HEMISPHERES

THE TUFTS UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

TRADING PLACES

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Building on the success of last year's inaugural Hemispheres magazine issue, this second issue invites readers to explore the theme "Trading Places" and its many manifestations in international affairs. With a notably larger team of contributors, our magazine has quickly become an important medium for Tufts students to share their insightful perspectives on pressing global challenges. This year was one marked by heightened student mobilization. As the debate over free expression and discourse on college campuses intensifies, our role as a platform for student opinion has never been more crucial. Continuing our mission to make international relations scholarship accessible and engaging for the broader Tufts community, this issue offers a wide variety of articles written by contributors of diverse academic backgrounds, and is designed to spark meaningful conversation about the complex issues shaping our world today.

As this landmark election year draws to a close, the inauguration of new world leaders serves as a poignant reminder of how pivotal transfers of power can profoundly restructure global dynamics, redefining the roles and influence of countries on the international stage. Donald Trump's return to power leaves the future of US foreign policy and democracy infused with an air of uncertainty, a powerful illustration of how the internal shifts of a population's norms and values can send ripples far beyond borders. However, inversions of authority do not always occur within institutions—the toppling of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria last December underscored the consequential role non-state actors play on the global stage. From a security standpoint, the Russo-Ukrainian War has catalyzed the formation of an increasingly multipolar world and reshaped the scope of geopolitical alliances. Moreover, the war in Gaza—where direct civilian casualties number over 44,000—begs us to reckon with the design failures of multilateral institutions. Against this backdrop, the ascendance of China and other authoritarian regimes has ignited fervent debates on the erosion of US hegemony. This past year being replete with such instances of "trading places," our writers explore how shifts in authority, influence, and responsibility are redefining global relationships and the very structures that govern them.

Last fall, our staff editors worked collaboratively to brainstorm, craft, and revise their articles which covered a wide breadth of disciplines relevant to international affairs. While some address the theme "Trading Places" from a security angle, analyzing China's territorial disputes and the role of NATO, others examine the evolving architectures of global governance, assessing the viability of the International Criminal Court and the role of UN peacekeeping. Our writers also explore topics such as the repercussions of sanctions on Russia and the protests in Kenya from an economics perspective, alongside pieces that offer cross-regional analysis, like the varying role of family and childcare policy across countries.

For Hemispheres, this year was filled with reflection and renewal: as we reconnected with our founder, Dr. Stephen Davis, who first launched Hemispheres in 1976, we were instilled with a new sense of motivation and drive, understanding the importance of our role as a facilitator of international relations discourse at Tufts and as a platform for student expression. As you flip through this year's magazine, we invite you to use our articles to reflect not only on the complexities of the world today, but the profound role and responsibility you as an individual hold in shaping its future, regardless of your academic pursuits or professional aspirations.

Before you begin reading, we want to remind you that the statements expressed in this magazine are the views of individual authors and do not reflect the opinions of Hemispheres as a nonpartisan, non-ideological club committed to providing an open platform for intellectual discourse and academic publication. For endnotes, see the Hemispheres website https://www.tuftshemispheres.org.

Yours,
Ishika Gupta, Sam Sullivan, Grayton Goldsmith, and Zoe Raptis

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2024 was the biggest election year in modern history, with m
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Rise of the Far Right

The US and EU

Right and far-right parties made gains in both the United States and in Europe. In France, a reinvigorated National Rally (RN) headed by Marine LePen and Jordan Bardella won a majority of the popular vote in European Parliament elections.[1] Elsewhere, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy saw great electoral success.

In the United States, 2025 will see the Republican Party—now fully remade in the image of Donald Trump—take control of all three branches of government, a stunning electoral comeback for a party that had not won the country's popular vote in over two decades.[2]

Still, many signs point to a trend of anti-incumbency, rather than a profound ideological shift, as the impetus for a far-right renaissance.[3]

After 14 years of governance by the Conservative Party, the British electorate delivered a stunning majority for Keir Starmer's Labour Party. In France, meanwhile, the National Rally was dealt a surprising defeat in the country's snap parliamentary elections after the far-left coalesced to form the New Popular Front (NFP). Headed by prominent French leftist and occasional conspiracy theorist Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the NFP went on to win the most seats in France's parliament.[4]

Authoritarianism in Latin America

Venezuela and El Salvador

In Venezuela, President Nicolás Maduro has as yet maintained an iron-fisted grip on power, despite a renewed opposition movement headed by former member of the Venezuelan National Assembly María Corina Machado.[5] Although Maduro claimed victory in the country's presidential election, independent exit polls suggested a landslide victory for the Machado-aligned candidate, Edmundo González Urrutia.[6]

Presidential elections in El Salvador resulted in a landslide victory for the self-dubbed "world's coolest dictator" Nayib Bukele. Bukele scored a second term in office after his scorched earth crackdown on crime through mass incarceration proved wildly popular with the population, who observed a drop in violent crime. Unlike Maduro, Bukele seems to have maintained a degree of genuine popularity amongst his country's people.[7]

Still, both regimes have faced scrutiny for their blatant disregard of human rights and crackdowns on political opposition.

BY TARA WIRTSCHORECK AND GRAYTON GOLDSMITH

bes to the Polls

more than 60 countries holding national elctions. About 2 billion
ne of the most notable and important elections across the globe.

Between Russia and the EU

Moldova, Romania, Georgia

In much of Eastern Europe, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War has made navigating relations with Russia a top political priority. Moldova, Romania, and Georgia have all alleged Russian interference in their electoral processes. In Moldova's presidential election, pro-Western incumbent Maia Sandu secured a second term in a narrower-than-expected victory.[8] In neighboring Romania, the country's constitutional court moved to nullify the results of its first-round presidential election after the Russian-aligned dark-horse candidate Calin Georgescu won the most votes. According to a now declassified intelligence report, Georgescu benefitted from a Russian interference campaign centered on popular social media sites TikTok and Telegram.[9]

In Georgia, 2024 has been a year of great political turmoil. Headed largely by young Georgians, protests erupted over the summer after the populist Georgian Dream (GD) party moved to adopt a "foreign agent law," mirroring a 2012 Russian law that has since been used to enact a vicious crackdown on political dissent. The move seemed to indicate a clear pivot away from the Euro-Atlantic future which the GD previously claimed to represent.[10] The country was once again plunged into civil unrest in October after Georgian Dream maintained its majority in parliamentary elections. The elections were marred by claims of Russian interference.

Change in South Asia

Sri Lankan elections saw left-leaning presidential candidate Anura Kumara Dissanayake emerge victorious, riding a wave of discontent with the country's economic state. Dissanayake was the first third-party candidate to win Sri Lanka's presidency. The country is still in recovery from a 2022 economic and political crisis that saw its government run out of foreign currency and resulted in widespread civil unrest.[12]

Elections in India delivered a surprising blow to Narendra Modi. Though he earned another term as Prime Minister, his Bharatiya Janata Party fell far short of an outright majority in the Lok Sabha, securing only 240 seats in the 543-member body and leaving him reliant on coalition partners to govern. Prior to the election, many observers believed it within the realm of possibility that the BJP and its coalition partners were on track to win a supermajority of at least 400 seats.[13]

Discontent in Africa

South Africa, Senegal, Tunisia

Last March, in Senegal, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye was elected on a platform of reform, anti-corruption, and populism that he claims has been difficult to execute because of the opposition-led parliament. In September, he dissolved the country's parliament, and in November, a snap election was held.

In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) lost its congressional majority during the May elections. The ANC garnered just 40 percent of the national vote, significantly less than the 57 percent it won in 2019. Many people in South Africa are frustrated with the country's high unemployment rate, inaccessible water and electricity, and general lack of progress since the end of apartheid, and blame the ANC for its inability to combat these problems.[11]

In Tunisia, President Kais Saied's reelection campaign was defined by a crackdown on political opponents. The majority of those attempting to run against Saied were jailed, and his government has arrested numerous lawyers, journalists, and activists who have spoken out against him.

America's Choice, the World's Consequence

STAFF WRITER

Amid political volatility and heightened polarization, Donald Trump—convicted felon of 34 criminal charges and perennial figure of controversy—has once again secured the highest office in the nation and his Republican party now stands poised to shape the trajectory of American governance for at least the next four years.[14]

Yet the implications of this outcome extend far beyond the borders of this country. In an era defined by an escalating climate crisis and rising geopolitical tensions, a pressing question emerges: What does this dramatic shift in leadership mean for the future of our planet? Ecosystems are teetering on the brink of collapse and the stakes have never been higher.[15] International cooperation is more crucial than ever as the world watches a new chapter unfold in the White House, uncertain whether America will serve as a beacon for progress, or whether it will deepen the fractures threatening our fragile global order.

One of the initial actions taken by Trump's administration in his previous term was their withdrawal from the Paris Climate agreement in 2017, sending a message to the international community that the US was disengaging from global efforts to combat the climate crisis.[16] Shadowing these events, in preparation for his upcoming presidency Trump has once again prepared executive orders on not only withdrawing from the agreement again, but also shrinking the size of monuments protected under Biden's early administration to allow oil drilling and mining.[17] Previously under Trump's leadership, the US terminated numerous environmental protections, including regulations aimed at limiting carbon emissions

from power plants, reducing air and water quality standards, and weakening protections for public lands, creating issues not only for the local green areas and their inhabitants, but also for human health.[18] This situation is even more troubling now that President-elect Donald Trump has announced his intention to appoint Robert F.Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health & Human Services. In the wake and aftermath of an environmental health crisis. Americans are now expected to place their trust in Kennedy to address the situation—despite the fact that he lacks all necessary qualifications for the role.[19]

The Republican Party's approach to climate change is often framed in the language of skepticism, with many party leaders rejecting the scientific consensus on global warming. This skepticism aims to undermine any genuine efforts to tackle the crisis on a national level, while fueling an information war between politics and science—two sectors that should be collaborating to address the crisis. Trump's calculated moves against environmental welfare in his previous term were justified under the banner of "energy independence" and economic growth, yet they had a devastating impact on both the environment and public health.[20] A return to this stance under a second Trump administration will likely result in further dismantling of the regulatory framework designed to curb emissions, impede clean energy innovation, and hasten the depletion of vital natural resources.

This brings us to the official declaration of Trump's future war against the planet: Project 2025, a comprehensive 900-page

policy blueprint, is set to reshape the US' environmental regulatory framework. With over 150 pages dedicated to deregulatory measures, this proposal—crafted by former Trump administration officials and Heritage Foundation staff—poses a grave threat to fundamental environmental protections. If enacted, it would dismantle crucial safeguards, stripping Americans of their right to clean air, safe drinking water, and a livable planet. At the heart of this agenda is its direct assault on the legal frameworks that have conserved decades of progress in wildlife conservation. Project 2025 proposes the dismantling of protections for endangered species, including the gray wolf and the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Additionally, it seeks to eliminate the provision in the Clean Air Act that mandates the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish health-based air quality standards—further undermining public health and environmental justice. Most vitally, this plan also directs federal agencies overseeing public lands and waters to prioritize the interests of corporate fossil fuel extraction, thus advocating for the expansion of oil and gas drilling operations. It explicitly calls for the approval of controversial pipeline projects like Keystone XL and Dakota

Access, reinforcing the US poisonous commitment to fossil fuel infrastructure over climate resilience.[21]

While the primary focus may be on domestic policy, the ramifications of Project 2025 extends beyond US borders. This reversal of environmental protection will reverberate across the globe, undermining international efforts to address the climate crisis and protect biodiversity.

With Trump back in the White House, the US is once again poised to take a backseat—or worse, a destructive role—in the global fight against the climate crisis. But the international order cannot afford to sit idly by. While America's leadership falters, the onus is now on other nations to take bold action, strengthen global partnerships, and ensure the momentum toward sustainability continues. But even as global forces move, the people of the US still have the power to push for change from within—fighting for their rights, holding their leaders accountable, and demanding a future in which our planet can continue to sustain our lives. The struggle is far from over, and ultimately, it will not be elections or governments alone that shape the future, but the collective will and action of the people.

ART BY ALEXA LICAIRAC

Election Economics

PATRICK MORAN & TAYLOR NELDER

President Trump's victory on November 5th, 2024, is yet another example of the right-wing surges that have characterized recent elections across the globe—a pattern that may be projected to continue. This trend can be attributed to various factors, ranging from increased migration pressure to disaffection towards the reigning liberal establishment, creating an opportunity for reactionary challenges against incumbents. While these right-wing administrations' respective interpretations of traditional conservative economics policies—like decreasing government spending and reducing taxes—slightly differ, their place among a global movement is unmistakable.

> *"Often supported by a wide voting base, including above-average proportions of working-class and unemployed voters, these parties appeal to disillusionment with existing liberal governments, gaining traction in reaction to an economic downturn."*

Protectionism, the economic practice of shielding a country's domestic industries from foreign competition, has also been central to several of these major nations' rightward, at times nationalist shifts. Most often taking the form of tariffs, protectionism has seemingly risen as a leading campaign promise, highlighted in the recent Trump campaign, where the right-wing candidate promised general tariffs ranging from 10-20 percent on all trade partners, and upwards of 60 percent against China.[22] Trump, however, is not the only candidate to see success from these promises.

Italy's Giorgia Meloni rose to power in 2022 at the helm of right-wing populist party Brothers of Italy, promising a protectionist economic policy shift. Meloni's implementation has focused its efforts on Italy's energy industry, where her administration has, along with the rest of the EU, sought to boost domestic energy supply to reduce reliance on Russian oil and gas. However, by reversing its 1987 ban on nuclear energy, Italy differs from other countries in the EU as it aims to boost domestic nuclear power as an alternative.[23]

However, not all right-wing administrations view protectionism in the same positive light. In Argentina, President Javier Milei's fight against inflation has seen tariffs as a valuable tool, though one to be used reluctantly. Milei's well-known ideological opposition to tariffs stands in light of a complex and largely failed history of Argentinian tariffs and import substitution. However, when Milei took office, he increased Argentina's PAIS tax, which effectively acted as an import tariff, with the alleged intention to temporarily increase revenues to control Argentina's spiraling deficit. Not only did this go against his personal reluctance towards tariffs, but also hurt his mandate to fight price inflation.[24]

Now, Argentina's federal tax agency has announced that importers will no longer pay the PAIS tax in advance, as they have been, which will have the dual effect of making goods cheaper to import into Argentina and lowering the price of imported goods for the Argentine consumer.[25] Therefore, in his efforts to overhaul the long-failing Argentinian economy, Milei has implemented economic policies that, at some points, differ from both personal preference and traditional norms.

In Germany, the rise in popularity of the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party reflects the nation's alignment with the world's shift to the political right. From holding only 7 seats in the German parliament in 2014, to 94 seats in 2017, the AfD has grown rapidly and has now become the second-most popular German party.[26] Like Milei's administration in Argentina, the AfD's representation of

economic conservatism is unique.

In a nation where a majority of the government is outspoken against tariffs, the AfD, a non-traditional populist party, has taken an expectedly non-traditional approach to protect German production. Allegedly inspired by Britain's exit from the EU, the party declared in 2021 that they would seek a departure from the institution—despite opposition from 68 percent of Germans.[27] Regardless, the party stays strong in its aim to isolate Germany from foreign economic entanglements, touting a desire to return to their pre-EU national currency, the Deutsche Mark, citing the euro as a source of trade imbalances. Overall, the party's goal to restore German economic independence is not represented in strictly protectionist economic policy, but in a hint of isolationism demonstrated by its desire to leave the European Union.

An aim to reduce government size and spending, a traditionally conservative economic ideal, has also found a significant place in several new administrations' goals. This key policy tool has been another constant in the race to the right, utilized to accomplish the goals of the new administrations in Italy and Argentina, and in Germany's rising AfD. For example, the AfD has predictably advocated for a large reduction in government spending and government intervention. The AfD's popularity indicates that Germans are increasingly in favor of a small government, with AP News noting that the AfD proposed income tax cuts and strongly opposed state meddling in the free market during their 2023 federal election campaign.[28] They have additionally characterized many of the nation's taxes as a progressive means of wealth redistribution, a larger indication, they say, of a form of a state-directed economy. The AfD argues that this far-reaching economic governance "will sooner or later end in misallocation and corruption," and also advocates for a reduction in state subsidies, as well as the abolishment of wealth and inheritance taxes.[29] Although AfD hasn't been allowed into a coalition by the other ruling parties, their gained traction indicates a strong possibility of this in the near future, wherein their ideas could be implemented.

The analysis of these right-wing administrations' varying implementations of economic policy is nuanced and largely depends on the nation's unique political climate and economic history. As economists and politicians alike look ahead to the potential continuation of this rightward trend, they must look toward common causes.

Domestic tensions fueled by increased migration have affected much of the EU and the US, and are largely seen as a cause for the rising support of right-wing and nationalistic administrations promising a crackdown on illegal immigration. The German AfD has certainly capitalized on people's frustrations, which largely dwell on a lack of immigration regulation, by promising changes to established policy.[30] Italy's Meloni has also garnered support for her hard-line immigration policy, which included the diversion of migrant reception centers from Italy to Albania.[31]

On a greater scale, these right-wing shifts can be attributed to larger dissatisfaction with established governments. Often supported by a wide voting base, including above-average proportions of working-class and unemployed voters, these parties appeal to disillusionment with existing liberal governments, gaining traction in reaction to an economic downturn. Javier Milei, much like President Trump, embodies this response—as those discouraged by years of economic downturn, inflation, and poverty are drawn to a cult-of-personality figure, whose inflamed rhetoric touts anti-establishment solutions and a fresh political start.

These movements in Argentina, Italy, and Germany are only examples of a trend that encompasses the US, the EU, and Asia. Their differing interpretation of economic ideals indicates that this rightward shift in politics, largely having an economic basis, has evolved and formed across nations with a wide variety of political climates and economic histories. As future election decisions are made across the globe, the social and economic foundations underwriting these right-wing, populist movements will likely continue to yield the same results when they appear elsewhere, while each unique application of economic policy will continue to shape domestic and international economic futures.

Bougainville Island

An Isolated Case or a Representatitve of a New Age for Independence Movements?

MAX DRUCKMAN

Historically, nations vying for independence have made international headlines and, sometimes, prompted international conflict. Yet, the international community's next addition could be an obscure island in the South Pacific Ocean called Bougainville Island. The third largest of the Solomon Islands Archipelago, it is an Autonomous Region of Papua New Guinea.[32] However, its foggy path toward independence encapsulates a shift towards an era of fewer newly independent nations.

Map of Bougainville Island (Source: Brittanica)

Bougainville's Story

In December 2019, Bougainville voted for independence, with 98 percent of voters backing the measure in a referendum. The referendum represented a culmination of the 1988-1998 war between Papua New Guinea's army and Bougainville's rebels that claimed 20,000 lives.[33] The violence was prompted by the operation of a lucrative copper mine by the federal government and the Rio Tinto Corporation. The government, not Bougainville, reaped the profits, prompting residents to detest that the pollution and disruption yielded no rewards.[34]

Five years later, Papua New Guinea's parliament has not ratified the referendum. Parliament seeks a two-thirds majority for ratification, while Bougainville favors a simple majority, with both sides calling for international moderators to bridge the divide.[35] Pouncing on the turmoil, foreign powers have grown interested in the conflict. Ishmael Toroama, Bougainville's president, has been lobbying the US to invest in the Panguna mine, the same mine that previously sparked conflict. Funding the mine could prompt Bougainville's self-sustainability and make it an American ally. Simultaneously, China has instituted trade relationships with Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, appearing poised to target Bougainville next.[36]

Independent Nations: A Disappearing Trend

Bougainville's slow path toward independence represents a trend within the international community. Since 2002, just two newly independent nations have ascended to the United Nations.

South Sudan seceded from Sudan on July 9th, 2011, and joined the UN five days later.[37] Like Bougainville, its independence push resulted from a civil war. In 1983, Sudanese President Nimeiri imposed Shari'a law nationwide and revoked the South's autonomous status. The subsequent civil war lasted until 2005 and killed 2.5 million.[38] The tragedy's scale and high-profile caused South Sudan's independence effort to become recognized globally, unlike Bougainville's cause.

Montenegro is the second most recent nation to gain recognition. Following the Balkan wars of the 1990s, Montenegro emerged independently in tandem with Serbia. On May 21, 2006, Montenegro's citizens voted for independence, and, by July 27th, it joined the UN.[39] Like South Sudan, Montenegro's history of conflict and independence journey was more

ubiquitous in the international community's consciousness than Bougainville's. Thus, both South Sudan and Montenegro utilized their widely-known conflicts and comparative historical prominence as springboards for rapid recognition. The ease with which their independence was garnered, though, appears to be a bygone artifact.

Struggling Modern Independence Movements

Like Bougainville, many active separatist movements have been unsuccessful. Catalonia voted in 2014 to separate from Spain, and again in 2017 with around 90 percent of the vote, though Spain considered both referendums illegal. Catalonia has held autonomous status since 1978 and feels that its productive economy is being exploited by the federal government, similar to the Panguna mine in Bougainville. Pro-independence protests have persisted since 2017, and Catalonian political leaders have been arrested and charged with treason.[40] Both Catalonia and Bougainville are economically lucrative and historically autonomous. Nonetheless, both have seen their independence referendums neglected by central governments, with most of the international community remaining silent.

Further, the French territory of New Caledonia's separatist movement is comparable to Bougainville. The indigenous Kanak people comprise 40 percent of the region's population but control the government, desiring independence by 2025. The island saw civil war during the 1980s and three independence referendums have failed since 2018.[41] In 2024, a state of emergency was declared following five deaths during independence protests.[42] Both Bougainville and New Caledonia have been rendered geopolitical afterthoughts by most of the international community. Despite clear yearnings for independence, division remains the only realized outcome.

The Future of Independent Nations

The difficulty Bougainville, as well as Catalonia and New Caledonia, have faced in gaining independence initiates a larger question of why newly independent nations are a 21st-century rarity. One rationale is that most land has already become independent

nations. Unlike the 20th century's latter half, when most new countries were colonies of European powers, most modern independence movements occur in breakaway states. Global powers and multilateral institutions tend to condemn breakaway states as a threat to the post-colonial world's stability.[43] Also, with powers like the US and China catering to smaller nations for economic and political interests, the wider world may seek to prevent new independent nations to hinder the reignition of a Cold War.

The two most recent independent nations, Montenegro and South Sudan, emerged from widely-known conflicts with immense destruction. They were the last relics of the 20th-century era of expansion, as their root conflicts lay in either colonialism (South Sudan) or the Cold War (Montenegro). However, today's international community is not eager to welcome new members and views separatist movements unkindly. As Bougainville proves, faraway independence movements are not an urgent task for most of the international community, a mindset even a Civil War has not been able to alter. Thus, for Bougainville, Catalonia, and New Caledonia, an independent future looks to be a relic of the past.

Zooming Out

Other Independence Movements Around the World

AIDAN WASSERMAN

Catalonian independence has near total support in the region, culminating in a 2017 referendum in which 90 percent of voters supported independence, despite police crackdowns that scared many voters. Following a declaration of independence, Spain dissolved the local government, imposed its direct rule over Catalonia, and jailed many members. Despite the movement's popularity among Catalans, the Spanish constitution would need to be amended, requiring much more national support.[44]

Balochistan spans Southeastern Iran and Southwestern Pakistan. The Balochi people seek political autonomy, suffer economic inequality, and feel exploited for their natural resources. The movement has mainly been through violence, as opposed to attempting political recognition, with terrorist attacks continuing to this day.[47]

Scotland has a long history of attempts to secede from the UK, with 45 percent of people voting for independence in a 2014 referendum. Since Brexit, there have been increased calls for independence as many Scots seek to join the EU independently. The Scottish Nationalist Party, a pro-independence party, is the second largest in Scotland and calls for another referendum are popular.[46]

The Kurdish people span through Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, with their political struggles and levels of autonomy varying across these countries. Iraqi Kurdistan is de facto independent, while Kurds in Turkey and Syria have long been fighting with Turkey for independence and engaging in terrorist activities inside Turkey. Kurds in Iran have had smaller-scale conflicts with the Iranian government for independence and have achieved little.[48]

Ambazonia is an anglophone region of francophone Cameroon. A civil war began after peaceful independence protests in 2016 were met with violent crackdowns. Although the Ambazonians now control most of their land, the Cameroonian government maintains firm opposition and international support for Ambazonia is limited.[49]

New Caledonia, an overseas department of France, has sought to secede, and two recent independence referendums have been close to a majority. There are current violent protests in the country as natives protest the French government. Although the movement may be popular, France will unlikely allow it to succeed.[45]

For the People, By the People

ARMAN KASSAM

When the US entered Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001, they did so with a goal in mind: regime change. More specifically, they forced a democratic government onto a country that had never truly had one. For a variety of reasons, from local corruption to the Taliban threat to public resistance, the experiment failed.[50] But what cannot be understated is the US government's demonstrated lack of cultural understanding—no one stopped to ask the people of Afghanistan what they wanted, to accommodate cultural schisms, to learn the history of the region, or to deal with the root causes of their unrest.

