultimately lost the party

a significant amount of voters.

As the conflict escalated in recent months with Israel's invasion of Lebanon and Iran's missile attacks on Israel, on the eve of election day, many progressives, like Bernie Sanders, were

stuck wondering, “How can I vote for Kamala Harris if she supports Israel's military actions?” While Harris's loss cannot be completely attributed to this issue, the Democrats gradual centrist shift in foreign policy over the years played a significant enough role to dissuade thousands of her constituents from voting for for the party.

Since Hamas's Oct. 7 attack, both Democrats and Republican leaders have been first to fight for “Israel's right to defend itself,” a continuation of past U.S. policy. The

U.S. played a large role in the creation of Israel in 1948 as they found it a strategic holding in the region and believed that the creation of this country would help promote democracy in the Middle East. As of right now, policymakers have sent \$8.7 billion dollars to their ally this past year, according to Reuters. On Oct. 1, Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel as a response to Israel's actions on the Gaza strip and attacks on Lebanon. On Oct. 9, Israel began an official, full on ground invasion of Lebanon after two previous attacks on Lebanese citizens through the hijacking of pagers; since October 2023, the death toll has risen to 2,865 in Lebanon alone. These recent events have only led to even more escalation, increasing the number of deaths in the region. Adding to a toll that is already over 42,000 because of the Gazans killed since Oct. 7. Despite the rest numerous countries banning or restricting arms trade with Israel, like Italy, Britain, Spain, Canada, and Belgium, the U.S. recently approved a \$20 million arms sale to the nation and pledged its support for Israel's ground incursion into Lebanon, according to Reuters, while condemning Iran's attacks in the same breath.

This policy upset many voters, specifically younger Democrats. Over a year after Israel began its military campaign in Gaza, the voices of the newer generation, instilled with a strong sense of social justice, ring large. This is the same population that Democrats sought to appeal to, with

Kamala Harris lost this election when she pivoted to focus almost exclusively on attacking Donald Trump.

Kamala's campaign pumping out videos on social media platforms like TikTok. However, currently, the political landscape of the Democratic party is divided, with more centrist members, like Harris and Biden, distancing themselves from those they deem "far left" or "radical."

This can be largely attributed to a deepening divide within the party. A clear example of this is the fact that many centrist Democrats, like Harris and Biden, have called more liberal minded college students, protesting against Israel's military campaign too radical or extreme. This recent split among the Democrat party is another signal of the erosion of the liberal institution. This, in turn, put Harris's path to victory in peril. According to NPR, if Harris cut ties with Israel, she would have lost the support of a large Zionist population, however, Harris also risked losing the large Arab vote in Michigan, a swing state that was essential in Biden's 2020 victory.

Despite Harris's loss, there are still substantial actions Democrats can take to regain power in future elections. The first step is listening to the voices of protesters, even those of the far left. Instead preventing pro-Palestinian protesters from entering the Democratic National Convention, Democratic leaders should take the time to listen to their concerns. However, listening is not enough. Democrats also need to take concrete action that shows their commitment like halting arms sales. Lastly, the party needs to get their stances straight. A problem with Harris's 2024 presidential campaign was that she tried to pander to everyone. Even though she did call for an immediate ceasefire, she continued to defend Israel's right to defend itself. This, along with Biden's conflicting responses to Israel's invasion of Lebanon and Iran's attack on Israel because it undermined the Democrat's campaign by being hypocritical. It is clear that Harris intended to appeal to both Israel's supporters and pro-Palestinians, but in the end, she couldn't appeal to

enough to win the election. While these actions may lose the party some pro-Israel voters, as of March of this year, the majority — 55 percent, according to Gallup's polls — of Americans disapprove of Israel's military actions, among both Democrats and Republicans.

And, for those who feel the Trump's presidency means the end to peace in the Middle East, it doesn't. While it has been over a year since Israel's assault on Gaza, and over 42,000 people have died, by putting pressure on U.S. leaders and repre-

sentatives, constituents have been able to promote peace in the region, as seen by both Biden's and Harris's calls for an immediate ceasefire, and this goes beyond just the Middle East. Don't

let the results of the election dissuade you from taking action because ultimately, our leaders are meant to represent our voices.