Afghanistan was cited by many to discredit the democratic experiment. Many claim that democracy cannot be the answer for countries straddled with violent histories or ethnic conflicts. However, a close examination of history reveals varying examples of societies similar to Afghanistan that worked through their difficulties and constructed a healthy, effective democracy.

Canada is one such nation. First colonized by the French, then the English, Canada has been divided since the beginning. In the years leading up to Canada's independence in 1867, Anglophone Upper Canada and Francophone Lower Canada struggled to unify as one country. Parliament was a violent and spiteful affair; while both the French and English sides had progressives willing to reach across the aisle, each side had just as many unwavering fundamentalists.[51] To compromise, the government finally agreed to place the nation's capital in Ottawa, a small bilingual town between the two regions.[52] Due to Canada's diverse politics, a variety of parties ran in the country's first election, including the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Liberal Conservatives, and the Anti-Confederationists.[53] Even today, most Canadian federal debates feature four parties or more. The democratic structure of Canada reflects that of its forefathers in France and the United Kingdom, but also adapted to its own intercultural difficulties.

Unlike Canada, not all countries are predisposed to democracy—some take it on, or at least attempt to, by choice. Russia today is ruled by Putin's iron fist, operating under authoritarian rule. While it maintains a superficial facade of democracy, genuine democratic principles are largely absent. For example, while Russia's oblast system appears to grant regional autonomy to states, in reality, they are dominated by the central Russian government and are stripped of any ability to self-govern year after year. Russia has been historically ruled by authoritarian leaders to maintain cohesion over its large area. Expansion of political and economic liberties have often allowed for increased popular mobilization and eventually revolution, as seen by Tsar Nicholas' reforms in the early 1900s and Secretary-General Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost policies in the early 90s. The current regime, although authoritarian, is a reflection of a de-autocratization that followed after the fall of the Soviet Union, as electoral democracy was attempted. However, a transition to democracy does not only depend on the existence of elections, but "requires fundamental, systemic changes in a given polity. Most authoritarian breakdowns do not bring about democratization but lead instead to a new authoritarian regime or state collapse and anarchy." In Russia's case, this is exemplified by Putin's invasion of Ukraine, as well as his continuous crack down on protests and dissent. This pattern of centralized authority has existed in Russia for centuries—therefore, it is pertinent to understand that not only elections, but democratic principles of freedom and equality must be enshrined if democracy is to ever flourish in Russia.

But what about nations that had democracy forced onto them? As a result of colonialism, countries across South America, Africa, and Asia were stuffed into a democratic box modeled on that of their colonizers. Nigeria, for example, was given a parliamentary system by the British. However,

Nigeria's borders were not drawn based on what made the most sense for the region, rather, they were the result of conquest and negotiations with other colonial powers like Germany and France.[54] This dissonance created a country with a stark divide: the richer Christian tribes like the Yoruba and the Igbo in the South and the poorer and rural Muslim tribes, like the Hausa-Fulani, in the North.[55] Decades of upheaval and military coups eventually led to the modern form of Nigeria as a republic. The current government delegates much more power to states, allowing for a more decentralized structure to fit the cultural diversity of the nation. For example, many areas of the north use Shari'a law for local disputes instead of federal Nigerian law so that they can be tried according to their community's beliefs.[56] Nigeria also shifted their capital north from the port city of Lagos to Abuja, located in the diverse "Middle Belt" near the center of the nation.[57] This move helped the Hausa-Fulani feel less removed from the workings of the nation and has started to stabilize Nigeria by increasing trust in the government.[58]

This article is not an argument for every country to be democratic, nor is it meant to say that these three countries are perfect. Rather, it is to demonstrate that democracy *can* work in all types of countries, so long as the structure of the government properly reflects the culture and the history of said country. America could have considered their historical impact on Afghani politics such as the funding of the Mujahideen, and made more efforts to reconcile their mistakes. They could have taken note of the fact that Afghanistan was previously only a democracy for a short period, one dotted by Russian and American intervention, and as such, may be distrustful of or unfamiliar with the healthy practice of democracy. Or perhaps they could have realized that a country scarred by corruption requires robust accountability mechanisms so that the nation doesn't crumble immediately after America's departure. If America had stopped to consider these factors, perhaps Afghanistan would be thriving today instead of mourning 172,000 lives and landing right back where it was on October 6th, 2001.[59]

The Hidden Victims of Nuclear Waste

MONICA REILLY

The Yucca Mountain has, for centuries, been a home and a sacred space to the Shoshone and Paiute peoples. So when there were plans in 2004 to turn the mountain into a nuclear waste dump, people fought back: first the Shoshone and Paiute peoples themselves, followed by environmentalists, and finally the government of Nevada. These collective protests seemed to prove successful; plans to store nuclear waste in containers buried underneath the mountain were largely abandoned, and the whole affair was lauded as an example of the government listening to the voices of the people. However, at a 2024 House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee Energy hearing, Republican leaders pitched restarting work at the plant in Nevada,[1] meaning that the people living on and around the Yucca Mountain have been put at risk once more. [2]

Global powers like the US have a history of offloading the ecological impacts of nuclear weapons and waste onto marginalized communities and less-developed countries. Nuclear waste containers are notorious for leaking, leading to groundwater contamination and nearby plants, animals, and humans absorbing dangerous toxins like plutonium. These are resulting from small leakages, and it has been known for decades that if enough nuclear waste is leaked from its container, the nearby area will become completely inhabitable. This trend can be traced as far back as the original nuclear weapons tests, otherwise known as the Manhattan Project. These tests

took place near the Moapa reservation in Nevada, with only a few mountains separating the two locations, thus endangering indigenous communities. The US is not the only country to commit an act such as this, as evidenced by similar actions in the Soviet Union. The infamous Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), for example, was an extremely tense point in the Cold War, resulting from the Soviet Union placing nuclear missile launch pads on Cuba, thus making America even more vulnerable to an attack. The Soviet Union used Cuba's fear of a full-blown invasion by the US—especially following the Bay of Pigs Invasion—in order to return to an even nuclear playing field with the US. Both of these global powers were largely concerned with maintaining equal power in the nuclear arms race, and the potential environmental destruction that Cuba could undergo was largely ignored.[3] The relationship between the Soviet Union, Cuba, and nuclear reactors, can be seen in the Juragua project. Originally projected to be a major success for Cuba's economy, the nuclear reactor site was eventually deemed too dangerous to ever actually run. Juragua has even been described as a potential Cuban Chernobyl, as any serious incident at the plant would utterly strip the nearby area of all life. The 18-mile radius around the project would be a dead-zone, or somewhere where absolutely nothing could live. Additionally, food production would be impossible in a 200-mile radius and harmful nuclear waste could be carried as far as 900-miles outside of Juragua. More recent attempts in Cuba to become a nuclear powerhouse in order to reduce its reliance on oil have failed similarly, and Juragua continues to stand, unfinished, to this day. [4]

In a desperate attempt to preserve their environments, some countries have even attempted legal action to defend themselves against nuclear waste disposal. One such example is the 2001 International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) court case, in which Ireland filed a claim against the UK, requesting that the ITLOS place provisional measures onto the country. Ireland claimed that the UK. was polluting the Irish Sea by transporting nuclear waste through it, as well as opening a Mox fuel processing plant that was allegedly discharging nuclear material into Ireland's marine environment. It was ruled that Ireland had failed to properly show that the defendant had actually been causing the alleged damage to the marine environment, and no provisions were placed upon the UK. Japan, France, and the United Kingdom have also all been guilty of transporting nuclear waste through the Caribbean states, mainly Puerto Rico, Panama, and the Dominican Republic, which puts said states in a very vulnerable position.[5] This nuclear waste can cause water contamination and damage the marine life which Caribbean states have come to rely on for their economy. Attempts to take legal action are almost always unsuccessful, though as intergovernmental organizations like the Central American Water Tribunal are powerless in enforcing their verdicts on great powers they so often prosecute.[6]

Uncapped nuclear waste stored underwater
(Source: Blatant World)

Nuclear disarmament and nuclear waste are not just matters of politics. If not disposed of or constructed thoughtfully and carefully, millions of people, plants, and animals could die. Less dramatic impacts are the slow infiltration of radioactive matter into water, soil, and eventually food production, inflicting largely marginalized communities like the Moapa tribe in Nevada with severe health impacts like cancer. The current state of nuclear waste storage operates on the infamous Athenian dictum: "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." But this is not Ancient Greece, and global powers should not be exploiting vulnerable nations and communities just because they can or because it is the easiest option. Our world is supposed to be governed by laws, and ideally no one nation can violate the sovereignty or health of another nation or marginalized community. Nuclear power may not be wholly destructive, but a nation abusing its power most certainly is.

Tracing the Legacy of Nuclear Waste

By: Briana Chen

Hanford, Washington State

Hanford the post-Cold War nuclear power plant was active from 1940s to 1965 , and it has accumulated up to 90,000 - 270,000 metric tons of radioactive sludge from producing plutonium. The site has lasting impacts to Native Indigenous Peoples residing in the Yakama Indian Reservation in Yakima, Washington, as it continues to contaminate natural habitats such as the Columbia River and local farms.

Blue Region: Indicating Yakama Indian Reservation
Grey Region: Hanford Nuclear Power Plan

Yucca Mountain, Nevada

A nuclear waste deposit created in 2004 has a design capacity of 77,000 metric tons, which continues to overflow today. Neighbouring communities around the site such as the Shoshone, Paiute people and Nevada government and residents have fought to remove this disposal.

Grey Region: Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Deposit

Haute Marne, France

France, a country that has multiple nuclear power plants, is struggling to manage nuclear waste. In 2023 a plan called Cigéo in Haute Marne was designed to place the waste 500 metres (1,640 ft) below ground in a clay formation. Construction will begin in 2027 upon approval.

Grey Region: Haute Marne, where plan Cigéo will occur

Cuba, Latin America

Since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviet Union and Cuba agreed to build up nuclear missiles; thus in 1976 located in Cienfuegos the twin-reactor nuclear plant the Juragua was created. In 1992, it was decommissioned. As a result of this crisis, between 1990-2000, research showed that industrial water systems and municipal wastewater in Cuba were at high risk. The last impact of Cuba informed nations such as the United States and international organizations like Greenpeace and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (UK) to begin advocating for more peaceful nuclear energy programs ensuring non-profliferation in the 1970s.

Caribbean Islands, Latin America

Marine transportation of nuclear waste by developed countries such as France, Japan, and the United Kingdom through the regions like the Panama Canal, Windward Passage, Anegada Passage, and the Mona Passage, is a risk to the region's marine ecosystems. For example, radioactive waste such as plutonium and uranium impacts the animal food chains, where larger fish consume toxin filled smaller fish. Coral reefs are also at harm leading to decreased marine habitats and coastline protection. Furthermore, these impacts directly harm the local economies specifically the heavily relied tourism sector. In 2024, World Travel and Tourism Counsel (WTTC) documents that the Caribbean has the highest share of the tourism sector to the Worldwide GDP at 15%. To relief these threats, the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) began a technical project in 2020 named "Streghtening Capacies in Marine and Coastal Environments Using Nuclear and Istopic Techniques" to cooperate with national authorities to address these threats. cooperate with national authorities to address these threats. Later in 2022, a case was filed to the International Criminal Court (ICC) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea: Environmental and Jurisdictional Provisions (UNCLOS), which aims to lead global agreement regulating ocean activities.

Arlit, Niger

In the Northern town of Arlit, there are 20 million tonnes of radioactive waste left from an uranium mine run by French company Orano closed down in 2021. Surrounding it is one of the biggest uranium deposits lies at Imouraren, around 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Arlit. There is minimal wildlife and natural plant around Arlit, and the surrounding population of 100,000 left with contaminated water source containing radon, a radioactive gas. As a result since 2021, there have been cases of former mine workers suffering from skin, liver, and lung disease.

Grey Region: Arlit town, where the French uranium mine was situated

Seversk, Russia

The Seversk plant located in the Tomsk region of Siberia, belonging to the Russian group Rosatam, is the only facility in the world that recyeles uranium. However, in April 2024 floodwaters in Tomsk region were threatened by the spill of radioactive liquid into Seversk river banks, where the waste from the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons program for decades were injected into two unprotected underground reservoirs.

Grey Region: Seversk Plant located in Tomsk, Russia

Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan

The Semipalatinsk region in north-eastern Kazakhstan was utilized as a nuclear weapons testing zone for the Soviet Union from 1949-1989, as this nation contains rich mineral resources. As a result, radionuclides such as plutonium and uranium are heavily present. In 2023, exporers estimate the nation holds 230 million tons of radioactive waste. An example is radon a radioactive gas from the decay of uranium. This poses long term environmental effects such as contamination of soil and vegetation as well as lung cancer risks for humans. There is still insufficient research done about the direct impacts of nuclear waste in Kazakhstan.

Lanyu, Taiwan

Since the 1970s, the Kuomintang government built 3 nuclear power plants on the Island. The Indigenous tribe of Tao were misinformed for generations that it was a cannery factory, as they fight for decades of safety. In 2023, the New York Times reports that the Tao People stll face rising cancer rates and health issues. These threats additionally disrupt their traditional practices such as shellfish picking, fishing and medicine usage from coastal regions.

Vaalputs, South Africa

Vaalputs in South Africa, approxiamately 600km north of Cape Town near Springbok allocates the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, which produced around 5% of South Africa's electricity production. In 2022, according to the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute, the youth activist Khulekani Magwaza mentioned that communities are painfully under-informed and are not involved in any actions to increase the risks of radioactive leaks at the nuclear waste deposits.

Grey Region: Koeberg Nuclear Power Station in Vaalputs

14

Echoes of Bhopal

The Crisis of Sacrifice Zones and International Chemical Dumping

CHRISTINA BELLIN

December 3, 1984: the methyl isocyanate tank in the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India exploded, leaking 40 tons of toxic gas into the air and ground around the plant.[1] Nearly four thousand people died that night and more than 20,000 died the following decade due to gas-related illnesses.[2] This December marks the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, and little has changed in terms of chemical dumping.

For context, Union Carbide was a pesticide manufacturing company based in the US. The company had two major plants: one in Bhopal and one in West Virginia.[3] In July 1984, the Bhopal plant was to be shut down and sold, but because a buyer could not be found, the factory continued running.[4] To save money on manufacturing operations, safety regulations involving the cooling of the gas tanks were ignored. Additionally, the tanks themselves were much larger than the ones found at the sister plant in West Virginia, which followed safety precautions.[5] Though the factory was shut down after the explosion, the chemical waste left behind has never been fully cleaned up, leaving the groundwater contaminated to this day.[6]

Those who survive continue to say that the lucky ones are those who died the night of the disaster. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world rushed to Bhopal in an attempt to save the people who were suffering from the leakage.[7] Clinics were set up, and antidotes to the gas were distributed. However, Union Carbide maintained that the gas from the factory was non-toxic, and the harm done was "temporary," therefore no antidote was needed.[8] The company shut down the clinics and refused to provide aid to the people of Bhopal. The water is still contaminated, and so is the blood of the individuals drinking it.[9] Children are born missing limbs and with disabilities because of the poison in their mother's wombs.[10] Thousands have succumbed to cancers caused by the poison.[11] Meanwhile, Union Carbide still refuses to take responsibility.

At the time of the disaster, there were no international laws regarding chemical dumping. The Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes, enacted in 1988, lays out the only current international law on chemical dumping, intending to control the movement of hazardous waste across borders.[12] According to the convention, trade in hazardous waste cannot take place "without the importing country's written consent" or if the exporting country believes that the waste will not properly be handled within the country.[13] One major restriction outlined in the Basel convention is that waste can only be exported if the exporting country does not have the ability to dispose of or recycle the waste properly or if the importing country is using the wastes as raw materials. This restricts the movement of waste between countries and prevents the dumping of one country's waste into another.[14]

Despite the Basel Convention, chemical waste continues to be dumped around the world. These areas are referred to as "sacrifice zones," areas where chemical waste is dumped or where the land has been exploited in a way that the environment has been harshly affected, including sites like oil mines or large agricultural parcels.[15] Oftentimes, these areas are poor and populated by marginalized groups. Even with chemical dumping laws, many countries find loopholes and continue to dump their waste, or exploit the land, often at great expense to the people living in these communities.[15] The following are just a few examples of modern-day sacrifice zones.

Kabwe, Zambia

Kabwe is one of the most polluted cities in Africa because of nearby lead and zinc mines. Dust from the now-closed mines blows into the villages, contaminating the air and groundwater.[16] While the Zambian government has attempted to provide some medical care, especially to those living on the contaminated canal, if the toxic waste from the mines is not cleaned up, the situation will continue to worsen. Currently, 95 percent of children are reported
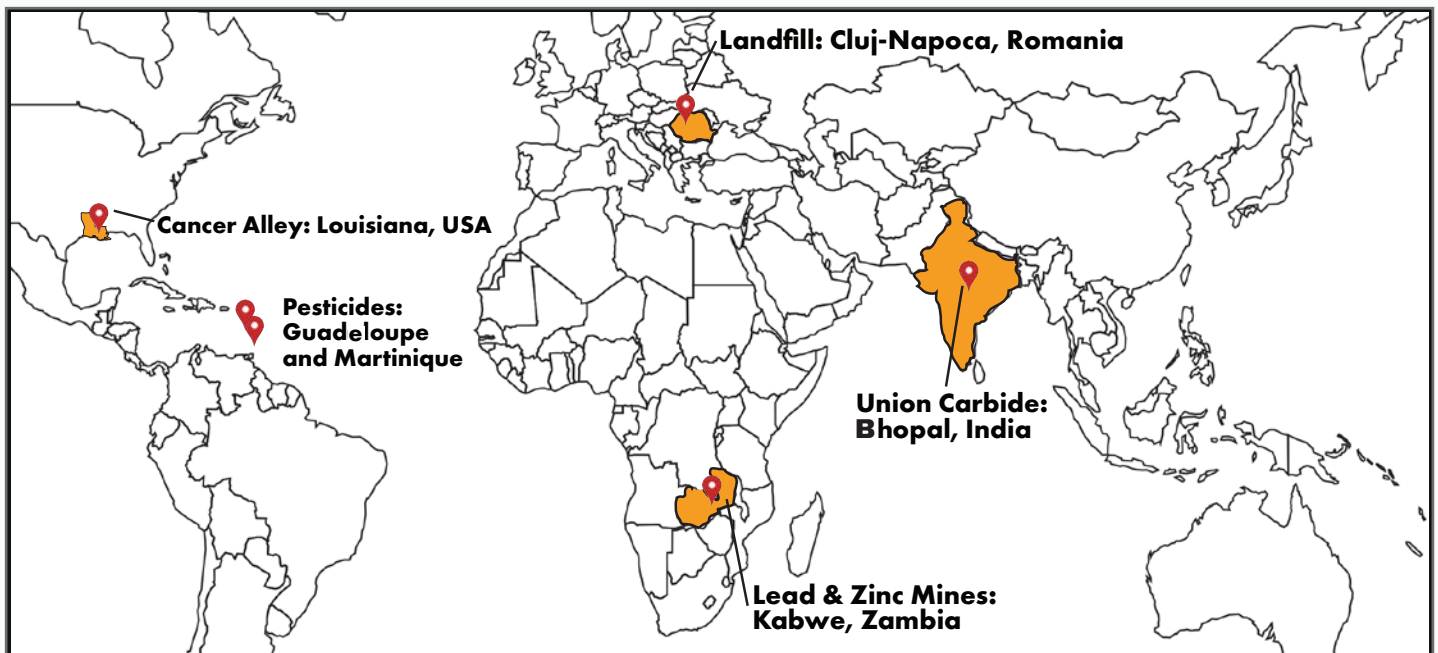
Graphic by Alexander Xia

to have high levels of lead in their blood, and this will only increase if the situation is not rectified.[17] The companies that own the mines continue to refuse to take responsibility and pay for the cleanup of the toxic chemicals.[18]

Guadeloupe and Martinique

90 percent of the people living in Guadeloupe and Martinique have chlordecone, a carcinogen used in pesticides, in their bloodstream.[19] This is because of the excessive use of pesticides, especially in the banana cultivation regions, currently leaving 20-40 percent of agricultural land contaminated.[20] Due to contaminated water, the government has instituted a restriction on agriculture and fishing. France is facing an international rights complaint, filed in the spring of 2024 from three NGOs, compelling the government to deal with their mismanagement of water and the broader water crisis in these countries.[21]

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Cluj-Napoca, a major city in Romania, is home to Pata Rat, the country's largest landfill.[22] Pollution leaks from the site into the groundwater, poisoning the water supply for the city. Along with this, garbage fires from the site are killing people living in wooden shacks nearby. The landfill was not built according to EU standards and the country and city are doing little to fix the environmental and public health issues.[23]

Cancer Alley, Louisiana

Cancer Alley is located between New Orleans and Baton Rouge along the Mississippi River. A stretch of just 85 miles houses residential communities situated next to 200 petrochemical and fossil fuel companies.[24] These plants dump chemicals into the water and funnel noxious fumes into the air. Cancer Alley was given its nickname because of the disproportionate number of people suffering from cancer, infertility, miscarriages, and respiratory ailments, caused by the consumption of these toxic wastes.[25] Cancer alley is composed of predominantly minority and poor communities, so companies believe they can take advantage by dumping their waste without repercussions. Many people within the community are dependent on the plants for work, so they are compelled to accept being poisoned in exchange.[26]

Forty years ago the disaster of Bhopal was a rude awakening to the international community about the dangers of chemical dumping. Yet, despite international efforts to regulate this, sacrifice zones continue to exist today. International companies are unwilling to take responsibility for the damage caused because of the financial impact. In the same vein, they will continue to dump toxic chemicals because it is cheaper than properly disposing of them. It is imperative that the international community finds a way to eliminate the loopholes and end this pollution, for the sake of the environment and the people that continue to suffer.

Our Environment, the Forgotten Victim of War

JAKE LANIER

In recent years, wars have broken out across the world, dominating the news. It is as if one cannot go a day without confronting the political, humanitarian, and economic fallout of wars like those in Ukraine or the Middle East.

But what of their consequences for our planet? Although ecological damage is an often overlooked consequence of warfare, it is often among the deadliest elements of a conflict. World leaders rarely consider the environmental impacts of their foreign policy, yet at a time when climate change, population growth, and ever-increasing extractive activity already burdens our ecosystems, these consequences can no longer be ignored.
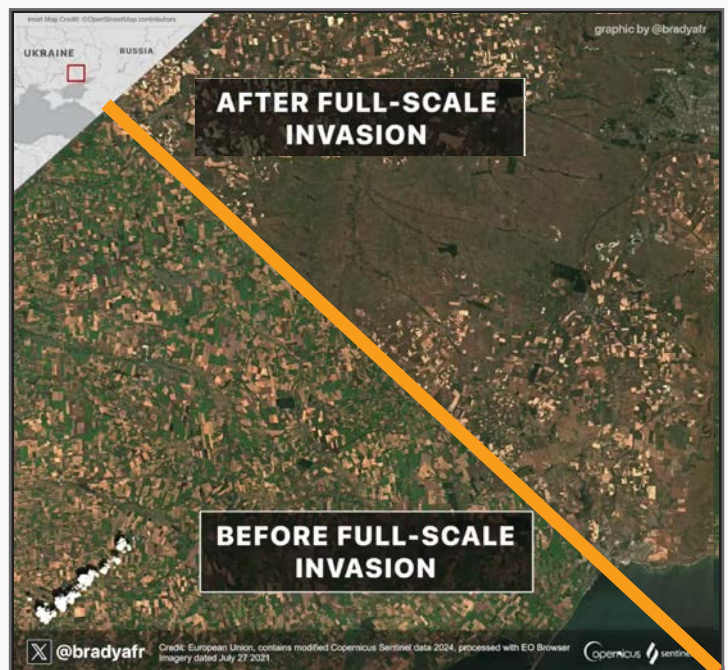
Ukraine

The war in Ukraine is one of the only recent conventional, industrial wars, and in terms of men and materiel. It is by far the largest war of the 21st century, so it is not surprising that it has created major environmental problems. Because the fighting has disrupted agricultural activity, the front lines of the war are even visible from space. A "green belt" of fallow fields, where trees and ground cover have sprung up in the absence of cultivation, can be seen marking the zone of conflict.[27] The effects on the land will almost certainly be long-lasting, as large amounts of unexploded ordnance create hazards even after a war is over. Old land mines and other unexploded munitions injure people and animals in other former conflict zones, such as Bosnia and Cambodia.[28] Also, munitions such as shells and bombs contain heavy metals and environmental toxins that leach into the water supply and soil, which can render crops unsafe to eat and poison aquatic life.[29]

Soil

Ukraine has some of the most fertile soil in the world, called *chernozem,* which is notable for its very thick layer of humus, or organic matter, and its rich biome, thus making it highly productive and resilient.[30] Largely due to its soil quality, Ukraine is one of the world's largest grain exporters.[31] Research has shown that traffic from heavy vehicles such as tanks can disrupt soil biomes, and contamination from explosives and metals will likely do the same. Also, crops grown on contaminated soil can take up toxins from the ground, rendering them inedible.[32] Ukraine's Sokolovsky Institute estimates damage to soils (as of 2023) to be $15 billion. Cleanup and remediation efforts will likely last years after fighting ends, and the UN has declared thousands of acres to be in states of ecological catastrophe. [33]

Wildlife

Ukraine is home to a large diversity of plants and animals, numbering over 70 thousand unique species.[34] However, certain parks in Ukraine are being taken over by Russian forces and, in some cases, habitats of protected species are displaced by Russian military fortifications.[35] The Tuzly Lagoons National Park, which has conducted decades of conservation efforts, has

been unable to resume their operations, resulting in a migration failure for migratory fish that support an entire ecosystem of birds.[36] These events demonstrate the cascading effects of the environmental destruction. In 2022, high rates of strandings and deaths of dolphins were observed in the Black Sea, with some appearing to have been killed by naval sonar and pollution from military activity.[37] Additionally, Russian forces have destroyed several dams, releasing large amounts of toxic sediment that flood wildlife habitats and kill large numbers of fish.[38]

The full ecological impacts of the war in Ukraine are likely to remain unknown until years after fighting ends. It is clear, however, that they will be profound.

Middle East

In the last year, the Israel-Hamas war and Israeli invasion of Lebanon have been at the forefront of people's minds, but conflict has also been ongoing in Syria and Yemen for several years.

Yemen

The conflict in Yemen, mainly between the Houthis and the Republic of Yemen has been a major proxy conflict involving the Gulf states and the West. The destruction of basic infrastructure has had severe humanitarian implications, such as a lack of clean water infrastructure and corollary outbreaks of diseases.[39] Additionally, the Saudi-led blockade precipitated a hunger crisis, placing millions at risk of starvation.[40] As in the Sahel countries, the displacement of millions has intensified deforestation, and ongoing warfare has also led to the destruction of oil facilities.[41] Leaks of oil into soil and drinking water have exacerbated the already severe health crisis, and there is even evidence that cancers have become more prevalent because of war-related pollution.[42]

Gaza

Gaza has seen some of the most intense environmental destruction. Israeli bombing has destroyed or damaged a majority of structures in Gaza, creating millions of tons of debris, much of which poses environmental hazards.[43] Rubble and debris contain heavy metals, as well as contaminants like asbestos.[44] Like in Ukraine, the leaching of toxins into water and

soil will be particularly damaging. Additionally, approximately half of Gazan land was used for agricultural purposes before the war.[45] Today, Israeli armies have destroyed over two-thirds of that area, clearing crops and orchards, often building military sites in place of farmland.[46] The environmental destruction has also impacted Gazan food security—the most intense destruction of cropland was in the north, where famine conditions have also been worst. The UN has estimated that it will take 14 years to clear the rubble from the war, meaning that pollution issues will likely persist.[47]

Ecocide?

Ecocide—the idea that environmental destruction is a crime against humanity—has gained public attention in recent years, with many now viewing it as an offense that should be strongly prosecuted by the international community, even in peacetime. Currently, the Rome Statute prohibits willful environmental destruction in wartime, but due to opposition from the US, it does not apply to peacetime.[48] In the past couple of years, Israel and Russia in particular have faced allegations of ecocide from various international organizations.[49] In a world suffering increasingly from ecological harm, many desire a formal framework to hold the leaders who enable such destruction responsible. A good first step would be to establish international consensus over a definition of ecocide; certain organizations, like Stop Ecocide International, have tried to promulgate definitions already, but an effective definition will require the approval of the international community. Then, work must follow to establish statutes to extradite and prosecute the culprits, perhaps in the International Criminal Court or another recognized international body. These efforts will likely face fierce opposition, but they are absolutely necessary to slow down what seems like an inexorable march toward environmental disaster.

"In a world suffering increasingly from ecological harm, many desire a formal framework to hold the leaders who enable such destruction responsible."

Mitigating Diseases During Wartime

SRAVYA DONTHARAJU & DAWSON CHANG

Around the world today, over 14 million children have never received a vaccine.[50] Over half of these children live in ten countries, mostly in Africa or the Middle East, that are currently engaged in war.[51] The UN is currently off track in meeting its goal to halve the number of unvaccinated children by 2030.[52] In order to better mitigate the spread of global diseases and facilitate a greater number of vaccinations, we need to take a deeper look at these war-torn regions and find solutions to mitigate the spread of disease.

Recently, several conflicts in the Middle East have significantly contributed to the spread of disease in the region. This past August, the World Health Organization confirmed the first case of Polio in Palestine in the last 25 years.[53] Researchers from Human Rights Watch say that, due to the war in Gaza, polio vaccinations have dropped from 99 percent in 2022 to under 90 percent in 2024.[54] Damage caused by the war to major water and waste management infrastructure has worsened the polio outbreak.[55] Similarly, in Yemen, which has been embroiled in some state of conflict since the outbreak of the Yemeni Civil War in 2014, over 580,000 children have never received any vaccines.[56] This represents an increase of over 150,000 from three years ago.

Many African countries as well, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Sudan, have been affected by diseases such as the sleeping sickness, ebola, and monkeypox.[57] According to the National Library of Medicine, insurgency and general instability are the main reasons for the lack of disease intervention or prevention.[58] UNICEF's Sudan representative states that, "national vaccination coverage has…rates averaging 30 percent in active conflict areas and as low as eight percent in South Darfur."[59] According to the International Rescue Committee, the Sudanese civil war has left 25.6 million people

Vials in medical kit. (Source: Mikhail Nilov)

in need of healthcare which are collapsing.[60] While there has been a coordinated effort to send aid to countries in need, these crucial resources are often intercepted by insurgents and rebel groups before they make it to the hands that need them most.

Solutions to mitigating this spread of disease need to address the collapse of healthcare infrastructure. According to the National Library of Medicine, negotiations are central to access people in conflict ridden areas.[61] For example, Somalia's non-state and state actors have allowed aid groups to vaccinate in conflict zones after mediation.[62] Negotiations for temporary ceasefires have also been effective in promoting vaccination in the case of Lebanon—in 1987, several four-day ceasefires were negotiated to prevent the spread of measles.[63] There are certain policies or actions states can take to mitigate the spread of disease, like setting up vaccination checkposts around conflict zones, where civilians would only be able to move in and out of areas if they have been vaccinated. Mass displacement heightens disease risks, but Nigeria addressed this by setting up border vaccine stations for life-saving treatments.[64] Disease spread can be mitigated through increasing access to vaccines and creating temporary infrastructure for distribution of that life-saving medication.

Old Wine in New Bottles

STAFF WRITER

"But for all the effort that Blood put into defining and documenting genocide, the terrible term had no impact at the White House. Neither Nixon nor Kissinger ever mentioned genocide against the Bengalis or the Hindus. If they were shocked, they kept it to themselves."
Gary Bass, The Blood Telegram

On the 20th of November, 2024, the US vetoed a resolution in the United Nations Security Council that called for a ceasefire in Gaza. The decision was met with much disappointment and conformed to the US' standard position when it comes to Israel; it has vetoed over 40 resolutions addressing negative Israeli conduct.[1] The narrow worldview that has served to justify the destruction wrought in Gaza since October 7th, 2023 does not account for the last 77 years of history. Any surprise at the assurance of support to Israel, despite America's dialogue of peace, makes the same mistake. The case of Bangladesh lends an insight into the liberal duplicity of US Foreign Policy.

The long shadow of the Partition of India hung over South Asia like a stormcloud. In 1947, Viscount Cyril Radcliffe was tasked with drawing the borders for independent India and its new neighbour, Pakistan; despite never having visited the subcontinent, he held its future in his hands. The state of Pakistan was carved out of the Northwest and Eastern regions of India, which led to the creation of two distinct identities in the process. After all, over a thousand miles separated the Northwest and Eastern regions, whose only common denominator was religion.[2] The viscount's eponymously named Radcliffe line caused violence of a scale never seen before, as Hindus and Muslims crossed over new borders in the largest mass migration in history, known as the 1947 Partition.

In 1971, sectarian hatred began to rear its head again. Tensions between West Pakistan (the political center) and its Eastern counterpart were exacerbated by narratives of provincial concessions and linguistic politics. Four of the country's five provinces lay in the West (Balochistan, the North-Western frontier, Punjab and Sindh), while East Pakistan constituted the fifth. Bengali speakers, the majority community in East Pakistan, protested against the institution of Urdu upon them, and were ridiculed for their imagined weakness (as more intellectual and therefore inferior in comparison to the martial qualities of the Punjabis in the Western region).[3]

The Awami League, a left-leaning party that promoted East Pakistani autonomy, derived from a strong regional identity, emerged as the primary force for those whose desire for political representation was growing stronger in the face of opposition from the central government in the Western region. Governmental negligence in the aftermath of the devastating 1970 Bhola Cyclone, which left around 500,000 people dead, was the tipping point.[4] As long-standing discontent manifested in protest, largely led by students, the Pakistani army launched Operation Searchlight. This sweepingly violent policy aimed at curbing calls for independence through a state-sanctioned, violent repression of dissidents. It focused specifically on students, professors and activists and spread terror across the countryside in a rampage of pillage, rape and killings.

Amidst the crackdown, Archer Blood, the American consul stationed in Dhaka, led fellow diplomats to sign a telegram that detailed the Pakistani army's atrocities against the Bengalis. The letter caused an uproar

in the White House, eliciting demands for censure from President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The US was operating within the framework of Cold War politics, so its alliance with the military junta in Pakistan was key to maintaining US influence in the region. Kissinger was looking for any information that could lend support to America's position and picked anti-Bihari sentiments.

Biharis, originating from the Indian state of Bihar, were a discriminated minority in East Pakistan. They were predominantly Urdu speakers, and hence leaned towards supporting West Pakistan. During Operation Searchlight, they collaborated with the Pakistani army, precipitating reactionary killings from Bengali nationalists. The Americans now found a moral equivalent to justify the actions of the Pakistani general, Yahya Khan, despite Blood's assertions of the disproportionality of violence. The Secretary of State considered that "since the Bengalis were going to go left anyways," it was best to "stay out," which in reality included covert arms shipments to Pakistan in violation of an ongoing embargo.[5]

The pogrom continued unabated, resulting in the 1971 India-Pakistan War, which led to the eventual creation of Bangladesh. Upon Kissinger's passing on November 29th, 2023, then Bangladeshi foreign minister Abdul Momen commented, "We feel that he should have apologised to the people of Bangladesh for what he has done—the genocide, mass killing of the people of then East Pakistan".[6] Echoes of the US' attitude to Bangladesh are visible in its stance on Palestine today. Biden and Blinken's repeated affirmations of Israel's right to defend itself have legitimized collective violence against Palestinians. Institutional support for this almost punitive policy, despite its glaring violations of international law, has been supplemented with attempts to court public opinion through misinformed narratives. Despite being debunked, the story of 40 beheaded babies took precedence over civilian casualties in the Gaza strip (President Biden himself went so far as to claim he had seen pictures of these infants).[7] The biased reportage

on the student encampment movements, which took American campuses by storm, resorted to labelling pro-Palestinian protestors "hateful and dangerous."[8] Such phenomena has served to validate a discomfiting complacency with America's role in enabling these atrocities.[9]

The silence for East Pakistan has been replaced by vociferous claims of the existential threat the only democracy in the Middle East faces from its aggressive enemies, namely Hamas and Iran. The 2022 National Security Strategy (NSA) articulated a desire to break away from military-centric policies to create conditions for sustainable peace.[10] Yet, America has continued to support Israel, despite the latter's invasion of Rafah and its rejection of ceasefire resolutions, both of which Washington asserted were top priorities. The lack of any accountability has severely restricted avenues for stability in the region. Framing the conflict as symmetrical cannot distract from the devastating and disproportionate statistics, which currently stand at 44,282 casualties in Gaza and 1,139 in Israel.[11] This is not diplomacy; it is duplicity in the face of genocide.

"Echoes of the US' attitude to Bangladesh are visible in its stance on Palestine today. Biden and Blinken's repeated affirmations of Israel's right to defend itself have legitimized collective violence against Palestinians."

In Bangladesh, realpolitik manifested as a strategic effort to maintain favorable relations with Pakistan to counterbalance the Soviet-India alliance. There was more anger against Blood's telegram rather than the atrocities it documented. Today, the concerted lack of institutional action against Israel's punishment of Gazan civilians for October 7th is in contrast with statements in Biden's own NSA and represents violations of both US and international law. America has served up old wine in new bottles, and the flavor only gets bitter with time.

Ancient Realism Revisited

DANIEL CHUNG

In recent decades, as scholars attempt to square American liberal internationalism with the remaining prevalence of war, discourse in international relations theory has been oriented to providing a normative foundation for armed international intervention. Recall, for example, that those defending US intervention in Afghanistan up to the last second argued that America had a moral obligation to preserve the rights of women and civil society. But it seems that such arguments based in humanitarianism have faltered, with Americans largely rejecting foreign intervention, especially that as grounded in lofty goals which detract from realist self-interest. In light of this apparent inability of modern theories to supply agreeable dictates of foreign policy, I suggest that we re-explore options from the deeper roots of our theoretical traditions, as Western political philosophy has long attempted to reflect on the just conditions of war and its just practice. The ancients, I think, can supply us with an alternative which could, at the very least, remind us of why we may choose to wage war as we do today.

Since at least Aristotle, there has been an explicit current of political thought which articulates the sentiment that "training in matters related to war should be practiced not for the sake of reducing to slavery those who do not merit it, but in the first place in order that they themselves will not become slaves to others."[12] This sentiment is also found at the outset of Plato's *Laws,* where the Athenian Stranger, who seems to be the mouthpiece of his author, makes the case that, because we are fundamentally born into communities which are prior to us, and this cannot be escaped, we should be first and foremost concerned with the health of the regime on its own grounds, not with looking to external wars.[13] Ultimately, foreign policy was subject to the political necessities of the domestic sphere. Of course, the notion that foreign policy is subject to domestic politics is not a strange one. Figures across the American political spectrum increasingly echo the notion that foreign

policy should serve citizens, especially with regards to economics. I suggest, though, that foreign policy can serve domestic necessities by encouraging the development of political virtues, the existence of which within a certain political community would be a benefit to the community.

Naturally, performance of political virtue on the international stage would involve the demonstration of courage through attempts to achieve great acts, as with the organization of operations such as D-Day, or the Athenian attempt to launch an expedition to Sicily—although the latter resulted in disaster which the Athenian democracy never quite recovered for in the rest of the Peloponnesian war. However, foreign policy is also an opportunity to demonstrate magnanimity and self restraint on the international stage. One can create a "resplendent memory" of oneself not only in the minds of other nations and peoples, but among one's own citizenry.[14] Espousing a policy of fairness and justice abroad leads to better behavior by one's fellow citizens at home. Contrast, for example, how the people of Athens became more moderate under a leader like Pericles, while under the reign of someone like Cleon, who Thucydides describes as the most violent among the Athenians, the regime became prone to civil dissension and external misadventure according to the consent of the people.[15] And it is not only the effect of rhetoric which achieves this change between a virtuous and low minded statesman with regards to their impact on the character of the body politic, but also the unavoidable fact that statesmen simply provide us with examples of what behavior counts as high-minded, examples we feel naturally inclined to tend towards. Especially today in the age of mass political movements, it is required that a statesman have the appearance of possessing political virtues—for us, witnessing statesmen engage in actions we regard as virtuous, I think, has a salutary effect, as disturbing as the thought may seem. Nietzsche, over a century ago, wrote

presciently that "the appearance of one who commands unconditionally strikes these herd-animal Europeans as an immense comfort and salvation from a gradually intolerable pressure, as was attested in a major way by the effect of Napoleon's appearance."[16] Certainly, the desire of masses to be comforted by one who commands well, and does so while engaging in apparently effective foreign action, has not today subsided.

The ancient conception of foreign policy, which viewed it as a means to develop political virtue in such a way which would benefit the operation of domestic politics, is a conception I believe should be revisited in our own discourse. I acknowledge, of course, this would completely invert how we view foreign policy, being a view which precisely denies foreign policy its autonomy as a political matter, subjugating it beneath the realm of domestic politics. But then again, I think there might be cause to return to thinking about foreign affairs in this manner, especially as the US seems to return to a more non-interventionist stance in world affairs—and this perspective, if nothing else, is certainly worth considering.

The Past, Present, and Future of the International Criminal Court

ALISON CEDARBAUM, ARJUN MOOGIMANE, & HENRY SADLOWSKI

Since its inception, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has existed as a global champion of human rights, an object of anti-colonial scorn, and a metaphor for the challenges and potential of international institutions. Researching the Court generates a series of important questions: What necessitated the Court's creation? What is its function within the wider scope of international affairs? Can it be effective? Is it necessary? The answers to these questions hold significance for the future of international legal oversight, and the fate of international governance itself.

Early History and Formation of the Court:

The desire for a formalized structure by which to hold perpetrators of genocide and war crimes accountable has existed in some fashion since the end of the First World War.[17] However, it was only after the establishment of post-war tribunals in Germany and Japan in the Second World War's aftermath that the nascent United Nations decided to act. In 1948, the General Assembly adopted the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which invited member states to consider the manner by which a more permanent tribunal might be established.[18] While some formal discussions would occur in the following years, the political conditions of the Cold War were such that little progress was made until the end of the 20th century.

As the Cold War waned and the UN took on a more significant role in global politics, discussions regarding the establishment of an internationally recognized court resumed. Ad hoc tribunals established in the aftermath of genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia underscored the need for a permanent international judicial body, and in 1994, a final draft statute for an international court was presented to the UN General Assembly. A date was subsequently scheduled in 1998 for a vote on the statute's adoption in Rome. The "Rome Conference" was held from June 15 to July 17, with more than 160 Governments in attendance. 120 parties would vote in favor of the Rome Statue's adoption and 21 abstained.[19] Only 7 participating governments voted against the treaty, including the US, Israel, China, Iraq, Libya and Qatar.[20] The ICC was formally established on July 1, 2002, and issued its

first series of warrants in 2005.

The Rome Statute grants the ICC jurisdiction over four principal crimes as of 2024: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression.[21] The ICC is known as a 'court of last resort,' and is only allowed to exercise its jurisdiction when countries fail to investigate or prosecute the aforementioned crimes, as is their responsibility under international law.[22] Unsurprisingly, certain countries, such as the US, view this authority as a violation of their sovereignty and have rejected the treaty.[23]

The ICC is overseen by the Assembly of States Parties, a legislative body to which each signatory nominates a representative, and is composed of four organs.[24] The first organ, the Presidency, is responsible for the administration of the court. It is composed of three judges elected by their peers for a maximum of two three-year terms. The second organ, the Judicial Division, consists of the court's 18 judges, spread across three chambers: Pre-Trial, Trial, and Appeals. ICC judges are elected by the Assembly of States Parties for 9 year terms, and must represent 19 distinct nationalities. The third organ, the Office of the Prosecutor, is responsible for conducting investigations and prosecutions. The Prosecutor may open an investigation under three circumstances: when a case is referred by a state party; when a case is referred by the UN Security Council, or when the Pre-Trial Chamber determines that it has received sufficient evidence from other sources to initiate an investigation. The fourth and final organ is the Registry, which is responsible for all non-judicial aspects of the court's administration.

Monumental Past Cases:

Since 2002, the ICC has presided over thirty-one cases. Of those, only six have resulted in some form of punishment—either monetary reparations or imprisonment. The others are either still pretrial (8), ongoing (5), or had their charges dropped (12).[25]

Despite its low conviction rate, the ICC has slowly expanded its purview over the last two decades. In 2012, ten years after its establishment, it rendered its first conviction on Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the war crime of enlisting and exploiting child soldiers. He was sentenced to fourteen years and had to pay reparations to victims, mostly in the form of monetary payouts. In a typical timeline for the ICC, it was not until eight years after the referral that the verdict was passed down. Still, this was a landmark decision, as it was the first time an individual was tried by a non-national, non-tribunal, permanent entity for war crimes.[26] This was essentially a proof of concept for the ICC: the first time it fulfilled the task it was created to do.

In 2009, the sitting Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was indicted, marking the first time the court targeted a sitting head of state. Given Sudan's status as a non-signatory, he was not remanded to ICC custody, but the precedent he set is crucial. The ICC continued to build on its authority in 2016, when former President Simone Ggabo of the Ivory Coast made history as the ICC's first trial of a former head of state, though he was eventually acquitted.[27]

Notably, a vast majority of the ICC's cases have concerned the conduct of African leaders. This imbalance has led a number of the continent's governments to accuse the court of bias over the course of its existence.[28] There are, however, several reasons why the court might reasonably focus its efforts on Africa: of the court's 124 signatories 34 are from the African continent. This means the court has a greater degree of jurisdiction to prosecute crimes there as opposed to other parts of the world, where there may be fewer signatories. Furthermore, despite complaints from the African Union and the governments of African nations, the court itself has managed to keep a strongly positive perception among populations in African countries.[29]

Regardless of region however, the trend seems to be that over its two decades, the ICC has been attempting to expand its purview and insert itself in areas of global conflict to make its presence known.

Current and Ongoing Cases:

Today, the ICC is handling a number of high-profile cases regarding human rights violations. Most pertinent is the ICC's response to conflict over the past year in Israel and Palestine. Although Israel is not a member state of the ICC, the Court's jurisdiction over Palestinian territory gives it the authority to prosecute actors involved in events occurring in the Gaza Strip.[30] Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan of the ICC visited the region and expressed

concerns regarding human rights abuses on behalf of Hamas, other terror organizations, and Israeli settlers, claiming: "All actors must comply with international humanitarian law. If you do not do so, do not complain when my Office is required to act."[31] On May 20th, 2024, Khan sought arrest warrants for leaders of Israel and Hamas, to whom he attributed criminal responsibility for a number of atrocities during the current conflict and in years prior. The ICC subsequently issued such warrants on November 21st, 2024, with mixed international responses continuing to emerge.