GAGE SKIDMORE/FAIR USE

SPEAKING OUT: Kamala Harris gives a speech at a Democratic Convention in San Francisco in 2019.

The Price of Leaving

As Lebanon empties of foreigners, a quarter million domestic workers remain trapped by law and poverty

In the shadows of Lebanon's glamorous high-rises, women from countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines clean homes and care for children, earning a mere \$300 a month — an amount that would barely cover groceries in Western countries. For these women, domestic work is more than simply a form of employment; it's a lifeline and a necessity, representing the third-

largest source of income for women in the Philippines.

As Lebanon began to emerge from the rubble of their civil war, domestic workers from Asia and Africa flooded into the country in search of opportunities. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines these women as: individuals, often women, engaged in house-related work within an employment relationship. Today,

their numbers have swelled to over a quarter million, providing a crucial framework for Lebanon's economy.

In October 2024, Israeli forces struck Southern Lebanon, targeting the terrorist organization Hezbollah. The impact of the attack ricocheted through civilian communities and displaced hundreds of thousands. United Nations officials reported that all 900 government-facilitated shelters located throughout major cities had reached capacity, forcing those remaining to flee the country. For migrant workers, already the most vulnerable members of Lebanese society, the crisis proved to be especially catastrophic. They were stripped of shelter and other basic necessities in a country where they already struggled to stay afloat.

At the core of their vulnerability lies the kafala system: an Arabic word meaning "sponsorship." This legal framework, prominent in most Muslim countries, strips domestic workers of fundamental rights like the ability to form unions, have universal labor laws or earn a minimum wage. The system makes exploitation exponentially more accessible for employers.

The cost of this system is devastatingly clear. Domestic workers in Lebanon are unable to change or quit their job without the permission of their employers and workers are in danger of losing their migration status once their employment relationships end. In a 2014 interview with the non-profit Anti-Slavery, a Nepalese woman named Suvitra Pulami Magar who worked in Lebanon explained the powerlessness domestic workers face.



ANTI-SLAVERY/FAIR USE

One of Lebanon's migrant domestic workers, whose human rights are not guaranteed under the kafala system.

“It will be difficult if you escape,” Magar said. “If they catch you then they don’t treat you very well. You will be taken to the police and they will beat you. They will take away your things, and that includes your passport.”

With the progression of the war towards the North, the precariousness of these worker’s situations is intensified. Myriam Prado, a Filipina citizen, and the co-founder of Alliance of Migrant Domestic Workers speaks on behalf of her community’s growing fears, concerned that a full-blown conflict with Israel would mean months or even years of being at risk.

“I’m a widow and I have two boys [back home],” Praod said. “I don’t know what will happen here, but there’s no work back home.”

This sentiment is echoed by the story of Imelda Castro, a 64-year-old woman born in the Philippines. Despite the active threat, Castro decided to stay in Lebanon because of her family’s financial situation. Like many domestic workers, Castro single-handedly supports her family of five from her income in Lebanon.

“Lebanon is my home,” Castro said, “I’m not rich, I come from a poor family.”

According to The New York Times, nations like Canada and Germany seamlessly chartered flights to evacuate their citizens, while most domestic workers remain trapped. Their escape is blocked by financial and political barriers. Work visas under the kafala system may present problems at the border and overstay fees, Dara Foi’elle of Migrant Workers Action notes, can be several hundred dollars— weeks of labor for these women.

A quarter-million women find themselves stuck in an active war zone, while evacuation flights leave with hundreds of empty seats.

The situation is particularly dire for women from Ethiopia, Sudan and Sri Lanka, who cannot return to their native countries. In these countries, recent or ongoing conflicts have decimated cities. For them, the con-



DARA FOI'ELLE/MIGRANT WORKERS'ACTION

Migrant workers sit outside their shared housing, highlighting the harsh conditions they face in Lebanon.

cept of “home” has ceased to exist — there is nowhere for them to return to.

With their employers’ homes deemed unsafe and abandoned by official channels of support, these women are sometimes forced to sleep on public beaches and in abandoned warehouses. Their dignity stripped away by outside circumstances.