Another recent case pursued by the ICC concerns the actions of Russian leaders with respect to the Russia-Ukraine War. While the ICC also does not have territorial jurisdiction over Russia, Ukraine's accession to the Rome Statute gives the Court jurisdiction over crimes committed on Ukrainian soil.[32] Thus, the ICC was able to charge and officially issue arrest warrants for President Valdimir Putin and Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for war crimes on March 17, 2023.[33] As such, any country that is party to the Rome Statute is obligated to detain either of these figures if they enter that country's territory. The impact of these arrest warrants, however, is debatable. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has attested that Putin's diplomatic capacity is limited as a result of restrictions on his international travel, and the Russian leader's decision to cancel a pre-planned trip to South Africa appears to indicate the truth of that assessment.[34] However, Mongolia, a member state of the ICC, did not detain Putin upon his arrival there in September of 2024.[35]

Furthermore, the ICC is actively pursuing several other lower-profile cases. For one, the Court's attempt to investigate human rights abuses in Venezuela under the Maduro regime was put on hold by Venezuela's request to take over the case. On March 1, 2024, however, the ICC reclaimed jurisdiction of the case, citing the Venezuelan government's failure to take sufficient investigative steps.[36] The ICC is also focusing its current efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo regarding atrocities in North Kivu, Sudan regarding potential crimes in Darfur, and Belarus regarding alleged crimes committed under the rule of authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko.[37] Evidently, the Court has continued its active responses to various potential Rome Statute crimes around the world. Its recent actions, while expanding their geographic diversity and navigating barriers of jurisdiction, still leave numerous questions concerning the viability of the Court unresolved.

The Future of the Court:

In the midst of a tumultuous geopolitical landscape where threats to human rights are increasingly prevalent, it is vital to consider the efficacy and viability of the Court's influence in the years to come. Of course, there exists the perennial problem of any international institution: the lack of an enforcement mechanism. By the very nature of the Court, its members must choose whether or not they are willing to be held accountable. Even if they do opt into the jurisdiction of the Court by joining the Rome Statute and cooperating in an investigation, the Court is reliant on the enforcement mechanisms of member states to act on its rulings. As evidenced by Putin's travels to Mongolia, this method of execution of justice is not entirely reliable. In the case of former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, the leader simply removed the country from the court's jurisdiction in response to an investigation into his anti-drug crackdowns. Duterte has since sought office again.[38] The response of the Court to this restriction on its impact presents a pattern that has faced criticism in recent years: its convictions are concentrated heavily among African leaders in countries that hold less diplomatic sway, which allows them to evade accountability from international institutions.[39] This approach presents an unjust way in which international law is applied globally, hinting at the influence of traditional heavyweights in international affairs even in a purportedly independent Court system.

Admittedly, the ICC has recently shifted gears away from solely focusing on countries in the developing world. However, the focus of the Court on states and actors with greater geopolitical clout has come with

its own set of troubles. As the UN desperately seeks resolution to an international "deficit of trust" in international institutions, the rulings of the Court have become increasingly politicized and undermined by relevant powers.[40] In the case of the Prosecutor's attempts to issue arrest warrants for leaders of Israel and Hamas, leaders on both sides of the issue have aggressively rejected and condemned the Court, considering its decisions biased and "absurd."[41] Meanwhile, allegations of sexual misconduct against Prosecutor Khan have further undermined the perceived legitimacy of his work in the region.[42] For a judicial system whose power rests on objectivity and truth, these claims and allegations are particularly detrimental to the legitimacy of the Court's actions.

Ultimately, the lack of reliable or legitimate systems of justice in many regions during or following periods of conflict provides a basis for the ICC's existence. Despite challenges by great powers, the court will likely continue to play a critical role in holding perpetrators accountable in countries that welcome its objectivity and resources. Unfortunately, as is frequently the case for internationally recognized institutions, the court is limited by resistance from influential states like the US and China, and will face opposition when acting against the interests of those in power across the world. Despite this reality, the court has proven its worth as a forum for the documentation of international injustice and as an effective court of last resort in post-conflict zones. The court's recent failures to act on its convictions must not completely overshadow its successes, nor can they erase the motivations of the Rome Statute, produced by a century's worth of evidence in favor of an international judicial body. While grand expectations for the tangible impact of the court's decisions may need to be tempered, the ICC will continue to provide an important, if not paramount, role in the international community's ever-evolving regulatory architecture where it is welcome to do so.

Migration and Disinformation

Crafting a Security Threat

ZOE RAPTIS

One of the most pressing security concerns today does not involve weapons, but people. While the securitization of migration is not a new phenomenon, it has intensified significantly in recent years, with migration increasingly framed as a major threat to national security by world leaders. Migration, especially issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers, has been at the forefront of many recent elections throughout 2024. Right-wing populist politicians, in particular, have amplified anti-immigrant sentiment by framing migrants as security threats through rhetoric designed to manipulate public perception. This portrayal of migration as a grave security threat is fueled by the strategic use of threat conflation and disinformation.[43] Statements and posters around the page display the use of these two concepts. Two flowcharts further clarify this dynamic: the first explains the theoretical relationship between migration and disinformation, while the second grounds this theory in a European case study, demonstrating how disinformation drives the securitization of migration in practice.

How Migration Becomes a Security Threat

	1 INITIAL ANXIETY	2 THREAT CONFLATION & DISINFORMATION	3 SECURITY ISSUE	4 POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM & POLICY CREATION	5 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION & CONSEQUENCES
THEORY	• Underlying anxieties about the effects of irregular migration (e.g. jobs, crime, etc). AND/OR • General dissatisfaction with problems in society (e.g. unemployment, crime, etc).	• Threat conflation of anxieties making them seem like big issues. This is done through disinformation. • Conflation between regular and irregular migration • General societal problems get blamed on migrants.	• Initial anxieties transform into grave security threats. • Now migration is seen as a threat to national security due to the threat conflation and use of disinformation	• Politicians capitalize on immigration anxiety and suggest policies to combat conflated problem to win electoral support.	• SR deterrence policies that are politically appealing are proposed rather than long run policies that deal with structural problems. • LR problems persist and migration continues to be a perpetual security issue. • Unintended consequences from SR policies occur, such as weaponized migration.
EXAMPLE: EUROPE	• Many Europeans have existing fears of a migration influx, concerning cultural differences, potential "job stealing," more crime etc. AND/OR • Widespread societal dissatisfaction, such as unemployment in Greece.	• European politicians engage in threat conflation, e.g. Marine Le Pen compared the influx of migrants to the "barbarian invasion" of the fourth century. • Unemployment is blamed on migrants. [37]	• Threat conflation and disinformation, especially from right-wing populist parties, has made migration into a grave security problem in Europe, as seen by recent summer elections across the continent. • Example of disinformation include Hungarian PM Orban stating, "every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk." [38]	• European politicians capitalize on immigration anxiety, as seen by PM Sunak's "stop the boats campaign" and Meloni's promise to curb migration. [39] • Politicians propose SR policies such as the Italy-Albania agreement.	• Policies usually come in the form of third-country agreements such as the EU-Turkey deal and Italy-Libya MoU. • Europe's migration problems are persisting as policies focus on short term results. • Third countries have weaponized migrants, such as Turkey against the EU and Morocco against Spain.

**Björn Höcke,
Head of the Alternative for Germany (AFD)**

"Let's not forget, the Syrian who comes to us has still his Syria."
"The Afghan who comes to us has still his Afghanistan […] But if we lose our Germany, then we have no more home!" [42]

**Suella Braverman
Former Home
Secretary of the UK**

Small boat crossings are "the invasion of our southern coast."
"Illegal immigration is out of control."
"Let's stop pretending that they are all refugees in distress." [43]

"Every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk."

"For us migration is not a solution but a problem ... not medicine but a poison, we don't need it and won't swallow it." [41]

**Viktor Orban
Prime Minister of Hungary**

Families Are Universal, But Not Their Policies

A Cross-Cultural Analysis

EMILY LUPINACCI

In the eyes of global governments, families are more than just people who come over on Thanksgiving to talk about school and the weather. The unique traditions, historical contexts, and economic development of individual countries greatly influence social attitudes toward work and family policies. Recently, these policies have evolved as a result of the increasing number of women in the workforce, as well as due to the shift in the perception of marriage from a primarily economic and institutional matter, to one centered on emotional connection and community. The family policies in China, Sweden, and Japan all reflect their respective socio-economic values, but their polarization evokes global discussion regarding the efficacy of the policies and their broader social implications. With the major decline in fertility rates and the drive for families to support both cultural *and* economic values, comparing the policies in these countries creates intriguing perspectives on how policymakers aim to provide holistic solutions.

While Xi Jinping has been encouraging mothers to "rejuvenate the nation" by rebuilding families, the lasting impacts of China's previous One-Child Policy has led Chinese families to desire small households.[44] From 1979 to 2015, during the One-Child Policy, major anti-daughter sentiments rose as a result of families abandoning their daughters, as sons were considered more valuable for the purposes of inheritance and carrying the family name. Having a daughter was pejoratively considered a "small happiness" because they would grow up and ultimately live and serve their husband's family, in contrast to the "big happiness" associated with having a son.[45] This resulted in an infanticide epidemic amongst newborn daughters, prompting the Chinese government to issue an amendment allowing families to have a second child if their first was a girl. Still, this policy signified that a daughter's existence was subsequent to a son's in society's dominant view of family. China now has a Three-Child Policy, but its fertility rate is at a low 1.18 births per woman, among the lowest it's been in Chinese history.[46] While Xi encourages women to step up and "embody the traditional values" of marriage and children to rebuild the country and promote economic growth, the lasting impacts of the One-Child Policy have resulted in limited progress in female liberation, and growing reluctance to have children.[47]

Similar to China, Japan's family models are also geared toward bolstering the country's economy, but contrarily, the Japanese government has enacted policies to stimulate child development and encourage women to work. The highly-regulated public daycare systems not only help the development of Japanese children, but also incentivize women to work because they are able to trust the well-mannered facilities to take care of their children while they are at their jobs. However, the demand for public childcare is much higher than its availability, forcing mothers to resort to private daycare, which has lower standards and higher prices. Furthermore, despite the government's mission to establish a healthy work-life balance, Japanese women struggle to maintain this due to the traditional expectations that they devote ample time to raising their children to ensure they grow to be benign citizens. This leaves women with the ultimatum–to either fully dedicate themselves to either being a mother and domestic laborer, or to be a full-time worker. Regardless of Japan's superb childcare developments and pro-natalist attitudes, Japanese women are not encouraged to have children if they are full-time workers, as they do not want to sacrifice

their professions to succumb to traditional maternal expectations.

Like Japan, Sweden has also encountered the shift from the male breadwinner model to the dual-income model. However, their government has established a social-democratic ideology that includes welfare policies to strengthen familial development *and* workforce involvement. The implementation of paid parental leave, free universal childcare, and child allowances incentivize both parents to play active roles in their children's lives while also being dedicated laborers.[48] Sweden especially prioritizes paternal involvement, recognizing the importance of fathers gaining early care experience to establish independence and strengthen their connections with their newborns.[49] This supports Sweden's priorities of welfare, equality, and justice, where parents acknowledge their shared responsibility to care for their children.[50] While the disparate impacts of these policies are still skewed towards women, Sweden's cultural emphasis on social-democracy and welfare enable its policies to promote the highest degree of social cohesion for families, while still allowing for a baseline level of productivity in the economy.

As our tour of family and work policies concludes, it is clear that policies functioning in one country may not necessarily be suitable for another. While China's motives are primarily economic, Sweden's policies reflect its social-driven attitudes, and Japan's progress exhibits the battle between progressive, capitalistic, and traditional mindsets. Analyzing the different ways countries aim to address falling fertility rates reveals the priorities of the governments and how they aim to help their citizens socially, economically, or both.

Fragments of Sovereignty

A Historical Analysis of Settler Colonialism in the United States and Palestine

VANESSA JOHN & SHARON LI

The "Postcolonial Age" refers to the period following World War II, when colonies of Western imperial countries gained independence. Yet, in modern times, the realization of a truly postcolonial age remains elusive.[51] Colonialism endures in the status quo, fueled by relentless greed, where colonizers rhetoric of "peace" is weaponized to obscure the more discreet operations of settler colonialism and suppress resistance. The original owners of the land are now forced into mere fragments of it, residing under the governance and dominance of those who continue to benefit from their dispossession.

Although peace treaties and declarations have been presented as pathways to harmony within colonial regimes such as Israel and the US, the continued practices of suppression, surveillance, and displacement in both Native American reservations and Palestinian territories, reveal that these so-called agreements often serve as mechanisms to maintain control over indigenous populations rather than fostering genuine coexistence. Historian and scholar Patrick Wolfe asserts that settler colonialism is a structure rather than an event, the elimination of the Native does not solely derive from mass murder rather it is through the repression of the Native that normalizes and perpetuates the structure of the settler-colonial state.[52] Therefore, in order for colonial projects to actualize, the "logic of the settler" must be employed to suppress the Indigenous population of the land they intend to occupy.

The illusion of allyship between the settlers and the Indigenous population is illustrated through the long trail of broken treaties the US has left in its journey of annexation. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830 marked the one of the largest land cessions signed by the US government and was the first removal treaty put into effect under the Indian Removal Act.[53] The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek dictated the Choctaw Indians be removed from their homelands in Mississippi and migrate into the lands of Oklahoma, the name deriving from the Choctaw language words being "red people".[54] Although the Choctaw leaders signed

the treaty, it was riddled with deceit, falsely promising safe transportation and adequate support, while veiling threats of destruction and military force. During the Trail of Tears, initiated by The Indian Removal Act of 1830, it is estimated that 15,000 Choctaw Indians were ethnically cleansed from their homes, and about a third of the people were killed, ranging around 6,000 Choctaws dead, but these numbers are likely higher.[55] The land designated as "Indian Territory" was vastly different from the swampy terrain and fertile soil that the Choctaw and other tribes had relied on for their survival. The US government aimed to either eliminate or assimilate the remaining Native populations by forcing several tribes onto unfamiliar and undesirable lands.[56]

Then, the US established the reservation system through the Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 as a means of controlling Indigenous populations.[57] By relocating them to designated areas, the government gained control over their territories and facilitated land acquisition while actively subduing these communities. Further suppressing Indigenous identity, the US government enacted the Dawes Act of 1887, which aimed to assimilate Native Americans by breaking up communal lands and allocating individual plots to Indigenous families, thereby undermining Tribal unity and severing ties to ancestral land.[58] Although the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 marked a shift toward recognizing tribal authority by encouraging tribes to form their own governments and manage their land, the US government retained overarching authority, ultimately limiting the full autonomy of Indigenous lands and maintaining federal oversight.[59]
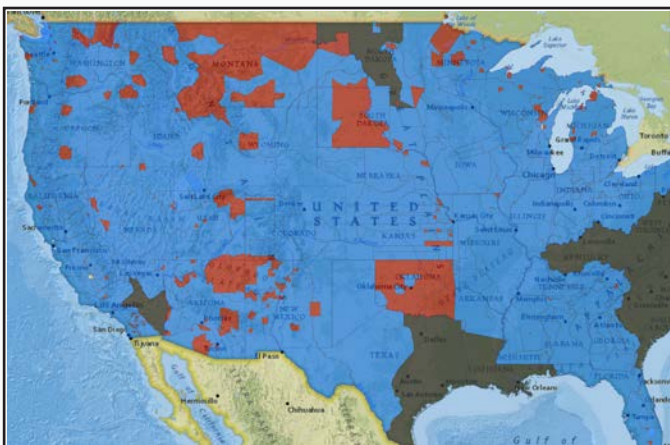
Map by University of Georgia eHistory
Red: Current reservations or land with most native sovereignty.
Blue: Stolen land through "cession."
Gray: Original land stolen through colonization prior to 1776.

The US continually utilizes tactics to undermine Indigenous sovereignty, which manifests in policies that strategically restrict autonomy. The government's control over federal recognition processes determines which Indigenous communities are acknowledged and eligible for federal aid, adding an administrative barrier that stifles tribal sovereignty and resource access serving as a reminder that the US federal government ultimately holds authority over Indigenous sovereignty. A key tactic is the manipulation of water rights and resources, as seen in cases like the Fort Belknap Reservation, where upstream water diversion by non-Indigenous farmers has limited water access for the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribes.[60] Despite the Supreme Court's Winters Doctrine, which ruled in favor of upholding Indigenous water rights, tribes still face significant challenges in securing access to this vital resource, as the US government does not effectively intervene to protect these rights.[61] Similarly, The Haudenosaunee people, with a deep ancestral connection to the Great Lakes, follow the Great Law of Peace, their framework of stewardship. However, the US government has consistently overlooked the significance and precedence of this traditional law, prioritizing its own legal systems and objectives. As such, the US government's failure to include Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems in environmental policy hinders sustainable, culturally aligned approaches to resource management as the US's Great Lakes Charter and its Annex fail to address ongoing water diversions and their harmful effects on Indigenous communities.[62] These diversions disrupt traditional food systems, health, and cultural practices, such as fishing, which is essential for sustenance. This exclusion of Indigenous perspectives from environmental policy on lands that have historically sustained Indigenous communities diminishes Indigenous sovereignty and depletes their resources. Thus, sovereignty is granted only within boundaries defined by the oppressor, on terms that ultimately serve the oppressor's interests.

Israel employed various tactics to entrench its control, echoing colonial methods seen in other regimes, such as the US' treatment of Native American populations. Political Zionism, rooted in Theodor Herzl's 1896 publication, "Der Judenstaat," is a nationalist ideology aimed at creating a Jewish state in Palestine.[63] Herzl did not seek to create this

state through negotiation with Indigenous peoples of a territory but through guarantees provided by colonization. To Herzl, Palestine was "A land without a people for a people without a land"[64] This same logic was applied by settler colonists in Turtle Island, where the Indigenous population, despite having long-established cultures and societies, were denied the recognition of a cohesive 'nation-state' and consequently their right to one. The Balfour Declaration facilitated Jewish immigration to Palestine and laid the groundwork for Israel's establishment; this forced creation of a state within an existing state catalyzed the Nakba in 1948.[65]

The Palestinian Nakba refers to the mass expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinian Arabs from British Mandate Palestine during the creation of Israel between 1947 and 1949, displacing around 80 percent of the Palestinian population.[66] In late 1947, the United Nations approved a plan to partition Mandate Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, granting significant land to the Jewish state despite Zionist Jews, many of them recent European immigrants, being a minority.[67] Following the plan's approval, violence erupted, with Zionist militias, later forming the Israel Defense Forces, expelling Palestinians and committing atrocities in villages like Deir Yassin and Tantura.[68] By the end of the fighting, Zionist forces controlled 78 percent of historic Palestine, leaving a large population of Palestinians displaced from their ancestral lands and marked the start of an ongoing process of settler-colonialism through the systematic ethnic cleansing and the theft of land and property from refugees and remaining Arab residents.[69]

From 1948 to 1967, Israel implemented laws like the Absentee Property Law of 1950, seizing land from displaced Palestinians, and the Law of Return, which allowed Jewish immigration while excluding displaced Palestinians from returning.[70] This institutionalized settler-colonialism helped solidify Jewish control over Palestinian resources and land, reinforced by a powerful military apparatus that asserted regional dominance. Israel's tactics continued evolving after the 1967 war, following its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. This period marked a phase of entangled colonization, characterized by settlement expansion, military control, and economic exploitation, drawing Israel into a prolonged conflict with Palestinians who increasingly found their land and livelihoods at the mercy of Israeli policies. In the present day, while Israel attempts to maintain a facade of legitimacy on the international stage, its ongoing practices of suppression and genocidal treatment of Palestinians have led the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to recognize Israel's actions as violations of international law.[71]

PALESTINE **SHRINKING EXPANDING** ISRAEL

VISUALIZING**PALESTINE**

Since 1948, multiple UN resolutions have affirmed Palestinians' right to self-determination and condemned Israel's control over Palestinian resources and human rights violations. Integral to this right is the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources. Thus, as a temporary occupier, Israel lacks legal sovereignty over Palestinian territories and their resources, leading it to tactically utilize methods to further expansion through resource control. For example, in 1982, Israel illegally placed Palestinian water resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) under the Mekorot water company's jurisdiction.[72] This private Israeli entity has systematically redirected water from Palestinian territories, forcing Palestinian residents to rely on Mekorot for daily water consumption. While Mekorot provides water to Palestinians in the West Bank, it prioritizes supplying Israeli settlements, diverting resources from Palestinian allocations. As Israel controls 89 percent of the Mountain Aquifer's water, using it predominantly to support Israeli settlements, Palestinians must purchase their water from Mekorot often at higher rates, further exacerbating their economic dependency and restricting access to a vital resource.[73] This manipulation of water access exemplifies a broader strategy of colonization, as control over water resources not only suppresses Palestinian autonomy but

also facilitates the growth and sustainability of Israeli settlements within the West Bank. By weaponizing water access, Israel has created a system that undermines Palestinian sovereignty while advancing its territorial and political objectives.

The legacy of colonial origins in both Israel and the US continues to shape their political movements and policy decisions to this day. A striking example of these parallels can be seen in the Tohono O'odham reservation and the use of Elbit System surveillance towers along the US-Mexico border.[74] Elbit Systems technology has been implicated in serious violations of international law and Palestinian human rights. Since the escalation of violence in Palestine, the UN reports over 40,000 Palestinians killed by Israel's ongoing collective punishment.[75] However, many believe the actual number is likely much higher, with estimates reaching around 200,000 due to unaccounted individuals buried under rubble and other unrecorded effects.[76] In fact, the same surveillance towers deployed by Elbit Systems at the US-Mexico border and the Tohono O'odham reservation are also installed at Israeli military checkpoints in the West Bank, around the besieged Gaza Strip, and in the occupied Golan Heights.[77] These enforcement practices exacerbate border violence, prioritizing control and exclusion over safety or humanitarian needs.

The US and Israel's policies deliberately fragment Indigenous and Palestinian societies and territories to sustain political, demographic, and economic dominance. Through the weaponization of natural resources and strategic deployment of surveillance technologies, these practices suppress autonomy, entrench settler-colonial structures, and deny communities their kinship ties and stewardship of ancestral homelands. Claims of peaceful coexistence within settler states misrepresent the ongoing reality of oppression. Such narratives obscure the enduring violence and dispossession that force Indigenous and Palestinian communities to share their lands with their oppressors—lands steeped in the blood and sacrifices of their ancestors. True liberation and justice require dismantling colonial systems and restoring self-determination to those whose lands and rights have been systematically taken, through initiatives like Land Back and the Right to Return.

A Gulf Dream or Nightmare?

An Economic Analysis of Remittances and Inequality

NAISHA LUTHRA

It is June 12th, 2024, 4:30 a.m.. A fire breaks out in a six-story building located in the coastal city of Mangaf in southern Kuwait. The building housed many low-income immigrants, a majority of them Indian citizens. Amongst the 200 individuals packed inside the small apartment building, 50 lost their lives, leaving the rest to share their stories about the dangerous living and working conditions they are subjected to daily.[1] According to Human Rights Watch, for low-income migrants in Gulf countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, hazardous working conditions, long hours, unpaid wages, and cramped and unsanitary housing are simply reality.[2] These workers come to the Gulf under the Kafala system, which allows private companies and citizens to have full control over the immigration status and working conditions of their employees.[3] This brings into question why Indian workers still make upwards of 30 percent of the expatriate workforce in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Why do upwards of 8 million Indian workers leave their homes to live a life of discomfort and hazard?[4] The answer lies in India's economic landscape.

The Indian economy is marked by striking inequalities, with high poverty levels serving as a push factor for migration. Approximately 90 to 92 percent of workers in India are part of the informal sector, which operates outside official regulatory frameworks and lacks formal job security and benefits.[5] The informal sector includes jobs like agriculture, street vending, construction, and domestic work, which are generally labor-intensive and unstable jobs. The alluring promise to get away from this uncertainty pushes Indians to migrate. Historical ties between India and the GCC, due to colonial

trade routes, also facilitate this movement.[6]

Despite the hazardous nature of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in Gulf countries, as well as unsatisfactory housing conditions, many Indians, especially men, are drawn by the prospect of significantly higher salaries. Almost all of these workers send their salaries back home to India as remittances, which play a critical role in supporting Indian households. For instance, in the state of Kerala, remittances accounted for 23.2 percent of the state's GDP in 2023.[7] By boosting household consumption in these areas through remittances, migrant workers boost their local economies, without returning to the country for years at a stretch. This triggers a ripple effect that increases the aggregate demand in specific regions, which ultimately increases India's GDP.

Conversely, one counterargument presented by critics explains how remittances don't always have a positive macroeconomic impact because they are used for basic consumption instead of for procuring productive assets.[8] Essentially, while they may aid families in the short run, there is no true benefit in the long run. Furthermore, economic costs aside, migration to the Middle East often entails high human costs, including unsafe living conditions, wage theft, and minimal labor protections. In a survey, 62 percent of Indian migrant workers said they experienced depression, and 77 percent experienced loneliness.[9] The number of deaths due to poor conditions has also risen in recent years, especially following Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup Tournament. Heat-based illnesses from working in extreme summer heat and suicide were the major causes of death among the 6500 lives that were lost since Qatar first won its World Cup bid.[10] The conditions of these workers during the World Cup were likened to modern slavery.

While remittances support India's economy, labor issues could create diplomatic tensions, compelling India to advocate for better treatment of its nationals. India has introduced policies like the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) insurance scheme and migrant worker welfare funds to protect its citizens abroad. Under this scheme, all workers in the GCC are given mandatory life and health insurance.[11] Still, the Indian government has been criticized for dealing with this problem on a reactionary basis, instead of trying to find a long-term solution.[12] To see tangible change in the lives of migrant workers, the Indian government and Gulf countries must work together to create concrete policies to standardize contracts in the private sector. There needs to be an open discussion about the Kafala system and its dangers to bring the plight of thousands of migrant workers to light. However, enforcing such initiatives is a challenge, as an excess of interference may create tensions with the Gulf nations, making it a tradeoff between human security and economic well-being for India.

Flashpoints in East Asia

Foreign Policy Perceptions in Washington and Beijing

THEODORUS NG & MILES BONDI

The ever-intensifying strategic competition between the US and China has conjured fears over a potential World War III.[13] Our article analyzes foreign policy rhetoric from Washington and Beijing toward the most visible flashpoints in East Asia – Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the Korean Peninsula. By triangulating rhetoric, actions, and intervening factors, we show where both sides stand on these issues today.

We designed a program in R for sentiment analysis of official government documents and press releases from the US Department of State (DOS) and from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).[14] Briefly, the R program matches the most frequently invoked words on either side toward each flashpoint to the sentiments with which they were invoked. We employed the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon as a metric,[15] and relevant R packages, to design our program. What is expressed by a country only tells us one side; for a comprehensive analysis, we also actively consider the actions of said country to examine matches or mismatches between rhetoric and behavior. Due to considerations of feasibility, we situate our analysis between 2020 and the present since the pandemic marked a disjunctive event that

contributed to the ostensible hardening of stances toward the respective flashpoints,[16] as well as for contemporary relevance. We analyzed a total of 200 documents containing 96,364 words, and the graphical results of our study can be found on the Hemispheres website.

Taiwan

Beijing expresses much trust in its ability to preclude Taiwan's independence, but also fear and anticipation for the wider havoc it might have to contend with in doing so. Noteworthy is the sharp dip toward more negative sentiments expressed in later documents, likely following the 2024 election of Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te—representing the third successful election for the Democratic Progressive Party, which has advocated for a separate Taiwanese national identity and continues to criticize China's claims of sovereignty over the island.[17] A hardening of stances on either side of the strait is also captured in Beijing's recent policy of executing "Taiwan independence forces," essentially Chinese political opponents, traveling to China—a move attributing a pejorative criminal status to Taiwanese people.[18]

Washington views Taiwan as a bastion of democratic freedom – an antithesis to China. Rise in US support for Taiwan and decline in US-China relations were exacerbated by the 2016 Trump administration's "tough on China" narrative, which garnered bipartisan support. The same narrative has held through the Biden administration and will likely continue into Trump's second term. In recent years, much of the upheaval regarding Taiwan has surrounded Nancy Pelosi's visit in 2022 and then Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen's visit to California in 2023. Regardless, Washington has made its position to mainland China clear: it will protect Taiwan's right to a democracy.[19]

South China Sea

The Chinese MFA's most invoked ideas of "peace," "cooperation," and "law" regarding the South China Sea (SCS) are viewed overwhelmingly with positivity and trust. This aligns with the establishment of the ongoing Bilateral Consultation Mechanism with the Philippines, and Code of Conduct negotiations with ASEAN.[20] Yet, Beijing's diplomatic rhetoric rarely aligns with its actions. Should Beijing truly seek a peaceful resolution in the SCS, and cooperation based on international law, it must cease its non-peaceful gray zone aggressions. We

observe dips toward more negative sentiments within the MFA regarding the SCS, roughly coinciding with Manila's hardening support in 2022 for the 2016 Hague ruling that rejected China's "nine-dash line" claims, as well as with the Philippines welcoming expanded US military presence in 2023.[21] MFA sentiments have become more negative recently, likely following Philippine President Bongbong Marcos' declaration at the 2024 Shangri-La Dialogue: "If a Filipino citizen is killed by a willful act, that is, I think, very, very close to what we define as an act of war...our treaty partners, I believe, also hold that same standard."[22]

"Upholding international law," in the SCS has been the foundation of Washington's position for decades.[23] In recent years, China has challenged the legitimacy of such international laws and tested US will in combating its infractions. Washington has mostly relied on rhetoric, reiterating support for free passage through the SCS while levying accusations against the PRC for trespassing the sovereign waters of other nation-states. Individual conflicts between China and the Philippines, a US ally, account for much of the variation in sentiments within Washington. China's gray-zone tactics, such as using water cannons and lasers to hinder refueling missions to the Second Thomas Shoal, constitute even worsening sentiments within Washington about China's position in the SCS.[24]

North Korea

Unsurprisingly, "friendship" with North Korea (DPRK), still China's sole defense ally,[25] is the most invoked word in China's MFA documents and the sentiments captured in them are overwhelmingly positive. Yet, curiously, there was a sense of fear from the MFA toward North Korea which coincided with Kim's 2022 declaration that the DPRK will never denuclearize.[26] These are likely related to Pyongyang's ramping up of nuclear missile tests since 2022, which could attract a greater US military presence in the region —antithetical to China's strategic objectives.[27] Recently, there seems to be a continuing uptick in positive sentiments toward North Korea. This could be in reaction to the recently penned Russia-DPRK mutual defense treaty in June 2024, which analysts have posited is unwelcome by Beijing, as a Kim emboldened by relatively militarily powerful allies could portend deeper US involvement in the region.[28] Courting a still warmer relationship with Pyongyang might be

perceived by Beijing as a way to ensure Kim's acquiescence to its objectives.

US-DPRK relations have been bordering on war for decades now. Despite small gains during Trump's first administration, relations have continued to dwindle, best represented by US efforts to communicate with North Korea through the recently reopened Swedish embassy.[29] The US has imposed various sanctions on North Korea and on other players in the purported "Axis of Upheaval," including Iran and Russia.[30] The perennial fear over the security of US-allied South Korea has claimed much of Washington's attention. Before the Russia-Ukraine War, sentiment about North Korea primarily concerned its test-launches of a new missiles or threats of uclear action. After the Russia-Ukraine War began, North Korea's increasing support for Russia, culminating in North Korean troops fighting alongside Russians, has marked a decline in sentiments within Washington toward North Korea. Still, Washington stands by a "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."[31]

Concluding Impressions

Both Washington and Beijing, at least in rhetoric, attempt to position their respective stances as morally superior. A prospective world war would be fought along lines of ideology, informational sway, and familiar balance-of-power politics. Captured in our data is the stark divergence of sentiments between Washington and Beijing toward each flashpoint; mirroring most of our increasingly tense feelings toward US-China relations which have emerged as the defining quagmire of our age. Yet, we don't want to paint an entirely bleak picture: war is not entirely unavoidable. One can remember a time in 1969 when American and Chinese ambassadors met without formal diplomatic relations for the first time in two years over a cup of tea. And while these talks in Warsaw did little to achieve formal agreements, they served as an avenue of communication that made miscalculations less likely and relieved tensions in East Asia.[32] We believe this face-to-face communication—which enabled both sides to perceive each other's innate humanity—is much needed today.

Hedging in Southeast Asia

China's ascendance on the international stage has in recent years become one of the most widely discussed phenomena in international relations. However, such conversations are almost always in reference to the US-China rivalry, while smaller players in China's game who face direct consequences are often overshadowed. Vietnam and the Philippines offer two such examples.

Vietnam
KHUE EDWARDS

In May 2014, China's state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) stationed the Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig in waters well within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone.[33] This zone is measured at 200 nautical miles from Vietnam's baseline, within which Vietnam has jurisdiction over living and non-living resources. The crisis was a major wake-up call for Vietnam and underlined Chinese intentions, as the standoff verged on violence. In response, Vietnam modernized its navy and coast guard, acquiring submarines, missile corvettes, and patrol ships with the help of partners like the US and Japan.[34] The most important thing Vietnam can do at this time is to strengthen key alliances and carefully navigate its relationship with China. In the wake of this superpower rivalry, Vietnam has chosen to play both sides and adopt a hedging strategy for the sake of its own sovereignty. An American partnership is essential to the Vietnamese balancing of China. In the case of Chinese aggression, Vietnam does not pose any concrete threat to China. However, with the support of the US, Vietnam has the capability to deter China. While remaining wary of China, Vietnam has sought to establish new communication channels, as Huong Le Thu outlines, including party-to-party talks, defense-focused dialogues, and a direct phone line for handling emergencies in the South China Sea.[35] The maintenance of bilateral relations is tactical on Vietnam's part to keep themselves in China's good graces. As of now, Vietnamese strategic ambiguity is the only way forward. By

hedging rather than aligning with either side, Vietnam benefits from the protection of the US without escalating tensions with China. Still, this hedging strategy will likely be unsustainable in the future, and Vietnam will be placed in a difficult position.

View of the Gulf of Tonkin (Source: Khue Edwards)

The Philippines

GIGI COPELAND

In June of 2024, a Chinese vessel was accused of intentionally colliding with a Philippine supply ship near the Spratly Islands, injuring five onboard crew members, with one losing a finger [36] The incident, captured on video, attracted international attention and widespread condemnation for its brazen violation of international law, with US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller calling the ramming "escalatory and irresponsible."[37] Despite being the most severe Sino-Philippines altercation in recent history, this incident is only one amongst a litany of altercations between the two parties that have taken place over the past two decades. As a partner to the US-led 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, the Philippines has called on the US for support in pushing back against Chinese "gray-zone warfare in the South China Sea."[38] While critics of US presence on the archipelago argue that overly relying on military assistance from one of China's most staunch adversaries may further expose the Philippines to Chinese aggression,[39] given the current dynamics of other small-state alliances in the region, it appears that the Philippines may have little choice but to rely on its Western ally for support.

Despite downgrading its relationship with the US in the 1990s in hopes of bolstering its own nationalism and pursuing a more pragmatic relationship with its superpower neighbor, relations between the Philippines and the PRC have remained strained. Under President Benjamin Aquino III, the Philippines took a more assertive stance towards China, bringing its case against China to the court of arbitration in 2013.[40] However, Aquino's successor, Rodrigo Duterte, pivoted to a much more conciliatory approach, terminating joint US-Philippine Navy Patrols as part of his overall initiative to bring the Philippines closer to China for Chinese investment.[41] The election of Bongbong Marcos has seen the implementation of a policy of so-called "strategic transparency," in which not only has the Philippines condemned China's behavior at global forums, but has also become the only ASEAN member nation to exit from China's Belt and Road Initiative, the multi-trillion-dollar global infrastructure project which has secured other ASEAN members firmly under Beijing's grasp. [42]

Some theorize that Beijing's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea aim to drive the southeast Asian nation further away from its American ally, while others believed they are designed to test legal boundaries and provoke powers like the US and NATO into retaliating, framing China as defending its sovereignty while justifying further military expansion.[43] Regardless of Beijing's intentions, since the Philippines now relies on US military support only in the event of direct military confrontation, it is more vulnerable than ever to China's assertive tactics in non-military disputes. Moreover, the Philippines stands to lose significantly if it cedes its South China Sea territories to China, given the area's untapped oil reserves and strategic importance for defense and trade. Once a cornerstone of Philippine foreign policy, efforts to build a united ASEAN resistance against China's incursions have yielded little progress due to Beijing's economic influence over other littoral states like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei.[44] With China's actions growing increasingly assertive, the Philippines may need to set aside its nationalist ambitions and lean more heavily on US support to counter Chinese aggression, as ASEAN appears unlikely to offer unified resistance.

Taiwan's Divisive Monopoly Over Semiconductors

KARSTEN LYLE & ALEXANDER XIA

Global reliance on Taiwan for semiconductor production has emerged as a critical issue, with far reaching economic and geopolitical consequences. Semiconductors, or chips, are small pieces of integrated circuits carrying tens of billions of transistors and powering various technologies.[45] In fact, almost every conceivable piece of technology, from automobiles to LED lights, carry one or multiple semiconductors vital to its functioning.[46] Though the production of these chips is undoubtedly crucial, manufacturing is concentrated in one country—Taiwan, which "produces about 90 percent of the world's most advanced semiconductors, mostly through the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Companies (TSMC)."[47] This global dependence on Taiwan for semiconductors, in a time of heightened conflict and uncertainty, poses a glaring risk to international supply chains—most notably through the looming threat of a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan. A Chinese invasion, or even blockade, would have unparalleled consequences for global supply chains—likely "forcing them to grind to a halt, shaving trillions of dollars off economic output, and plunging the world into an economic depression."[48] Due to this reality,

the international community feels compelled to defend their ability to receive semiconductors, demonstrated by their increased interests in onshoring semiconductor manufacturing, as well as US efforts to curb China's technological and military development.

Over the last 20 years, semiconductor manufacturers in Taiwan have decisively led the industry in innovations and investment, leading to significant results in comparison to competitors. TSMC was founded in 1987, and was the world's first contract manufacturer – solely focused on chip manufacturing instead of design.[49] This created an environment where firms could "invest heavily in chip research and design," while outsourcing manufacturing to TSMC.[50] The pattern led to increased, and now complete, dependence on Taiwan and TSMC for chip manufacturing. TSMC is a crucial "choke point in the logic semiconductor industry"— its near 500 customers, including industry juggernauts like Apple, AMD, NVIDIA, and Qualcomm, cannot function without the company's support and all outsource their chips to the Taiwanese foundries.[51] They continue to rely on the company's cutting edge fabrication technology and unrivaled intellectual property

Semiconductor Supply Chain Visualized by Alexander Xia
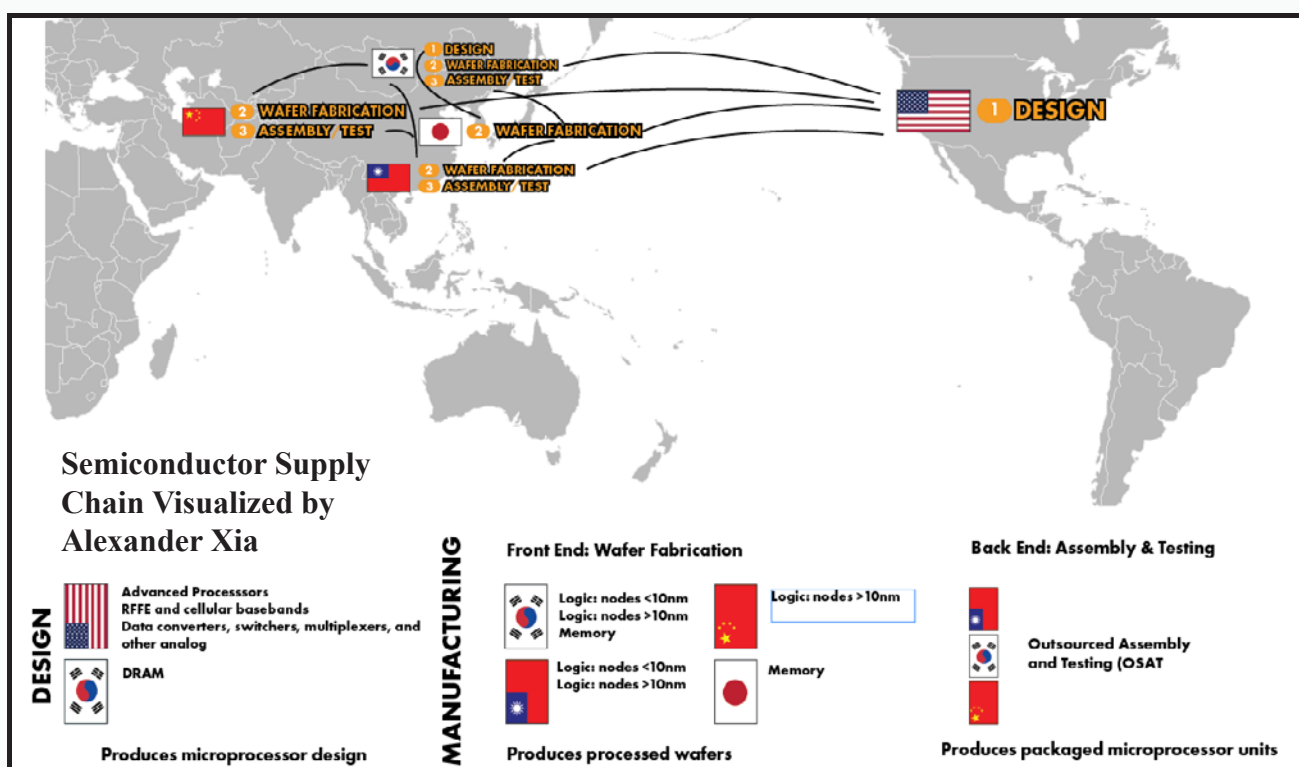
(IP) library.[52] The importance of Taiwan's network was especially demonstrated through the COVID-19 pandemic, when the closure of several Taiwanese manufacturers led to a semiconductor chip shortage that shocked global supply chains.

The global reliance of the semiconductor industry on Taiwan is especially concerning due to the significant risks faced by both the country, as well as its foundries, amid the potential threat of a Chinese invasion. In recent years, China has increased military exercises near the Taiwan straits, "conduct[ing] 950 sorties over Taiwan's air defense identification zone" in 2021.[53] Additionally, in his 2024 New Year's address, President Xi Jinping also expressed that "China's 'reunification' with Taiwan is inevitable".[54] With this increase in tension, as well as the backdrop of intensifying hostilities between China and the US as well as EU countries, the risk of the semiconductor industry falling into China's hands seems to be increasingly imminent. As a Chinese-operated semiconductor industry would certainly see many cut off from crucial supply lines, the result of a military operation would be devastating for the global economy, exceeding far beyond the impact caused by the pandemic. For example, it is estimated that losing access to Taiwanese semiconductors would decrease US GDP by five to ten percent.[55] Furthermore, due to the level of sophistication Taiwanese chips have reached, "it would take years to build and activate high-end chip production facilities to replace Taiwanese foundries."[56]

The clear risk of concentrated chip production in Taiwan, due to the threat of a Chinese invasion, has incentivized many countries to begin to onshore and redirect semiconductor manufacturing. For example, the CHIPS Act released by the Biden administration in 2022 invests nearly $53 billion into promoting domestic semiconductor manufacturing, research and development, and workforce.[57] Additionally, the Act also caps the increasing amount of interest given to the semiconductor industry by US administrations.[58] The CHIPS Act has also incentivized the formation of TSMC fabrication plants around the world, aiming to diversify supply. For example, TSMC has opened a fabrication plant in Camas, Washington, currently the only TSMC plant present in the US.[59] The company argues that this form of "globalization" will help them be "competitive worldwide," while also reducing "the need for crisis management" should conflict begin in Taiwan.[60] TSMC has committed to the development of a plant in Arizona as well, which upon its creation would become the most advanced TSMC plant not based in Taiwan.[61]

Like the US and its allies, China has also aimed to build its own semiconductor manufacturing capabilities, investing in fabrication plants. For example, TSMC has also set up a plant equal to the one in Washington in China.[62] In response to this, the US has aimed to restrict China's technological development and onshoring of Taiwanese semiconductor manufacturing, which could threaten US national security if used for military applications. For example, the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) strengthened export controls in October 2022, aiming to restrict Chinese artificial intelligence and semiconductor capabilities and advancements.[63] Most recently, on December 2nd, 2024, the US curbed semiconductor exports to 140 Chinese companies, including the Technology Group, a chip equipment maker.[64] China has responded by banning exports of gallium, germanium, and antimony, critical minerals that have "widespread military applications."[65]

Given the semiconductor industry's significant geopolitical implications, it became a central issue during the 2024 presidential race and a prominent topic in the American public's conscience. While President-elect Donald Trump has stated that significant changes are needed within the industry to ensure its security, he has also continuously bashed the CHIPS Act, claiming that the act lacks effectiveness and that only rich companies will profit off of the proposed investments.[66] When he comes into office, Trump will likely enact his promised 60 percent tariff on all Chinese imports, which he believes will prevent the purchase of the newly expensive semiconductors from overseas, while also encouraging innovation among domestic manufacturers.[67] However, "imposing tariffs on partners like Taiwan, whose exports to the US have surged thanks to Nvidia, would harm silicon valley too," meaning that domestic production could decline as a result.[68] As exemplified by these debates, it is clear that the solution to semiconductor security, both in the US and abroad does not have a simple solution. However, the sheer vitality of the industry in the world of technology ensures that discussion will endure, and more solutions will be found as companies and countries work together.

A View from Ankara: Turkey's Geopolitical Situation

By Ben Scharr-Weiner and Oliver Brazda

Legend

- <1000 Turkish Soldiers Stationed
- 1000-10,000 Turkish Soldiers Stationed
- 10,000-20,000 Turkish Soldiers Stationed
- 20,000+ Turkish Soldiers Stationed

In 2016, an attempted coup d'état took place in Turkey, which nearly succeeded in ousting the democratically elected president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, from power. The coup was halted after significant opposition from the public, and subsequently stamped out. The United States, alongside much of Europe, was particularly slow to condemn the coup, fomenting the belief within Turkey that the United States had conspired against Turkish democracy. Erdoğan holds that the Gulenists, led by Fetullah Gulen–a former ally turned political rival–orchestrated the coup. America's refusal to extradite Gulen (who at the time lived in the United States), citing a lack of evidence, only exacerbated tensions. Furthermore, defense disputes loomed large. After negotiations with the United States to purchase the U.S. Patriot missile defense system failed, Turkey pivoted to Russia, purchasing its S-400 missile defense system. The United States subsequently canceled Turkey's planned purchase of F-35s (a new American fighter jet), maintaining that F-35 exposure to S-400 systems would enable the S-400 to adapt to counter F-35s. As a result of these disputes, anti-American rhetoric among Turkish politicians has soared, contributing to a negative public perception of America among Turks.

Ukrain

Safe Route for Grain Exports from Ukraine Established in 2022 Grain Deal

Turk

Istanbul

Turk

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo

Albania

Greece

Turk

Libya has been embroiled in an ongoing civil war since 2014. Turkey first intervened in the conflict in 2020, in support of the UN-backed "Government of National Accord" (GNA) which has been fighting continuously against a range of different factions, from the House of Representatives to the Islamic State. Turkey has maintained a constant military presence in Libya to provide logistical support to the GNA. It has also paid Syrian rebels to move to Libya and fight on behalf of the GNA. This has been viewed by analysts as an attempt by Turkey to expand its influence further into North Africa and begin to demarcate itself as a regional powerbroker.

Cyprus was divided in 1974 when Tur invaded under the justification that Greece sought to unify with Cyprus. Turkey is the state to recognize the independence of the breakaway territory called Northern Cypru which has often been termed a Turkish pup state by international observers. Northern Cyprus uses the Turkish Lira for its curren and is heavily reliant on financial backing imports from Ankara. In recent years, the chance of Cypriot reunification looks ever slimmer, as the island has transformed into frozen conflict zone.

Turkish-backed Government of National Accord

House of Representatives

Approximate Lines of Control as of Nov. 2024

Somalia

In the past few years, Turkey has developed a flowering relationship with Somalia. The Turkish armed forces have operated a military base and defense university in southern Somalia since 2017. Just this February, Turkey and Somalia concluded a landmark agreement establishing themselves as military partners for the foreseeable future, with Turkey pledging to train and repair the Somali navy in exchange for 30% of the revenue from Somalia's waters. Soon after, the two states signed yet another agreement which exchanged further Turkish assistance to the Somali navy for profit from Somalia's offshore petroleum reserves. This close security cooperation with Somalia represents Turkey's most successful diplomatic move into Sub-Saharan Africa.