This pattern of abandonment and neglect is not new, it mirrors that of Vietnamese

domestic workers left after the fall of Saigon and Ethiopian housekeepers stranded during the Arab spring. Each crisis exposed

the same faults in labor policies and aid priorities. In Lebanon, these women’s stories reflect a broader failure of international humanitarian responses: the urge to overlook those who exist in poverty and the margins of society.

The inequity of wartime evacuation has long favored the middle and upper classes, but Lebanon’s current crisis has magnified this disparity to unprecedented levels. Hundreds of thousands of lower-class migrant women are caught in an active war zone. They have a viable way to escape — but not the monetary means to do so.

Although the political suppression of domestic workers under the kafala system demands moral condemnation, the widespread international neglect of these women’s safety is perhaps more troubling. Without assistance from resource-rich countries like the United States, these essential workers remain stranded, victims of both the war and the world’s indifference.

Nations like Canada and Germany seamlessly chartered flights, while domestic workers remain trapped.

A Wavering ‘Special Relationship’

As the United States faces growing challenges in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the United Kingdom quietly reassess its longstanding alignment

The United Kingdom’s foreign policy has long been closely aligned with its “special relationship” with the United States. This alignment is particularly evident in the U.K.’s role in the ongoing Middle East conflicts, with the United Kingdom allowing American forces to use its bases when supplying aid to Israel, providing intelligence to intercept attacks to Israel from Iran, and so forth. However, a year after the Oct. 7 attack, recent developments in the U.K. suggest divergence towards a more flexible foreign policy unconfined to the U.S., prompting a reevaluation of one of the world’s longest-standing and closest bilateral relationships, one that has persisted for centuries.

The U.S.-U.K. alliance is built on a shared foundation of ethnicity, democratic values, and history, persisting through the consistent exchange of mutually beneficial interests. According to an analysis by Charles A. Ray, the United States leverages U.K. historical ties and intelligence networks in countries where the United States lacks influence, while the United Kingdom enjoys easier access to the US defense, technical intelligence, and policymakers. As a result, the United Kingdom is a prominent ally when the United States needs a helping hand in foreign affairs, such as receiving British military aid in the 2003 Iraq war despite its domestic backlash, and more currently, utilizing the United Kingdom’s proximity to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to provide backing to Israel. On the other hand, the United Kingdom is dependent on the United States to maintain its global power status. While Britain remains a major power, it is far behind in global influence and strength behind the top 3 countries, the United States, China, and Russia.

Moreover, Britain’s departure from the European Union further weakened its global standing — and to maintain its status, the country has been keen to maintain strong ties with the leading superpower, thus often conforming to U.S. interests in spite of resulting constraints on U.K. foreign policy.

While the United Kingdom and the United States align in their support for Israel in the Palestine-Israel war, the nature of their involvement in the conflicts shows how their stakes in the region have crucial differences. Both countries have powerful Israeli lobbies— Conservative Friends of Israel holding 80% of British Conservative MPs as members, and pro-Israel groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the largest and oldest such organization, intensifying lobbying and financial contributions in the U.S. since the Gaza war— influencing foreign policy. Their histories with Israel are also intertwined, dating back to the Cold War when Israel served as a symbol of democracy in the Middle East against the communist Soviet influence in neighboring Arab countries.

However, in spite of these common factors, the United States has more to lose due to its strategic interests in the region needed to preserve global dominance. Israel provides crucial and direct access to

the Middle East for intelligence gathering, establishing a military presence and the ability to reap the economic benefits of the natural resources. U.S. support has also been further reinforced by concerns over terrorism since the September 11 attacks, a nuclear-armed Iran, and the Middle East’s growing global importance.

Unlike past conflicts that were relatively short and victorious for Israelis, the current war, fueled by brewing resentment from Israel’s neighbors in the Middle East, has dragged on now for over a year, leaving

Israel unable to sustain itself and heavily dependent on American support. The U.S.’s greatest concerns, in regards to maintaining their standing, of the region banding together against it may come to fruition if the it were to allow a two-state solution. They would

lose critical leverage in the Middle East, with Palestine gaining autonomy to operate and serving as a counterbalance to Israel, alongside Russia and China, the two competing global superpowers, taking up U.S. influence over the neighboring Arab countries.

The U.K., on the other hand, while principally attached to Israel as America’s ally, doesn’t have the U.S.’s position to maintain, and thus has more room to criticize or push back against Israel’s actions. Under

The U.K., on the other hand, while principally attached to Israel as America’s ally, doesn’t have the U.S.’s position to maintain.



BEN DANCE/FAIR USE

Foreign Secretary David Lammy visits the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing and meets with Minister Liu Jianchao, on October 18, 2024. His aim is to reestablish ties between Britain and China.

former Prime Minister and later appointed Foreign Secretary David Cameron, serving until July this year, he had reinvigorated diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, especially towards Israel and Palestine. In contrast to the U.K.'s consensus support of Israel's right to self-defense — the current policy — Cameron advocated for more

humanitarian aid to Gaza and to recognize Palestine as a state for a potential peace deal in light of the escalating violence and bloodshed. He declared that the support for Israel “is not unconditional,”

pointing at the country's violations of international humanitarian laws. In September 2024, some of these sentiments were realized as the U.K. suspended arms sales to Israel because of the risk of humanitarian law violation.

More subtly, the U.K. is beginning to recognize the U.S.'s unstable status as the dominant global power. The U.S. is stuck, embroiled in a proxy war in Israel, reluctant to deepen involvement yet unable to

withdraw as the conflict drags on with deep-rooted and unresolvable animosities between both sides. While the U.K. does not have the full capacity to completely change sides at the moment, the U.S.'s struggles and decreasing ability to keep allies in check signals to Britain that a shift in alliances may be something to consider further down the line.

As a result, their eyes are starting to wander to the Far East. Though the U.S. remains far from collapsing, the U.K. has been working to repair damaged ties with China. In October, the current British For-

eign Secretary David Lammy made a rare visit to China — the second in six years among top UK diplomats — deliberating with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss first steps to rebuilding economic and diplomatic relations between the two countries. Given China's growing influence in foreign affairs and increasing economic power, it presents a viable alternative for the U.K. to offset the U.K.'s traditional reliance on the U.S.—the U.K. is hedging its bets.

Even with the recent potential calls for change, the U.K. remains a weaker country post-Brexit. It has even been called into question their ability to independently back Israel, given its weakened military, manpower shortages and inferior technology. Moreover, the U.K. lacks a clear enough justification to break away from the U.S., whose foreign policy still has a hold on the U.K. For instance, Cameron's diplomatic efforts for de-escalation in his term may be a way to ease the burden on the U.S., though his actions are hindered by the U.K.'s limited resources and funding cuts on foreign aid. In reality, the U.K. lacks the resources and power to assert itself on the global stage, resulting in its strategy to play “second fiddle” to whoever's on top as a means to maintaining its power. While it may seem to be a reactive or even an opportunistic approach, it is the most pragmatic one for Britain in the long run. It simply lacks the strength to be a superpower independently and thus needs to tie itself to a larger force to remain relevant. Whether their future involves the U.S. or another rising power, like China, is still up in the air. Considering all these possibilities, moving forward, U.K. foreign policy must focus on keeping its options open and preparing for a potential fork in the road, acknowledging that its alignment with the U.S. may no longer be a constant.

More subtly, the U.K. is beginning to recognize the U.S.'s unstable status as the dominant global power.

Policy of Contradiction

Ending America's hypocritical policy toward the Israel-Hezbollah conflict

As conflict spreads across the Middle East, Israel has found itself fighting the Iran-backed military group Hezbollah. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Lebanese group is “the world’s most heavily armed non-state actor” and possesses a wide range of weapons that are capable of striking across the border of Lebanon into Israel. Having stockpiled since its last war with Israel in 2006, Hezbollah is estimated to have amassed around 130,000 rockets and missiles, with over 20,000 active fighters and 20,000 reservists. These military capabilities, which have already begun to be utilized, pose a significant threat to regional peace.

For the U.S., this threat should be cause for alarm. Beyond promoting Israel’s right to democracy, Israel’s intelligence apparatus and strategic location in the Middle East are of great importance to American interests. Israel is both an economic and technological asset, with defense collaboration that benefits both sides. Protecting our allies is key to maintaining a balance of power in the region. Projecting strength and commitment to our allies against aggression is central to successful deterrence: a critical part of the U.S. Middle Eastern policy.