Russia

Approximate Lines of Control as of Nov. 2024

In the three years since 2020, Azerbaijan, with Turkish backing, moved to redraw the map of the South Caucasus. Beyond a mere alliance of convenience, the Azeri-Turkish affinity is based on a shared identity. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliev famously called their relationship "one nation, two states." On the other hand, Armenia and Turkey have significant historical disputes, stemming in part from a Turkish refusal to characterize the 1915 Armenian Genocide as such. Following six years of bitter conflict, in 1994, amidst the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Armenian forces captured the ethnically Armenian territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, and surrounding Azeri lands, from Azerbaijan. As Azerbaijani economic and military power soared in the decades following, aided by Turkish and Israeli backing, it moved to recapture its lost territory. In 2020, Azerbaijan recaptured ethnically Azeri lands, encircling Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia rushed to freeze the conflict, placing peacekeepers within Nagorno-Karabakh. Amidst a distracted Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, with considerable Turkish support, Azerbaijan instituted a blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 ethnically cleansing its Armenian population and incorporating the territory into Azerbaijan.

Ankara has attempted a balancing act between Kyiv and Moscow since the outbreak of war in 2022. Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Erdoğan helped broker the landmark 2022 grain deal that allowed for grain exports to continue to flow through the Black Sea despite the conflict. This move was partly motivated by Erdoğan's desire to maintain access to cheap wheat for flour production, a major Turkish industry. Meanwhile, Turkey has maintained close commercial links with Russia through TurkStream–a major transport line for Russian gas to enter Eastern Europe. As of 2024, Turkey imports over 80% of its oil from Russia. Despite attempting to restrain NATO, including opposing Swedish ascension to the alliance, and maintaining trade relations with Russia, Turkey has emerged as a crucial arms supplier for Ukraine, fueling its drone force that has proven effective on the battlefield.

...Stream Gas Pipeline

BlueStream Gas Pipeline

Ankara, ...y's Capital

Approximate Territories in Turkey with Large Kurdish Populations

Armenia

Azerbaijan

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is a Marxist terror group seeking a united Kurdish state across the Middle East. Turkey's southeast houses a large Kurdish population, and since the 1980s, Turkey has been embroiled in fighting against the PKK. Killing thousands across the decades, during the 2010s terror across the country prompted a PKK crackdown. In Syria, Kurdish groups, namely the YPG and PYD, both of whom share strong links with the PKK, seized control over the northwest region of the country. In 2014, the United States partnered with the YPG and PYD and provided weapons and training in order to fight ISIS. American support for these groups, whom Turkey deems terrorists, severely damaged bilateral relations and remains a major point of contention in U.S.-Turkish relations.

Kurdish-led Forces

Assad Government

Approximate Lines of Control as of Nov. 2024

Anti-Assad Forces

Iraq

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When the Arab Spring protests erupted in 2011, Syria found itself in the throes of a brutal civil war that quickly became a proxy war pitting the Gulf States and Turkey, backed by tacit support from western democracies, against Iran, its proxies, and Russia. Turkey became an essential backer of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a group of liberal revolutionaries striving to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. In 2015, Russia directly intervened on behalf of an increasingly weak Assad, destroying Turkish-backed rebel positions en masse. Later that year, a crisis ensued. A Russian fighter jet was shot down after entering Turkish airspace, prompting a complete deterioration in relations between Turkey and Russia, which severely impacted the Turkish economy. When the diplomatic estrangement was resolved in 2016, Turkey's priorities had shifted from the newly impossible goal of empowering rebels to overthrow the Assad regime to countering the perceived Kurdish threat in Syria's north. In the decade since, Turkey began to prioritize preventing further escalations with Russia, intervening in Syria solely to create buffer areas against Kurdish militants. In late 2024, amid Hezbollah's destruction at the hands of Israel, and Russia's war in Ukraine, Turkish backed rebel forces began a major offensive, restarting Syria's stagnant civil war.

Since 2015, Turkey has maintained a permanent military presence in Qatar. It finished construction on its first military base in the Gulf state in 2017. Although a relatively small state, Qatar has been a close partner of Turkey. Qatari firms have financed an array of Turkish military projects while Turkey has supplied Qatar with armaments, including 100 tanks and over 500 armored combat vehicles.

Indian Ocean

UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon

Current Efforts and Future Impact

ARYA PATRI & OLIVIA FOSS

What is Peacekeeping?

According to the UN Peacekeeping website, peacekeeping helps countries transition from conflict to peace by providing security, supporting political processes, and promoting human rights. It is guided by the principles of consent, impartiality, and limited use of force, relying on global cooperation and legitimacy to address the most challenging environments.[1] More broadly, UN peacekeeping involves deploying military, police, and civilian personnel to conflict zones to maintain peace, protect civilians, and support post-conflict recovery, with operations authorized by the UN Security Council (UNSC). These operations can range from traditional peacekeeping to more complex, multidimensional missions that include political, humanitarian, and security tasks. However, UN peacekeeping has faced significant critiques, including the lack of sufficient resources, challenges of maintaining neutrality in complex conflicts, and difficulty securing political consensus within the UNSC, often leading to delays or incomplete mandates. Additionally, peacekeepers have been accused of failing to protect civilians and of engaging in misconduct, such as sexual exploitation and abuse. The effectiveness of peacekeeping is also questioned due to the sometimes limited authority and insufficient troop strength which undermines the ability to enforce peace and prevent violence.[2]

UNTSO (Observer Group Lebanon)

The UN's presence in Lebanon has been vast and extensive. Since almost its inception, the UN has been involved with Middle Eastern affairs and conflicts within Lebanon. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) is the UN's oldest peace keeping mission and has evolved throughout the decades. It was originally put in place to help

with the partition of Palestine but now has evolved into a peacekeeping and security force for the region.[3] The UNTSO was established in 1948 to monitor armistice agreements in the Middle East. In Lebanon, UNTSO operated under the Observer Group Lebanon to support peace and provide monitoring support to other UN operations within Lebanon and other Middle Eastern nations. The UN states that "the UNTSO currently provides military observers to two UN missions in the area: Observer Group Lebanon (OGL), which supports UNIFIL in south Lebanon, and Observer Group Golan (OGG), supporting UNDOF in the Golan [a plateau on the border of Syria]."[4]

However, despite its role in providing security during the various conflicts within the Middle East over the past 80 years, the UNSTO has its drawbacks. It has been criticized for its limited presence especially due to recent events. Additionally, the impact of UN politics and regional politics have severely inhibited the role the UNTSO has played in securing borders. Nevertheless, there are equal criticisms about the UNSTO's closed military crossing points as well as sealed "access points" on the Golan.[5] The overall theme of issues, which will be discussed further, is too many troops and not enough results.

UNOGIL (United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon)

The UNOGIL formed in May 1958 to monitor Lebanon's borders and prevent illegal arms infiltration during a period of political crisis. During this conflict, civil unrest erupted in Lebanon after President Camille Chamoun announced plans to amend the Constitution to allow his re-election. The conflict, starting in Tripoli, spread across Beirut and northern areas near Syria, evolving into a near civil war. Lebanon accused the United Arab

Republic (UAR) of inciting rebellion by supplying arms and personnel from Syria. The UNSC addressed Lebanon's request, initially postponing debate to allow mediation by the League of Arab States. When mediation failed, the UNSC adopted Resolution 128, establishing the UNOGIL to monitor and prevent illegal arms inflows across Lebanese borders. By October of that same year, this UN mission was disbanded due to agreements with the Jordanian government and a withdrawn complaint from Lebanon in order to maintain relations with the UAR.[6] Overall, the mission was deemed a success, given the conflict wass assuaged and tensions were reduced for the time being.

UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon)

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was initiated in 1978 and spawned from the UNTSO to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and help restore peace. UNIFIL's role expanded after the 2006 Lebanon war to monitor a cessation of hostilities, support the Lebanese Armed Forces, and ensure the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line remains free of unauthorized armed personnel.[7] The UN reports that under the UNSC Resolution 1701, UNIFIL's role expanded significantly to monitor hostilities and support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Peacekeepers from 41 countries conduct daily ground and air patrols, supported by a Maritime Task Force patrolling Lebanon's coast to prevent illegal arms entry. The Blue Line marking project, begun in 2007, involves demining efforts and placing blue barrels to reduce cross-border friction.[8]

The UNIFIL still remains and has just reissued a mandate due to belief of ongoing threats and security issues due to conflicts with Hezbollah and Israel, despite political protest within the UNSC. However its impact is severely limited as it can no longer enforce UNSC Resolutions (in which both Israel and Hezbollah have violated the UNSC Despite UN presence).[9] The conflict has continued — facing an escalation recently amidst the ongoing war that Israel is a part of. As of now, the death toll has surpassed 3,000 in the past 3 months and tensions are rising.[10] The significance and the value of the UNIFIL has

been called due to its cost and the continuation of the ongoing conflict.

Soldiers of UNIFIL's Multinational Force Mobile Reserve Unit man a checkpoint. (Source: John Isaac, UNIFIL)

Future Implications for Peacekeeping:

The future of UN peacekeeping, as shown by operations like UNIFIL and UNTSO in Lebanon, will reflect the complexities of modern conflicts. Peacekeepers will need to navigate challenges posed by non-state actors, political fragmentation, and fragile state institutions. In Lebanon, peacekeepers not only monitor ceasefires and patrol borders, but also provide support in rebuilding infrastructure, aiding political reconciliation, and ensuring protection of civilians. This evolving role reflects global peacekeeping missions, as peacekeepers are increasingly tasked with addressing weak governance and economic instability. As UN peacekeeping shifts toward conflict prevention and early intervention, technology, like drones, surveillance systems, and AI, play a larger role in monitoring and providing real-time data for early-warning systems.[11] However, these technologies introduce ethical and security concerns, particularly regarding privacy and vulnerability of cyberattacks. In Lebanon, the challenge is not only monitoring the cessation of hostilities but also managing regional dynamics, such as the influence of Hezbollah and tensions with Israel, which often undermine peace efforts. As UN peacekeeping will increasingly tackle threats like terrorism and the collapse of state institutions, future missions will need greater coordination between military, political, and humanitarian actors. Operations will need to address both immediate threats and the underlying causes of conflict.[12]

The Political Geography of the Middle East

Can Land Influence Political Culture?

DERIN ICINSEL

In the international sphere where an infinite number of variables determine states' politics, one fact remains permanent: geography. States are bounded by the geographies they inhabit, not just in terms of geopolitics and their proximity to other crucial actors, but also their topography, access to important natural resources, and their climates. Although foreign policy objectives and domestic political culture are generally credited to other factors, geography can be essential in explaining the foundational reasons for how societies interact with their governments and the external world. In demonstrating this reality, the Middle East serves as an ideal example as political cultures seem to be similar across the region, but diverge in important ways that can be explained through their geographies.

One approach to examining geography through the lens of political culture is through topography. A stark contrast appears upon comparing the topographic maps of Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon, for example, affecting their distinct political cultures. Egypt has a relatively stable, low-elevation terrain (Figure 1)[13] that has historically facilitated the centralization of authority and physical control of communication and transportation while also leading to a highly concentrated population. The population density map of

Egypt (Figure 2)[14] exhibits the incredibly compact population centered around the River Nile, due to the presence of more fertile land around the river resulting from flooding, tourism, and agriculture-related activity. This
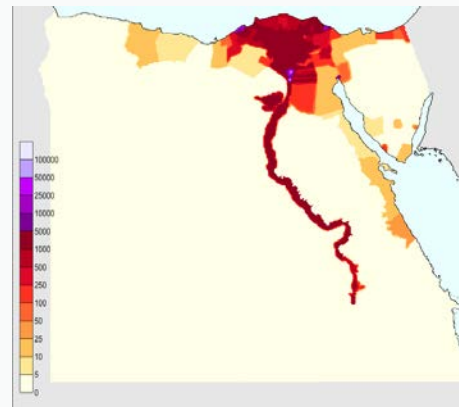

Figure 2: Population map of Egypt (Source: Vivid Maps)

geographical reality makes it practical for the government to surveil opposition political activity and impose regulations, while the population becomes homogeneous over time with ethnic and dialectal differences more and more blurred.

Contrary to Egypt's particularly centralising situation, the geographical realities of Iraq and Lebanon pose significant challenges to their governments. Terrorist groups such as ISIS[15] exemplify these problems, relying on underground tunnels or rocky caves in Northern Iraq to establish bases (Figure 3).[16] Similarly,
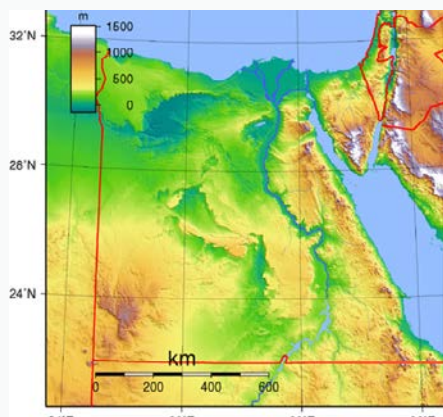

Figure 1: Topographic map of Egypt (Source: Wikimedia Commons)
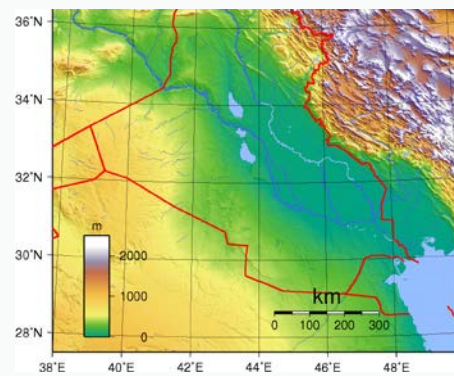

Figure 3: Topographic map of Iraq (Source: Wiki-Media Commons)

Lebanon is characterized by mountain ranges that have historically divided the populations into a variety of ethnic groups[17] instead of a largely homogenous, centralized community (Figure 4).[18] While the presence of the Nile River
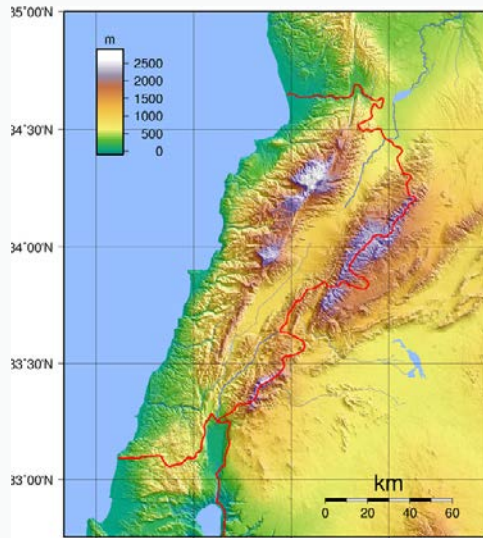

Figure 3: Topographic map of Lebanon
(Source: WikiMedia Commons)

in Egypt has led to greater centralization, promoting homogeneity and tolerance within the country, the existence of more topographical barriers in Iraq and Lebanon has led to a greater frequency of insurgent practices away from governmental authority and a more resistant political culture.

Another, more well-studied geographical factor and its effect on political culture is the presence of oil resources, prevalent especially in the Middle East since 1/3rds of the world's oil resources are found in the region.[19] Whether a country has large oil reserves or not determines

the kind of domestic and foreign policy they follow, with the rentier effect, when a country's primary income is through foreign payment for unproductive goods, being very much a determinant of human rights and political culture.[20] The United Arab Emirates is an interesting state to examine in this regard as they store 6 percent of the world's oil resources, and they gained a revenue of approximately $119 billion in net oil export revenue in 2022 alone.[21] The UAE's immense wealth from oil enabled it to forgo direct taxes, allowing the creation of a non-representative governing structure, based on the power of monarchs rather than the people. Combined with the fact that more than 85 percent of its population are non-nationals,[22] the absence of taxes decreases the UAE government's incentive to consider the interests of its residents—the result of which is a politically ineffective society with high rates of human rights abuses towards its immigrant workers.[23]

Although there are many complex, interrelated processes that create a political culture, geography, an invariable factor, can explain many of the essential dynamics within states. The Middle East is an exemplary microcosm of how geographic features encourage a state to develop in a specific direction and follow certain policies, and an analysis of any country from the geographical perspective might provide distinct insights that are generally not found through a conventional form of political research.

The Effort to Revive the Kurdish Language in Turkey

LEO DEENER

The Kurdish population of Turkey has been violently repressed since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded Turkey under Kemalism, an ideology of sweeping reform aimed at distinguishing the new nation from the Ottoman Empire and embracing Westernization. Symbolized by the

Six Arrows—Republicanism, Nationalism, Secularism, Statism, Reformism, and Folkism – Kemalism sought to create a secular, Western-style nation-state defined by Sunni Islam, the Turkish language, and ethnic Turkish identity.[24] This transformation marginalized non-Turkish groups within the new republic,

including Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and, most notably, the Kurdish population. The repression of Kurdish religion, culture, and specifically language stems from this nationalist vision. Despite the Kurdish homeland being the southeastern portion of Turkey, there are between 2 and 4 million Kurds in Istanbul.[25] The status of the Kurdish language in Istanbul is an ongoing issue. While the state has tried to repress the language as a means of repressing the people for many years, the Kurds have sought to revive it through traditional language revival programs. For the Kurdish people, language is a central vehicle of cultural heritage amid state repression. Recently, Turkey sought to loosen these restrictions to meet the human rights standards of joining the EU—there is even a national television station that broadcasts in Kurdish.[26] Still, the lasting impact of officially and politically banning a language cannot be undone.

In the face of linguistic repression, however, many nonprofits and NGOs have sprung up to publish, teach, and canonize the Kurdish language and its literature. I spoke to two of these organizations in Turkey: the Kurdish Research Association and Kiraathane. The Kurdish Research Association is the most important organization dedicated to Kurdish language and culture in Istanbul.[27] The

Kurdish Research Association (Source: Leo Deener)
association's main mission is the survival and strength of Kurdish languages. They teach three Kurdish dialects: Kurmanji, Zazaki, and Sorani, and publish instructional books in Kurdish. The organization also has an activist wing dedicated to advocating for education in the mother tongue across Turkey, challenging the government mandate that requires education to be conducted in Turkish.

In my interview with the director of the organization, she expressed that many Kurds from the heavily Kurdish southeastern region of Turkey, like herself, can speak the language from their parents speaking it to them at home, but are not literate in it. Most Kurds cannot read or write in Kurdish nor do they know the language's formal grammar. The Kurdish Research Association attempts to fill that gap through language arts education. She expressed that there is a general excitement around the Association's programs among Istanbul's Kurdish population as Turkey's Kurds *want* to preserve the language as a means of cultural survival. After the 2016 Turkish Coup attempt, Erdogan's regime cracked down on civil society and organizations it deemed a risk.[28] The Kurdish Research Association fell victim to this crackdown and was shut down in 2016 and they fear this could happen again at any moment. But activists like the woman I spoke to at the Association are willing to work through the persecution to fight for ethnic and cultural survival through linguistic revival.

Kurdish language advocacy in Istanbul is not only a mission of Kurdish-specific organizations. The other organization I spoke to, Kiraathane, fits this more general civil society makeup. Kiraathane is a liberal NGO based in Istanbul dedicated to promoting independent journalism and providing a common space for ideas to flow freely without the restrictive ire of the state.[29] Like the Kurdish Research Association, Kiraathane holds classes and journalism events in the Kurdish language. They are also working on publishing literary classics as a means of concretizing the grammar of the Kurdish language and preserving it for future generations. I interviewed a Kurdish employee at Kirathaane who expressed that though many municipalities in Turkey have piloted programs to teach Kurdish formally, many have been shut down by the Turkish government's implementation of the loyal trustee program. This is a national policy that replaces Kurdish mayors in the southeast with mayors deemed more sufficiently loyal to the state.[30] This has made the work of NGOs, like Kiraathane, even more important. The employee expressed a similar anxiety about their work being shut down by the government

at any time, but also was determined that their critical cultural heritage work must continue at any cost. These two NGOs represent the surface of the civil society in Turkey that is working to canonize, preserve, and promote Kurdish within Turkey. The mere presence of the organizations is fragile, but critical to the work of preserving a people's language and history.

The history of Kurds in Turkey is fraught with violent repression and cultural erasure. However, Kurds refuse to relinquish their history through linguistic erasure as they maintain a distinct identity as Turkey's largest ethnic minority. Despite the Turkish state's effort to erase the Kurdish language as a means of enforcing a policy of Turkish ethnic homogeneity, the work of NGOs, such as The Kurdish Research Association and Kiraathane, is proof that the Kurdish language, and therefore the Kurds, have not and will not vanish. They are an inspiring testament to the resiliency of the Kurdish people and to the NGO landscape in Istanbul and Turkey as a whole.

Gen Z's Unrest With Kenya's Economic Status Quo

MARY ANNA JOYCE

President William Ruto campaigned in 2022 on the promise of implementing economic policies that would pull Kenya's middle class out of poverty. Rather than carrying out this espoused agenda, Ruto continued adding to the national debt and mishandling loaned money from foreign governments and international organizations.[1] When the Finance Bill 2024 was announced by his administration, it was met with strong opposition from younger citizens—particularly Gen Z—because it proposed a regressive taxation regime on everyday necessities.[2] This summer, Gen Z responded through a series of political demonstrations that culminated in a raid of the Kenyan Parliament in late June. Not only did the actions of Kenya's youth result in the withdrawal of the tax bill, but it also became a catalyst for the restructuring of Ruto's internal cabinet and retooling of his economic agenda.

Prior to the protests, international governments played a key role in influencing Ruto's flawed economic agendas. The US and China were heavily invested in manipulating the Kenyan government to join their individual global supply chains. Through China's Belt and Road Initiative, the East Asian nation began lending money to Kenya to build out domestic railroad systems.[3] Instead of extending existing railways, Ruto mishandled these funds and created a new, inefficient railroad that only covered 50 percent of Kenyan land. The US also made great strides to influence Ruto: in late May, the US invited the Kenyan president for an honorary official state visit to strengthen US-Kenyan supply chains.[4] The question remains how the US will invest in Kenyan infrastructure moving forward, and how Ruto's government will allocate those funds. Without fully understanding the extent of Kenya's flawed economic management, both China and the US played "tug-of-war" with Kenya to strengthen their global supply chains.

The overwhelming debt crisis in Kenya juxtaposed with high government spending is the source of economic inefficiency.[5] Ruto was previously the deputy president to his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, from whom he inherited a debt-ridden economy still in recovery from the effects of COVID-19. Since 2022, Kenya's borrowing and spending costs have astronomically increased, precipitating a collapse in the value of its currency. The debt-to-GDP ratio has also risen drastically each year, with the numbers now exceeding 70 percent.[6] To combat this, Kenya received a conditional loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF Experts devised a domestic tax plan that would address the looming debt crisis and help Kenya repay its conditional debt. In order to please IMF interests, Ruto adopted the IMF-backed Finance Bill 2024.

That is when chaos ensued. Young Kenyans were shocked by the implications of Finance Bill 2024. Understandably, many were

concerned about the outsize influence of the IMF in Kenyan domestic politics. Despite being out of tune with Kenya's domestic economic atmosphere, the IMF had recommended a bill which directly taxed both middle-class and low-income individuals. The Finance Bill 2024 targeted everything from eggs, diapers, cooking oil, phones, and vehicles.[7] Despite previous Kenyan generations finding tribe identities as a source of political divide, Gen Z found unity in their shared discrimination due to these tax propositions. Ruto's administration also continued to spend public funds recklessly- the highest government officials and the First Lady were granted exorbitant budgets and amenities for their offices.[8] United by their distaste for Ruto's tax bill, nationwide protests began and Gen Z re-named Ruto "Zakayo," referring to the famous biblical tax collector Zaccheus.

On June 25th, after the tax bill passed in Parliament, Gen Z protesters stormed the Parliament building. Almost 40 people lost their lives.[9] Notwithstanding, the success of the protest was clear. A day after, on June 26th, President Ruto withdrew the tax bill and promised economic reform. Ruto's weakened state meant complete governmental reform within his administration was necessary to regain Gen Z's trust.