Under the current Biden administration, American policy aims to “de-escalate the ongoing conflicts in both Gaza and Lebanon through diplomatic means.” However, Israel’s recent pager attacks, which detonated over 5000 bombs in Hezbollah pagers and killed at least 37 people, demonstrate Israel’s growing defiance towards U.S. mediation. Further escalations of conflict include retaliatory rocket barrages, which continue to claim dozens of lives on both sides of the border. With Israel’s increasing willingness to extend “self-defense” through the borders of Lebanon, American goals of peace are unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

This downward spiral of retaliatory attacks will not end until the U.S. considers different options. One option would be to limit the shipment of arms to Israel or make them dependent on certain diplomatic goals. However, this could leave Israel vulnerable to sudden escalations by Iran or its proxies and puts the safety of the Israeli population at risk. While the U.S. continues to protect Israel from Hezbollah’s aggression, separating defensive and offensive capabilities remains difficult. Israel’s offensive capabilities as deterrence are integral to its defensive strategy and contribute to the country’s national security. This means that continued Israeli military support and peace seeking diplomacy cannot reasonably coexist in U.S. policy.

The U.S. must choose to abandon its idealistic policy of peace and diplomacy in order for long-term stability to be achieved. Israel has removed much of Hezbollah’s leadership, but the threat of Hezbollah’s expansive arsenal and broad military remains. By targeting Hezbollah’s remaining rockets and offensive capabilities, its threat to the Israeli population can be significantly reduced. Recent Israeli attacks have proven this to be effective; the combination of advanced intelligence and precision strikes has already reduced Hezbollah’s ability to wage war. But as long as the U.S. continues to hold its stated goals of “peace,” Israel cannot fully utilize its resources and backing. The current administration’s tunnel vision on short term peace and de-escalation of the conflict now blocks it from seeing the broader issue; the problem is not the continued aggression, it’s the existence

of a powerful military group that threatens American interests. The U.S. should abandon its ineffective policy of “peace” that, in reality, perpetuates the conflict. Stronger American support for Israel’s war effort is needed for lasting peace.

However, there are risks to supporting a war in Lebanon. The Israel-Hezbollah war is similar to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, where Hamas is so entrenched into the population that removing the organization is near impossible. Preventing a similar stalemate situation in Lebanon is paramount to the safety of civilians in surrounding areas. Moreover, Lebanon’s population is considerably larger than Gaza’s, and Hezbollah’s military arsenal is also stronger. To combat this, a larger Israeli operation is necessary. On top of the current ground-based fighting in southern Lebanon, U.S. approval and support of more airstrikes and

precision incursions is needed to remove rocket launchers, ballistic missile sites, and other military installations. A stronger backing by the American military is critical for refraining other parties from expanding the conflict and limiting Hezbollah’s offensive capabilities.

Another factor the U.S. must assess is the risk of this conflict turning into a prolonged war. With Ukraine and Taiwan in mind, and the growing presence of authoritarian influences across the globe, we can ill-afford another Afghanistan. America should not just support Israel’s right to defend itself, but also any offensive operations conducted by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) if deemed necessary. The U.S. should

Continued Israeli military support and peace seeking diplomacy cannot reasonably coexist in U.S. policy.



ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES/CC BY-NC 2.0

An interceptor missile is launched by Israel's Iron Dome defense system, a cutting-edge technology designed to protect civilian cities and communities from incoming missile threats. The Iron Dome, developed by Israel, has achieved a 96% success rate in intercepting enemy projectiles.

continue its policy of defending Israel, but allow the IDF to project their full offensive capabilities in the region. This policy both protects American troops and allows Israel to eliminate Hezbollah's threat to Israeli citizens.

According to CNN, Israel remains the dominant military force in the region, with

over 90,000 more active-duty troops than Hezbollah. In addition, the recent collapse of Hezbollah's leadership ranks leaves the group vulnerable to Israeli attacks. Despite this, Hezbollah's military arsenal still proves a challenge to eliminate. With tensions soaring, it's a hard decision to sacrifice short term instability, but it may be required

to create lasting peace. current approach of advocating for peace while providing military support has proven not only ineffective but also hypocritical. The war has already been underway for a while, and the time to act is now. The best course of action is to ensure swift victory for both Israel and our own best interests.