Though reforms are underway, time will only tell whether Ruto's reformed policies will influence the opinion of the masses. After the protests, Ruto created the Appropriations Bill 2024 to significantly reduce government spending and compensate for the lost tax revenue due to the withdrawn Finance Bill 2024.[10] In cutting federal spending by 177 shillings from the budget, he hoped to combat the rising debt crisis through incremental changes.[11] Additionally, Ruto re-appointed an entirely new Cabinet after gutting the previous one on July 11th, marking a renewed era of Ruto's presidency.[12]

Ruto's restructuring of his government was merciless, and he turned on some of his closest allies. When allegations that his deputy president, Ragathi Gachuaga, had aided and financially supported the protestors, came to light, Ruto was quick to call for his impeachment.[13] Ruto spared no resources in retaliation. He swiftly ignited Senate impeachment processes and Gachuaga was found guilty with a 2/3 majority. By reappointing a new deputy president, Ruto made it clear that he would not be undermined by Gen Z's political influence as he scrambled to cling to power.

Over the summer, Kenya's economic policy shifts sent a bold message: Gen Z has a voice in modern politics. This new generation not only changed the status quo, it transformed the direction of Ruto's entire presidency. Kenya is not the only nation recently rocked by the generation's political awakening, and many nations must account for this demographic as they make important governmental decisions. After all, Gen Z will be the future generation dealing with the repercussions of poor economic, social, and political agendas. If global leaders want to maintain public appeal, they must be prepared for what the new generation has to say.

Violence at Kenyan Parliament after Finance Bill passed (Source Capital FM Kenya)

From Democracy to Military Rule

The Rise of Coups in Francophone Nations

ALPHA TRAORE

In the past 3 years, a series of coups have rippled through Francophone nations in Africa. Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea in West Africa, have all experienced military uprisings that disrupted civilian-led governments. Each event puts a particular accent on the precarious state of governance, security, and democracy in these places commonly marked by complex colonial legacies and fraught post-independence histories.

In Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, escalating security crises driven by transnational terrorist threats have deepened public frustration with elected governments. Populations going through relentless violence and economic stagnation in their day-to-day lives tend to view military rule as a better path to restoring order and delivering security than democratic governments, which in their view have failed to do so.

For instance, in Mali, ongoing instability has devastated communities, threatening citizens' safety, livelihoods, and access to basic resources. Jihadist violence in the central and northern regions has displaced countless families, forcing entire villages to abandon their homes. According to a 2024 report by MSF, entire villages have been abandoned due to these attacks by jihadists, with displaced families seeking refuge in overcrowded urban areas with minimal support. Such conditions drove many Malians to support a military coup in 2021, hoping it would finally bring the security that civilian administrations had long struggled to deliver.[14]

In Burkina Faso, despite campaign promises to prioritize the fight against jihadism, President Kabore's administration failed completely to counter extremist threats. Throughout 2021, Burkinabe forces remained ill-equipped to address the insecurity. The number of incidents more than doubled between 2020 and 2021 to over 1,100 attacks—greater than the number of violent events recorded in Mali and Niger together over the same period, according to ICCT.[15] This terrorist violence triggered the displacement of nearly 1.5 million people within Burkina Faso, as well as widespread instability in the country. In June 2022, the tragic Solhan massacre occurred and claimed at least 132 lives.[16] That was the breaking point for many Burkinabe citizens. The reasons behind civilians being targeted in this attack were attributed to a combination of factors. Heni Nsaiba, a senior researcher at Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), explains that one factor is retaliation against civilians suspected of collaborating with security forces.[17] Deeply divided security forces struggled to address the crisis. By the end of 2021, protests erupted across the country, demanding decisive action. Following this mounting discontent, Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba led a military coup in January 2022.

In Niger, President Bazoum was overthrown by General Tchiani and the Presidential Guard in 2023, making the third central Sahel state to succumb to military rule after Mali and Burkina Faso.[18] The Junta justified its actions by citing the deteriorating security situation, even though the country had fared better than its neighbors in reducing levels of violence. However, persistent threats from groups like IS Sahel, JNIM, and Boko Haram continued to destabilize vast regions of the country, including Tillaberi, Diffa, and Tahoua. Public frustration with relentless violence, coupled with economic hardship and anti-French sentiments fueled by perceptions of foreign interference, created fertile ground for the coup's acceptance among segments of the population.[19]

While all the other three countries dealt with escalating security crises, Guinea faced a different challenge rooted in political governance and democratic principles. As Guinea's first democratically elected president in 2010, former President Alpha Condé's controversial attempt to run for a third term in 2020 was seen as a betrayal of public trust. His decision to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a third term in office was immediately faced by protests all over the country. This move was widely perceived as a violation of democratic principles and an attempt to consolidate personal power, which ironically undermined the very democratic processes that allowed him to lead the country for ten years. The ensuing protests, characterized by calls for constitutional reform and the restoration of democratic norms, were met with violent repression by security forces, further intensifying public anger. As political tensions went up and opposition figures were increasingly sidelined or arrested, the military, led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, seized power in September 2021, just days after Condé's re-election in a contested poll.

Historically, the persistence of these instabilities is tied to the unresolved legacy of colonialism. As Frederick Cooper, a historian specializing in African and colonial history explains, "Africa was subjugated by the aggressors in ways that continue to hold it back even today, but not without putting up a fierce and brave resistance for the most part."[20] This legacy disrupted traditional governance systems, imposed arbitrary borders that continue to fuel ethnic conflicts, and established economies designed to serve colonial powers rather than fostering self-sufficiency. Newly independent nations inherited weak institutions, underdeveloped infrastructure, and limited educational systems, making it challenging to establish stable democracies or thriving economies.[21]

Furthermore, Jean-Francois Bayart, a prominent scholar on African politics, observes, "the salient feature of the last three centuries is not the growing integration of Africa into the western world economy but, on the contrary, the latter's inability to pull the continent into its magnetic field."[22] This observation underscores a paradox: while Africa remains marginalized in global economic systems, former colonial powers like France continue to exert influence through mechanisms like economic aid and military intervention. For instance, in 2014 France came up with Operation Barkhane in Mali, aimed to combat terrorism.[23] Though it was widely unpopular among the Malian population, it lasted for 8 years. Instead of fostering long-term stability, it only reinforced dependency on external powers, hindering Mali's ability to assert full autonomy.

This external presence often breeds local resentment, especially when post-independence leaders are perceived as more accountable to foreign interests than to their own people. Bayart's insight that "the relationship of power to social stratification is clearly somewhat different, now that the governing circles of the continent are more or less integrated into the world capitalist economy" underscores the complexity of contemporary political dynamics.[24] Consequently, military coups are not only a direct response to immediate governance issues, but also a symptom of deeper, unresolved tensions stemming from a colonial past that left nations divided, economically dependent, and politically fragile.

These events raise critical questions about the future of democracy and sovereignty in regions where military leaders, often in their 40s, claim to represent popular aspirations more effectively than civilian administrations. International actors, including France and the wider European Union, find themselves in a difficult position, uncertain whether to condemn these military takeovers outright or attempt engagement in hopes of fostering stability. Traditional responses—sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and conditional aid often exacerbate economic hardship without resolving underlying political grievances. The outcomes in these regions will resonate far beyond their borders, challenging international norms and prompting a re-evaluation of how global powers engage with nations striving to reconcile their past with their aspirations for a sovereign and democratic future.

The Other Southern Border

JULIA ROTTENBERG & EMILIA FERREIRA

What is the Darién Gap?

The process of immigrating to the US starts long before migrants arrive at the border. Around 3,000 miles south of the US-Mexico border lies another border: "The Darién Gap." As the only land-based pathway that connects South and Central America, the 66-mile jungle straddling Panama and Colombia, has been a historically common route for migrants traveling up from South America. Despite its dangers, the route has become drastically popular—over half a million people crossed the Darien Gap in 2023, compared to just around 22,000 in 2019.[1]

Who crosses?

While migrants from Venezuela, Ecuador, and Haiti represent the largest share of those crossing, the Darien Gap is unique in providing a crossroad for migrants from around the world, including those from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Many migrants flee treacherous conditions at home, only to meet similarly precarious situations on the trail. The most represented countries among the Gap's migrants have all faced internal strife—economic and democratic collapse in Venezuela, political instability in Ecuador, and environmental crises in Haiti — that lead many to seek asylum in the US. About one in five migrants are children,[2] and the lack of medical assistance and frequent injuries along the untamed jungle trail lead many families to separate.

Migrants face not only natural dangers, but also manmade ones. Drug cartels, namely Colombia's "Gulf Clan," is a neo-paramilitary group that makes millions smuggling migrants through the Gap. The Gulf Clan exploits both the system and the migrants—while the Clan is responsible for helping many migrants cross the Gap, they are also responsible for much of the abuse, assault, financial cost, and the trafficking the migrants endure and face while crossing.[3]

How did we get here?

The crisis at the Darién Gap is no accident. Through visa laws and requirements, paths of migration, and heavy restrictions, the Darién Gap's prevalence and precariousness have been manufactured. The geographical location of the Darién Gap makes regulation difficult. Coordination is required between Panama and Colombia, and there has historically been little interest in tackling a problem of its complexity and magnitude. Additional coordination is required from the US, the main destination country for those embarking on the long journey up Latin America.

US immigration policy has been continuously harsh and unwelcoming towards migrants, most recently with the pandemic-era policy Title 42, which allowed border security and immigration systems to turn away thousands of migrants for COVID control and send them back to a transit country, typically Mexico, or to their country of origin until 2023. While US policy aggressively attempts to stop growth in border crossings, an approach that is likely to heighten under President Trump, migration is unlikely to slow.[4]

Panama has, until recently, taken a relaxed approach to regulating the border while still allowing human rights organizations to aid migrants upon the end of their journey through the Gap and providing humanitarian assistance. However, no forceful approach has been taken in respect to cartel activity.

What now?

Efforts to address the Darién Gap crisis require multi-level collaboration, yet disparate interests and logistical challenges often hinder effectiveness. Panama's 2024 presidential election saw President Jose Raul Mulino voted into office, signaling an aggressive turning point in policy concerning the Darién. Mulino has expressed openness to building a route through the Gap controlled by the government—which

would require pushing cartels out.[5] However, this strategy would require cooperation with Colombia, the primary entrance point into the Darién and a country that has been inconsistent in its migration policies. It has coordinated cooperative discussions with Panama, yet its attempts to address border security are often complicated by organized crime networks like the Gulf Clan. NGOs have been critical in providing humanitarian aid to migrants along the life-threatening path, but have little agency in mitigating the deeper policy failings that force people into the Darién in the first place. Additionally, a second term Trump administration will likely continue a harsh border policy with Mexico and continue to turn away migrants en masse.

The issues surrounding the Darién Gap are unlikely to be resolved without comprehensive immigration reform in the US, Mexico, and Latin America as a whole that reflects the reality of the region. The Darién is a part of a larger problem, which is the failings of a multi-country immigration system that cannot be fixed with one policy, action, or initiative. While an American "open border" policy would not remedy the many causes behind the Darién Gap, it is clear that the current discrepancies in border policies between the many countries involved in these migration routes do not benefit the migrants nor the respective countries' foreign policy agenda. Without coordinated and comprehensive reforms and an increased investment in safe, legal migration routes, the humanitarian and security crises in the Darién Gap are likely to persist.[6]
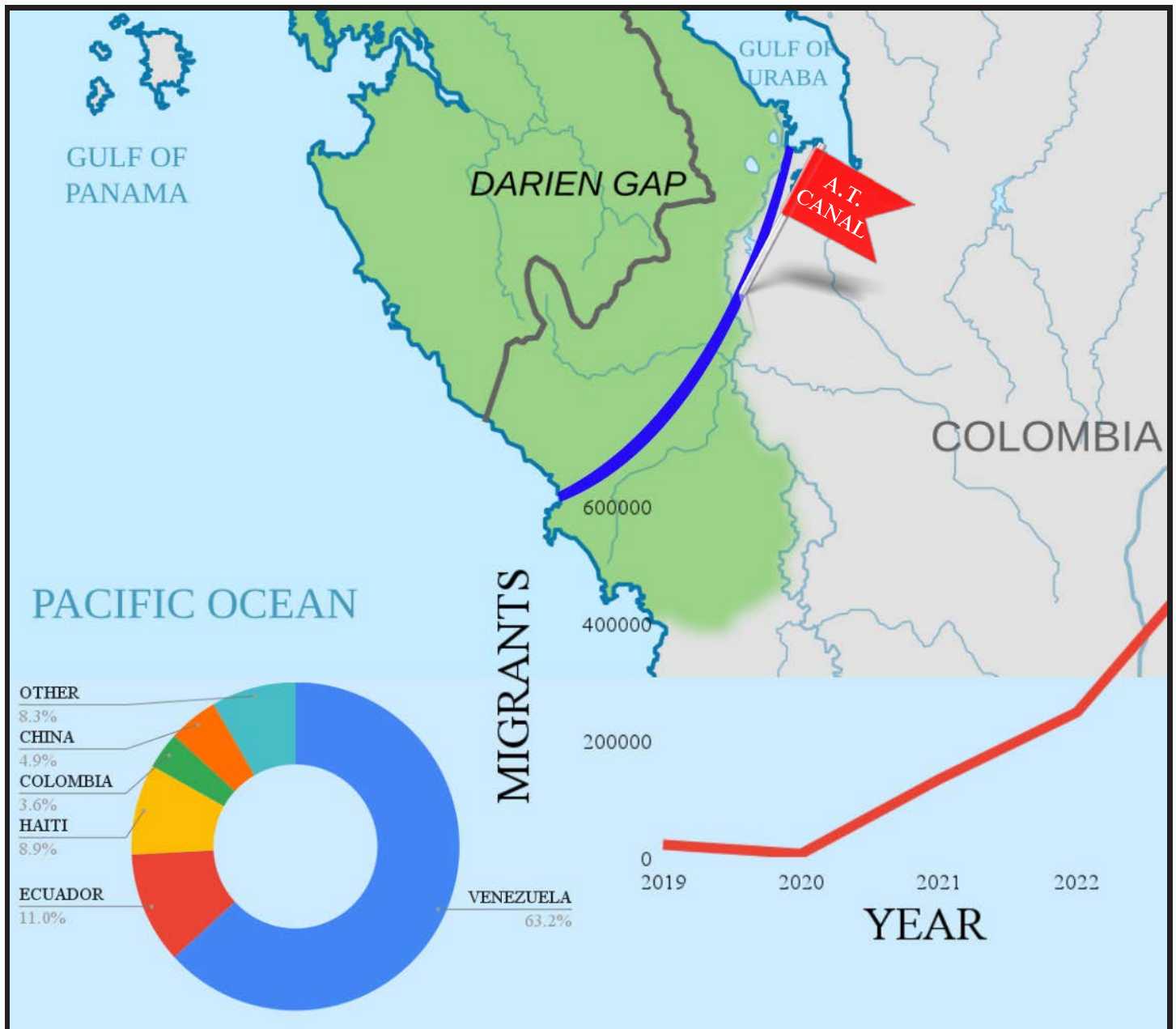

Figure 1: Map of the Darien Gap and plans for the Atrato-Truando Canal (blue). Adapted from Wikimedia Commons.

Atrata Truandó For Another Go?

LORD TOUSSAINT

Time's up. There is a strategic necessity for the US to identify potential alternatives to the Panama Canal. For decades, the issue of the canal's size constraints, and thus its viability as a shipping lane, has loomed large to observers of global trade. As of late, though, the primary cause for concern has been its dwindling capacity. In December of 2023, a historic low of 22 ships per day were able to cross the canal, down from the usual 36-38 ships per day.[7] But *why?* It so happens that the canal and Panama's people are competing for fresh water. Each time a vessel crosses the isthmus, 51 million gallons of fresh water are released from the Lake Gatún reservoir. Millions of gallons that *could* be going to the people of Panama, for over half of Panama's drinking water comes from this one reservoir. Last year, unprecedented drought conditions[8] afflicted the country as a result of the El Niño phenomenon, a warming of the Pacific's waters that dramatically reduces rainfall, resulting in the reservoir reaching its lowest levels since "at least 1965."[9] As a consequence of the shortage, a tradeoff had to be made and, at one point, "more than 160 ships were stuck at anchor at both ends," of the canal.[10] Climate change is expected to make these dry spells more pronounced as the waters of the Pacific warm with increasing intensity and regularity.

The Panama Canal Authority knows this.

According to Panamanian engineers, the solution is to create a second reservoir to feed the canal by building a new dam at the Río Indio. A recent ruling by Panama's supreme court will enable the construction of this reservoir which will lie beyond the canal's traditional watershed. Authorities are moving ahead with the project, "which is expected to take six years and cost $1.6 billion."[11] Still, as the issues outlined compound, efforts to find *other* "paths between the seas" are being taken seriously for the first time in decades. In December of 2023 Mexico inaugurated a railway connecting the ports of Salina Cruz and Coatzacoalcos.[12] This is part of what the Mexican government under A.M.L.O. has dubbed the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which it estimates will move 1.4 million twenty foot equivalent units per year, half of Panama's capacity, by 2033.[13] If time constraints in Panama persist, this alternative may prove competitive. On the continent below, Colombia is revitalizing its Pacific and Caribbean rail corridors which it may seek to link.[14] Further afield, the countries of the Southern Cone are developing their own highway based corridor that will link port Santos in Brazil with ports Antofagasta and Iquique in Chile via an unprecedented road network that will run through Paraguay and Argentina.[15] The route will deny Panama revenues from the emerging lithium trade.

Prior to this ongoing renaissance, Chinese investors moved toward a more radical goal altogether by reviving an age-old proposition: The construction of an interoceanic canal through Nicaragua, this time, to rival Panama's. In 2012, the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Investment Corporation (H.K.N.D.) was founded by Chinese billionaire Wang Jing to enact the vision outlined. In 2013, H.K.N.D. secured a concession from the Ortega government, but, for a bevy of reasons, including mass protests, dire ecological concerns associated with the project, and China's 2015 stock market crash, construction never broke ground and H.K.N.D. shuttered in 2018. This Chinese soiree—however laughable it may seem—still begs the question of whether building a second canal to address the sustainability concerns associated with Panama is desirable or even *possible.*

The question has been asked before. Only 35 years after the Panama Canal's completion, the US came to the conclusion that it could be done. American engineers were contemplating the construction of such a canal in the Colombian department of Chocó, using the Atrato and Truandó rivers (See Figure 1 on page 51). In 1945, the 79th Congress commissioned an investigation of "the capacity and security of the Panama Canal."[16] A subsequent 1949 report "describes the investigation and study made by the Governor of the Panama Canal to meet the future needs of interoceanic commerce and national defense, including an evaluation of the possibilities of a canal at other locations."[17]

Policymakers a mere generation removed from the construction of what was then the greatest operating feat of human engineering on the planet, wittingly or unwittingly, contrived solutions to challenges that would not begin to manifest themselves until the following century. The report's conclusion was that, "the construction of a *sea-level* canal on the Atrato-Truandó Route is practicable."[18] In 1984, Colombia's Congress ordered its construction.[19]

No one broke ground.

Perhaps a second look is in order.

Economics of Bukele

THOMAS BORDER & ALEXA LICAIRAC

With its 6.3 million inhabitants, El Salvador is the smallest and yet most densely populated country in Central America.[20] Historically, its economy has been largely agricultural, until periods of industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s.[21] By 2019, when Nayib Bukele came to power, El Salvador was struggling with a large national debt, little foreign investment, and competition from Asia in their primary industries.[22]

Nayib Bukele grew up in a relatively wealthy family. He entered the Salvadoran political scene in 2012 at the age of 31, running and winning the race for mayor of a small town called Nuevo Cuscatlan.[23] In 2019, Bukele won El Salvador's presidential election running under his own Nuevas Ideas party. In his first term as president, Bukele, self-titled the "coolest dictator in the world," waged war on the rampant gang violence that plagued the country. As a result, El Salvador went from having one of the highest homicide rates globally in 2022 to its lowest rate ever in 2023, with only 2.4 homicides per 100,000.[24]

However, Bukele's method of accomplishing this is far from what many would view as typical or even ethical. Bukele's legislature approved what is called a "state of exception," under which police could arbitrarily imprison anyone with suspected gang relations.[25] Over 80,000 Salvadorans are currently imprisoned in inhuman conditions: tortured or deprived of food, water, and healthcare.[26] Amnesty International cautions that El Salvador is undergoing a "gradual replacement of gang violence with state violence."[27]

Bukele loyalists have been key contributors to the erosion of democracy in the country, reinterpreting the constitution in 2021 to allow an incumbent Bukele to serve a second consecutive term after earning 84.6 percent of the vote in February 2024.[28] Mr. Del Cid, president of the neighborhood's community association, echoing the thoughts of the average Salvadoran isolated from the injustices of the system, is in support of Bukele: "He took the action that we needed him to take."[29]

What's Going Wrong: Economic Turbulence

In his second term, Bukele is setting his sights on 'curing' the economy. According to the World Bank, the poverty rate in El Salvador increased from 26.8 percent in 2019 to 30.3 percent in 2023 primarily due to stagnant wages and unemployment.[30] The monthly food

basket has increased from \$200 to \$246, while the minimum wage has stayed at \$234 per month for agricultural workers.[31]

To tackle rising food costs for Salvadorans, Bukele has promised to eliminate tariffs and taxes on imported goods, despite the fact that basic food items already have minimal tariffs due to free trade agreements. He also blames price-gouging business mafias, threatening importers with the same fate as those he suspected of gang affiliation. In actuality, the rise in food prices is primarily due to increased dependence on imports. In 2020, Bukele canceled 5 agricultural programs that incentivized local production of staple foods.[32] Before Bukele took office, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock projected 84.62 percent self-sufficiency in staple grains for 2019. Since then, production has declined, culminating in 2024 when El Salvador recorded its lowest production of basic grains since 2017. This overreliance on imported goods has led to the loss of 51,000 jobs in the increasingly weakening agricultural sector.[33]

Moreover, the government has also severely restricted public access to information by taking control of the Institute of Access to Information (IAIP), once an independent institution. This has allowed Bukele to block access to any and all government documents, creating a culture of secrecy that permeates across all sections of the government. Notably, in 2021, the legislative assembly declared expenses, purchases, and payrolls sensitive, allowing corruption to be more easily hidden.[34] In 2023, for example, the mayor of Nahuizalco threw an extravagant Christmas party where he arrived by helicopter accompanied by Santa Claus. Soon thereafter, the city hall concealed all information pertaining to the costs of the party. The World Economic Forum estimates that globally, corruption costs five percent of the world's GDP. Additionally, according to the IMF, "corruption increases income inequality and poverty through lower economic growth."[35]

Furthermore, as part of Bukele's plans to turn El Salvador into an international financial hub, he has laid the groundwork for what he calls "Bitcoin City," a tax haven supported by cryptocurrency and supplied with geothermal energy from the Conchagua Volcano.[36] While El Salvador became the first country to accept Bitcoin as legal tender in 2021, it remains largely irrelevant to the average Salvadoran concerned with how they will afford their basic needs. In La Union, a coastal town near the volcano, the government is actively displacing citizens to make room for the project. For example, plantations are to be converted into runways for an airport, access to mangrove fishing areas will be removed, and foreign businesses are already claiming to have purchased land that Salvadorans live on, effectively evicting them. It is unknown how much taxpayer money has been used on these crypto-related projects, but Bukele has expressed hope that these developments will help turn El Salvador into the "Singapore of the Americas."[37]

Looking Forward: 'Curing' the Issue

Bukele's economic policies aim to reduce the dependency on external debt, expand El Salvador's technological capabilities, and deal with the food crisis. In July of this year, Bukele also revealed two parts of his six part economic plan to revitalize El Salvador's economy. The first part of the plan aims to lower food costs by opening farmer markets. His second measure is the construction of the country's first industrial park: "Altius Tech Park," which will require \$70 million of

POLO

EVERYONE KNOWS ME AS 'THE WORLD'S COOLEST DICTATOR'

BUT MY FRIENDS CALL ME 'PHILOSOPHER KING'

ART BY ALEXA LICAIRAC

private investment.[38] He also expressed that the 2025 budget will be completely financed by El Salvador, though the validity of this statement is still uncertain. Furthermore, experts at Fitch "believe these ambitious measures face execution risks," citing concerns about Bukele's essentially unrestricted ability to implement spending policies in full with little governmental opposition.[39]

The details of Bukele's economic plan remain elusive, leaving Salvadorans to wonder: will his ambitious vision lift the nation out of its economic turbulence, or will the mysteries surrounding his policies deepen the challenges ahead?

Walk the Line

Demarcating Physical and Geopolitical Post-Soviet Space

MAXWELL TURNACIOGLU

On May 23rd, 2024, Estonia's border with Russia partially disappeared.[1] Russian border guards took navigational buoys marking the Estonian side of the Narva River, leaving the exact maritime boundary between the two states unclear. Coincidentally, the Russian defense ministry's website had featured a potential revision of their border in the eastern Baltic Sea, which similarly vanished a few days earlier. While the buoys were eventually returned, the message was clear: Russia is unhappy with its western borders, now abutting thousands of kilometers of NATO territory.

This incident is among many in a slew of provocations by a discontented Russia, which began almost a decade ago but have intensified following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Working in tandem, the Belarussian and Russian governments have constructed a complex supply chain, bringing Middle Eastern migrants directly to their borders with Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states.[2] Once successfully enticed into immigrating to Russia and Belarus, soldiers force migrants—once families including women and children, now primarily young men—to border checkpoints where they are pressured to illegally cross. This weaponization of migrants has become increasingly violent and blatant in nature, as border guards have given migrants wire cutters and axes to break through fences, targeted specifically "high terrorist risk"

migrants for crossings,[3] and distracted border guards with laser beams and strobe lights. The culmination of this extensive weaponized migration campaign has resulted in frustration and annoyance among Eastern European leadership, leaving minimal material damage. Russia has engaged in a litany of other subversive activities. The largest Finnish utility and banking companies have been hit with daily cyberattacks and communications disruptions, straining operations.[4] Furthermore, Kaliningrad has been used as a base for broadcasting GPS interference signals, jamming navigational capabilities of flights across the Baltics and ultimately grounding two planes in Tartu.[5] These actions are symbolic for the most part – planes, for example, can usually fly without GPS navigation—but they are sinister nonetheless.

The extension of Russia's power beyond its physical borders blurs the geopolitical significance of the borders themselves. By abusing the recognized responsibilities of a sovereign state–maintaining concrete, secure physical boundaries and regulating migration — Russia controverts its status as a responsible state, leaving its degree of participation and cooperation with international norms entirely unclear. Putin hopes to cultivate a fear through his subversion of the international regime—the fear of the unknown. Finland's Minister of the Interior, Lulu Ranne, expressed this

agitation last month, worrying that she could not know "what is true and what is not."[6] Like Schrödinger's cat, their exact position is indeterminate until they act. Moreover, the scale, sophistication, and pernicious repetition of this "hybrid war", as Poland's Donald Tusk regularly refers to it, nurtures an image of an omnipotent Russian state.[7] The heavy investment of time and resources into this rhetorical warfare displays an obsession with this image. Always on attack, always one step ahead–this is Putin's dream of perception.
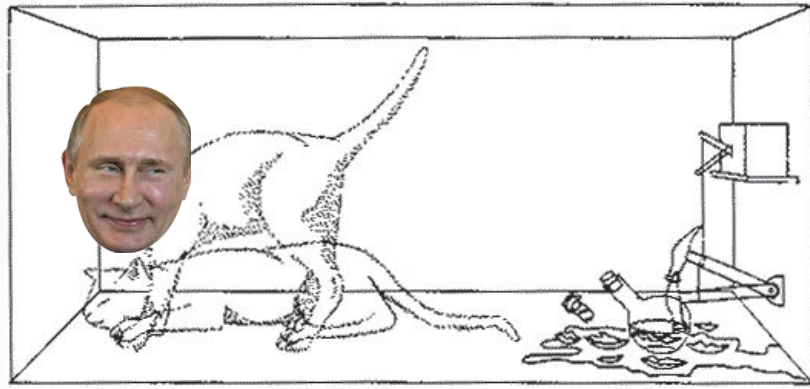
Putin as Schrödinger's cat (Source: Adapted from University of Toronto)

"By abusing the recognized responsibilities of a sovereign state–maintaining concrete, secure physical boundaries and regulating migration –Russia controverts its status as a responsible state, leaving its degree of participation and cooperation with international norms entirely unclear."

While his dream may have been superficially realized–Russophobia among the EU and NATO grows stronger than ever in the post-Soviet era–the material consequences of this policy may prove a curse to any hopes of a return to Russia's days as a great power. The eastern members of NATO have proven themselves to be true European hedgehogs, much like those that burrow and scurry across the vast expanse of forested Finnish borderland. As they are poked, prodded, and otherwise threatened, NATO's eastern front has begun to extend its quills in defense. Along the Lithuanian border, a different variety of hedgehogs now soak in the Baltic sun: the anti-tank variety.[8]

Simply put, Russian signaling towards aggression has been met with equivalent European signaling towards defense. Prior to the 2022 invasion and Russia's increased border activity, NATO's border was somewhat advantageous to Russia. The physical border remained largely demilitarized, as there were few physical fortifications and open crossings between the Baltics and Finland.[9][10]

However, Russia's indeterminate state of aggression has galvanized European states, thus disrupting this advantageous state of affairs. The accession of Finland to NATO in 2022 and its subsequent bilateral defense pact with the US actually increased American military presence along the Russian border by opening up equipment and munitions storage depots.[11] Poland has combined its "Eastern Shield" project with the "Baltic Defense Line" into a single proposal for EU funding to fortify the Russian border, dedicating billions of euros to the construction of bunkers, barriers, and warehouses,[12] and bolstering its 118 mile metal wall on the Belarussian border with a 600 foot buffer zone.[13] Lithuania, currently possessing an air force of only five planes, has begun calls for additional NATO forces in the country, while committing to spend 600 million euros over the next decade on mines and anti-tank obstacles along the border.[14] Russia has tested European borders and those borders have simply closed.

As Putin stresses the metaphysical boundaries of NATO's European presence, attempting to grow existence beyond his material bounds, border states have responded with the material and refused to engage with the immaterial. While subverting statehood can be a powerful tool for evoking fear, mines and barbed wire are difficult to surmount in reality. As Russia has shown in Ukraine, its omnipotent rhetoric is constrained by their military capabilities, thus the physical border truly bounds the normative one. Russia has lost control of the new iron curtain.

Ask the Experts

A Visit to Fletcher on Russian-West Economic Warfare

ZOE RAPTIS & GRAYTON GOLDSMITH

Hemispheres thanks the Fletcher Russia and Eurasia Program for extending an invitation to cover their September 2024 conference: *Global Repercussions of Russia-West Economic Warfare.* The conference brought some of the foremost Russia-Ukraine scholars to Tufts' campus, and addressed critical questions regarding the interplay of sanctions, energy markets, and the global financial system. It was through this conference we were able to conduct the following interviews.

Peter Harrell

Peter E. Harrell is a nonresident fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, focusing on issues of US domestic economic competitiveness, trade policy, and the use of economic tools in US foreign policy. He has also previously served in the US White House as senior director for international economics.

Margarita Balmaceda

Margarita Balmaceda is a professor of diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University and an Associate at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, focusing on post-Soviet energy politics and energy-industrial supply chains.

Edward Fishman

Edward Fishman is a Professor of International Affairs at Columbia University and a Senior Research Scholar at the Center on Global Energy Policy. As a member of the US Department of State's Policy Planning Staff and previously the Russia and Europe Lead in the Office of Economic Sanctions Policy and Implementation, he has played a central role in recent economic sanctions policy towards Russia.

Sergey Aleksashenko

Sergey Aleksashenko is a Russian economist with extensive public- and private-sector experience. From 1993-1995, he served as Deputy Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation and from 1995-1998 as the First Deputy Chairman of the Central Bank of Russia. More recently, Aleksashenko has served as an economic advisor to the National Bank, Ministry of Finance, and the Government of Ukraine.

SANCTIONS AND EXPORT CONTROLS TIMELINE

FEBRUARY 24, 2022 — Russian Invasion officially begins; The US, EU, Japan, Australia, UK, Canada and New Zealand immediately sanction Russia's financial sector.

MARCH 8, 2022 — *The US becomes the first to entirely ban imports of Russian energy products*

APRIL 2022 — Sanctions targeting specific Russian citizens invovled in the war effort increase

DECEMBER 2022 — *The EU restricts the price of Russian oil barrels but doesn't restrict imports entirely*

JANUARY 2023 — The EU passes a 6 month extension of sanctions indicating the unceasing war effort

FEBRUARY 2023 — Further price caps are placed on global exports of Russian oil by the G7

FEBRURARY 2024 — Second anniversary of the war plus the death of opposition leader Alexi Navalny causes a general widening and expansion of financial sanctions

Graphic by Arjun Moogimane

Energy questions

How do you think Russia's exclusion from European energy markets has affected the continent's clean energy transition?
Balmaceda: If you look at the long-term and the medium-term, I have no doubt that the energy crisis ushered in by Russia's all out invasion of Ukraine will help solidify and ensure a faster transition away from fossil fuels. At the same

time, if you look more in terms of the short-term, it led to two things happening: going back to coal for electricity generation, and increasing dependency on liquefied natural gas. In the short-term, European Union countries, for example, Germany, are actually creating the infrastructure that may lock them into fossil fuels again. So my answer is kind of two-sided, but I still believe that in the long-term, [Russia's exclusion from energy markets] will solidify the move towards renewables.

Fishman: In the short-run you cannot bring on clean energy overnight. In the long-run, almost undoubtedly, Russia's exclusion from European energy markets will accelerate the continent's clean energy transition. Pipeline gas is an incredibly cheap source of energy – the cost is all upfront. So long as pipeline gas from Russia was a viable energy source for Europe, I think it would have been very difficult to quit that energy source because it's cheap, it's readily available, it's well-known, and well-understood. The undoing of that gas relationship creates a hole in the European energy mix that I think is likely, over time, to be filled by cleaner energy sources.

Russia has long used Europe's dependence on its energy exports to its advantage. Now that many European countries have been jolted into a clean break from Russian energy, has Russia lost a valuable bargaining chip?
Fishman: I think Russia lost its biggest bargaining chip. In a globalized economy, there are all kinds of things that look like choke points. But what we found is that natural gas exports were not as big of a choke point as Russia thought they were. So perhaps the lesson there is that you may sometimes think the threat of weaponization is more effective than actual weaponization. Especially because I do think, having dealt with European diplomats extensively around the original Ukraine crisis in 2014, that they were petrified about getting cut off from Russian gas. And they really did think it was going to lead to people freezing in their homes, or factories grinding to a halt. That has not happened. And so in some ways, it's been shown that the Emperor has no clothes.

Balmaceda: Yes, I think so. It's not like [buyers of Russian energy] were poor people that had no choices and were forced to be dependent on Russian natural gas. They all found it very

attractive. This dependency played a role. It was like a perfect storm. It made people very happy. It made the Greens happy, because natural gas was this kind of bridge [to renewables]. They were willing participants. Now they have been forced to rethink, and it is going to be very hard for Russia to rebuild that market once the infrastructure is built for using other energy sources. Having said this, I think there are still many in Europe who would want a return to large scale Russian natural gas imports.

Sanctions questions

To what extent is the unraveling of economic ties between Russia and the West irreversible?
Alexenshenko: I think, never say never. [After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was] a lot of foreign direct investment in Russia. Germans, French and Italians, were very active in building 1000s of companies and enterprises, and many of them still operate in Russia. So when the war is over, when Putin is [out of power], when Russia says, "Okay, we recognize that we made a mistake. Let us come back. Let's rebuild relations." Yeah, why not? Of course, it will not be fast, but [it can happen]. From my view, the precondition is political change in Russia. If there is political change, economic change will follow.

Harrell: I think it is an open question, but we're definitely seeing rerouting of trade take place. Russia's trade is clearly shifted, so we are clearly seeing a realignment of Russian trade flows. Whether we are really going to see different blocks emerge? Of course, China and Russia deepened their economic relationship tremendously. So I think you are seeing shifts in global trade flows like what the future looks like structurally. [Will there be] discrete blocks with more limited trade between them? [Will it be] something nebulous than that? I think [that] is an open question.

Since US sanctions failed to alter Russian conduct towards Ukraine, is there anything the US could have done to further reduce Russian capacity?
Alexenshenko: I think that if sanctions touched ordinary people more, that would cause a shift in public opinion. It will cause them to think a bit more about what's going on. Today, there is this narrative among many Russians that "the West imposes sanctions on [Russia] because

they don't like Russia, and they want to steal [its] resources." There is no link to the war. In my view, the basic idea of the sanctions policy should be explained to the Russian people: that sanctions are because of Putin and because of the war.

Harrell: I think the US and the West could clearly have done more to restrict Russia's energy revenue, which is a part of the sanctions. I think the reason the US did not do so is nervousness about whether that would raise global prices for us. I do not think that doing more would have forced Russia to stop its war effort. So the goals of the sanctions became less around persuading Putin to stop the war, and more around degrading his capacity to wage the war. So it is more about: how do we make it harder for them to build weaponry? And I think that if we had hit there, if we had or in the future hit their revenues harder, it is not that I think Putin will give up on the war, but I think you will further constrict his ability to finance the war, while also meeting domestic economic needs of the Russian people. The whole strategic framework was more about reducing capacity rather than influencing behavior.

Propaganda and Power Plays

Conspiracy and Control in the Russian Information Ecosystem

EVA ZELTSER & GRAYTON GOLDSMITH

As the Russo-Ukrainian war continues, the path to peaceful coexistence for Russia and the West becomes ever more obscured. Public opinion surveys in Russia indicate widespread negative views of the US and European Union, with 64 percent of Russians viewing the Russo-Ukrainian War as "a civilizational struggle between Russia and the West."[15] Statistics like these provide much more than an acknowledgment of shaky relations: they reveal Russia's dependence on a shared enemy to control the masses. This strategy, by no means novel to the nation, is deeply rooted in the county's tumultuous past and continues to be utilized in the present day.

The Groundwork

In the years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika—a government campaign to restructure the Soviet economic and political system—cast the US as a model, emphasizing that this democratic and just nation should serve as inspiration for the revitalization of a corrupt and unstable post-Soviet Russia. With Russia struggling to rise from the ashes of its fallen union, resentment began to mount: both toward the perceived naïveté of Gorbachev's idealization of the US and, by extension, of the US itself.

When Vladimir Putin was first inaugurated in May 2000, he began to capitalize on these growing seeds of discontentment.[16] The period of 2012 to 2014 marked the beginning of Russia's wider campaign to shield its civilians from Western influence and a renewal of a reign of propaganda. Ranging from news stations falsely reporting abuse of Russian orphans by Western families, to US educational exchange programs being terminated, Putin's regime worked hard to limit Russia's exposure to the West, with these efforts culminating in monumental military actions.[17]

Post-Crimea Escalation

Although Putin's regime had long maintained an antagonistic posture towards the West, Russia generally acted on the same

plane as Western-aligned countries until the 2014 invasion of Crimea, a peninsula that was formerly under Ukrainian ownership.[18] Though Russia may have been unhappy with its stature in the international system, they appeared unlikely to levy any real challenge. However, this changed when Putin's annexation of Crimea shattered the illusion of a compliant Russia and ushered in a new era in the country's domestic political atmosphere. Putin's messaging was clear: Russia and the West could not peacefully coexist. From 2014 onwards, the country became embroiled in a perceived existential struggle against a morally corrupt Western world. While Russian citizens enjoyed a largely free and fair internet prior to 2014, the post-Crimean War crackdown on online dissent significantly limited free speech in a country where most traditional media outlets were already under state control. According to Agora, a human rights NGO, instances of internet censorship in Russia increased nearly ninefold from 2014 to 2015.[19] Moreover, between 2014 and 2016, 85 percent of convictions for "extremist expression" dealt with online behavior, with punishments ranging from fines or community service to prison time.[20] With hopes for Western cooperation all but erased, Russians struggled to conceptualize their place in an increasingly interconnected world. In the absence of discernible truth, they began to craft their own.

Ukraine: Culmination of Conspiracy

Throughout the Russo-Ukrainian war, Putin and his aides have often invoked a popular Russian conspiracy theory known as the "Golden Billion." The theory traces its origins back to the fall of the Soviet Union and the early days of the Russian Federation, as newly privatized industries became concentrated in the hands of a select few oligarchs. Its essential claim centers on the idea that the richest billion people in the world are conspiring to hoard crucial natural resources and wealth to enrich themselves at the expense of the rest of the world's inhabitants. In his political rhetoric, Putin has masterfully intertwined the theory with his trademark narrative of existential war with the West, preying on the vulnerabilities of the Russian people and garnering support for his cause.

Russia's victory against the Nazis in World War II occupies a prime position in the country's sociopolitical zeitgeist, while the economic and political turbulence that ensued following the collapse of the Soviet Union still lingers in the minds of many Russian citizens. In invoking these narratives of Russian historical memory, Putin unites and awakens the Russian populace and legitimates his authority as a leader who may bring glory to Russia once more.

As the Russo-Ukrainian War progresses, Russia will likely continue its dependence on such theories to consolidate power and rally support for the governing regime. By controlling the flow of information and shaping public perceptions, the Kremlin has built on a framework established in years prior. As the Russian populace drifts further from reality, Russia's position in the international system becomes ever more concrete. Under Putin, the country cannot prosper in the Western world order, instead resolving to create its own.

Putin at his long table (Source: Adapted from www.kremlin.ru.)

Austerity's Efficiency Paradox

ALEXANDER WAHL

One of the first concepts of a railway was born in modern-day Greece. The Diolkos, a stone track, provided Greek city-states with a means of interstate trade.[21] Today, the Greek transportation system still relies on trains for commerce and transportation to certain regions. Despite using rail for centuries, the nation has struggled to organize and operate its train system effectively. After stern cautioning from international regulators and countless warning signs, tragedy struck in February of 2023 when two trains collided at full speed in Tempi, killing 57 people, many of them university students.[22]

Following decades of steep spending and subsequent runaway debt, Greece's economy collapsed during the 2008 Great Recession.[23] The Troika, consisting of the European Commission, European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, bailed Greece out in exchange for the implementation of harsh economic reforms.[24] To comply, the Greek government ushered through a series of austerity packages; ultimately, the Parliament approved 14 Government reduction initiatives between 2010 and 2017. During this period, total spending declined by nearly a third.[25] Much of the divestment came from public sector jobs, employees' pensions, and government services. Changes in fiscal management reached OSE, Greece's state-owned train and railway system.

Heeding the calls of the Troika, an early austerity measure ordered the railway and train service operations to be divided, and in subsequent legislation, the train branch was sold into private holding, becoming Hellenic Train.[26] OSE, which retained control of track maintenance, also faced steep budget cuts and was forced to bring in privately-owned foreign contractors to complete many basic projects.

From maintenance delays to understaffing, profit took priority over safety.

When gangs in Greece began stealing copper from the state's railway, necessary for safety technology, resources were seldom allocated to replace it.[27] Without functioning signaling systems, the installation of the European Train Control System (ETCS) was delayed by years. Lacking any standardized signaling mechanism and having a fraction of the necessary staff, safety operations became ineffectual. Railway flaggers were solely responsible for communicating to trains whether it was safe to proceed, leaving no room for human error when directing rail traffic.

Tragically, this system failed in February 2023 when the trains collided in Tempi. A newly hired employee served as the station master the night of the crash. With the outdated signaling only working in certain places, the flagger lost connection with the passenger train's location shortly after departing Larissa and traveling toward Tempi. As a result, he directed both trains onto the same track traveling toward each other.[28] Without sufficient funding, there was no additional staff to provide quality checks, allowing this preventable disaster to happen. Furthermore, if ETCS had been installed years ago, the trains would have immediately been stopped when they entered the same track. Rather than dedicating the resources to rail maintenance, safety protocols, or proper staffing, Greece and the Troika paid with 57 lives.

This fiction that austerity and privatization can restore states from dire economic situations while maintaining or improving public services, including rail,

can be dispelled. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to navigate the recovery of a major economy while protecting the value of an international reserve currency. The Tempi train crash shows that indiscriminate budget cuts and compulsive privatization can lead to inefficiency, stagnation on vital projects, and danger to those utilizing public services. Given that the Troika led similar bailout programs in Cyprus, Ireland, and Portugal, the effects are likely not limited to Greece.[29] Not only did the Troika overestimate the reach and impact of their bailout preconditions, they also contributed to the deterioration of government programs available. This tragic situation serves as proof that the aim of austerity and the scope of the "privatize everything" doctrine must be more narrow. In Greece, keeping operation services centralized, sufficiently staffing these agencies, and providing adequate resources to maintenance crews would have improved quality and safety, likely saving the lives of 57 people.
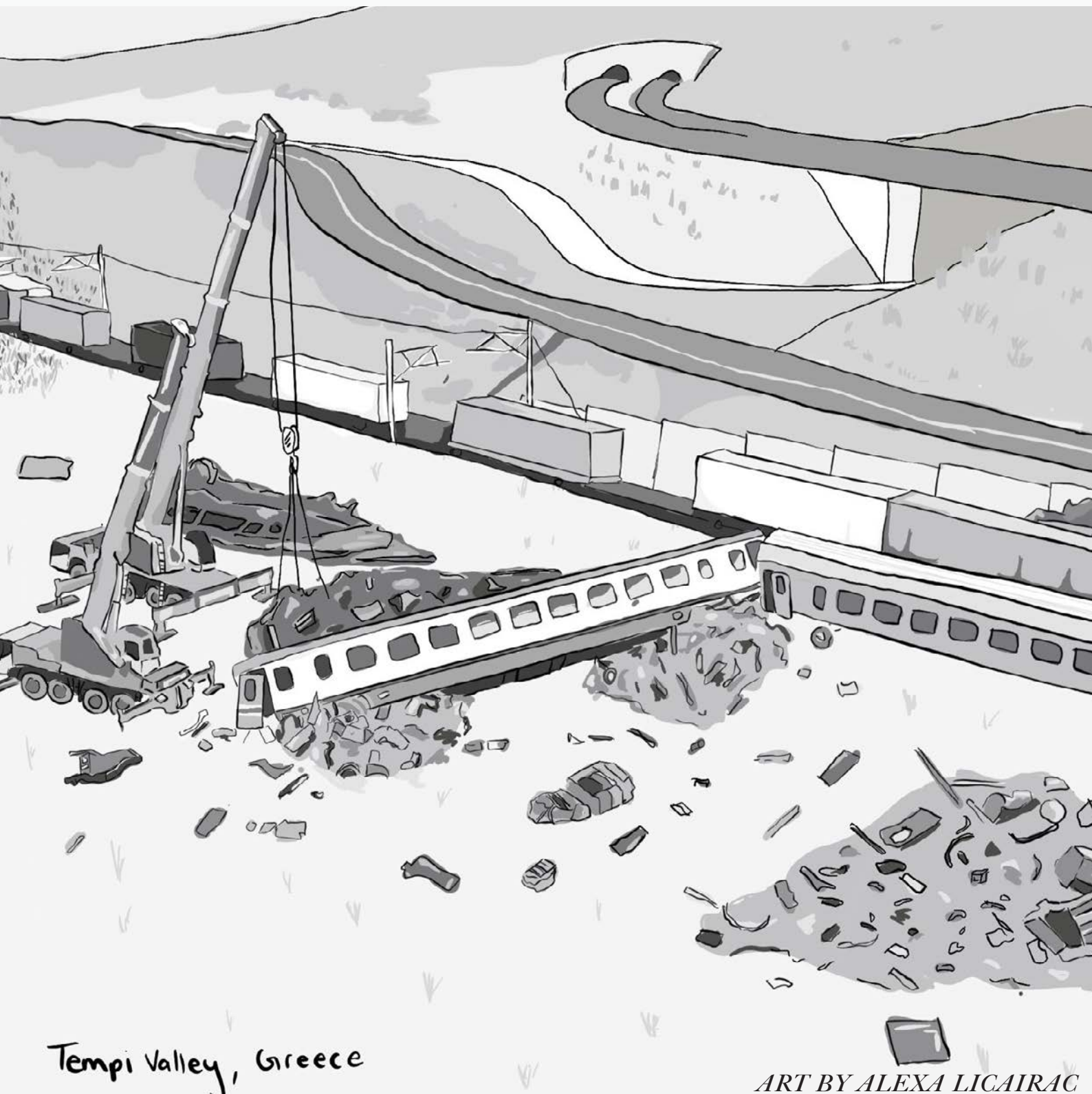
Tempi Valley, Greece

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