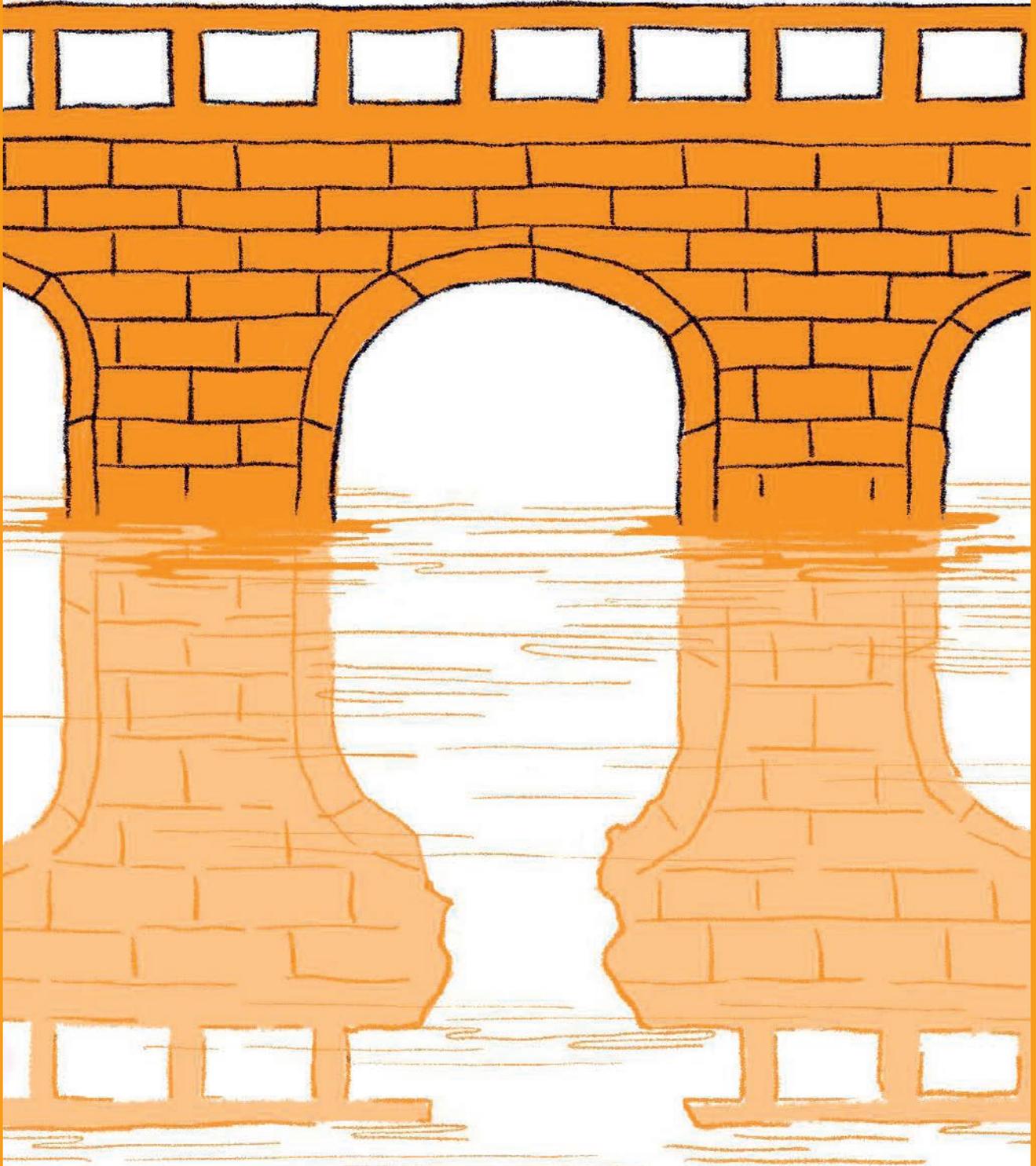


HEMISPHERES

THE TUFTS UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



BRIDGES & BARRIERS



| 2026

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

This year's issue of *Hemispheres* is situated within a global landscape marked by deepening divides alongside unprecedented forms of connection. The theme "Bridges and Barriers" investigates both the pathways that foster cooperation and the structures of separation shaping international affairs today. This semester, our membership has doubled, accompanied by a noticeable rise in campus awareness of *Hemispheres*. This growth underscores the magazine's role as an important platform for Tufts students to engage with and discuss issues in international affairs. In response to this unprecedented demand, our editorial team expanded the publication to include a greater number of pieces, reflecting the vibrant intellectual energy and demand for thoughtful student analysis of global challenges. We remain steadfast in our mission to make international relations scholarship accessible through our magazine, and this issue offers our most diverse range of articles yet—written by contributors from across majors and disciplines who seek to foster dialogue on the pressing issues shaping our world.

This year's geopolitical moments reflect the very heart of "Bridges and Barriers." In the first twelve months of his second term, President Donald Trump introduced a series of sweeping tariffs that reshaped U.S. trade relationships, altering key partnerships and impacting global import dynamics. Meanwhile, other countries have forged decisive trade agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the African Continental Free Trade Area, facilitating cross-border cooperation and offering new avenues for economic growth. As some countries have strengthened ties, others have intensified rivalries. Both the Israel-Hamas conflict and the Russia-Ukraine War demonstrate the pervasiveness of international antagonism, despite attempts at making peace. However, hope is not to be lost; international support for a ceasefire in Gaza continues to grow, and NATO has strengthened its ties in response to Russia with a successful summit at The Hague and further commitments to the alliance. There has also been an increase in female presence in international positions of power, from Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo assuming presidency in Mexico to Sanae Takaichi becoming the first female Japanese Prime Minister, among others.

Our staff writers worked tirelessly this fall to curate a collection of pieces that reflect the breadth and nuance of this year's theme. The issue features a wide range of formats—from traditional op-eds and analytical explainers to data-driven graphics, interviews,

and creative reviews—each bringing a distinct lens to "Bridges and Barriers." Many contributors approached the theme through questions of security, examining hybrid threats such as conflict in space and the intensification of Russia's drone campaigns. Others adopted comparative perspectives, contrasting corruption in Nepal and Thailand, as well as exploring border shifts in the Middle East. This semester also saw a heightened interest in climate and global health. Pieces explore a multitude of topics, ranging from climate injustice in Asia to the implications of the dismantlement of USAID, underscoring how environmental and public health crises both transcend and reinforce geopolitical divides. Our human rights contributors tackle topics ranging from Cameroon's anglophone crises to the coups in Myanmar, while our economics writers delve into questions of tariffs, the AI scramble, and quantum computing. Finally, several articles probe public opinion and political culture more directly—such as a survey of the Tufts community on gender and global leadership—as well as a documentary review examining the devastation of Mariupol, offering a powerful reflection on the human cost of conflict. Together, these pieces highlight the intellectual curiosity and the spirit of collaboration that define *Hemispheres*, with many articles produced through close teamwork among writers.

As you flip through the pages of this year's issue, we hope the ideas, analyses, and narratives presented here prompt you to think critically about the bridges being built and the barriers being reinforced across our world. Whether or not you study international relations, we invite you to engage with these conversations, challenge your assumptions, and consider how you, too, can help shape a world where connection outweighs division.

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, nonideological club committed to providing an open platform for intellectual discourse and academic publication. For endnotes, see the *Hemispheres* website at <https://www.tuftshemispheres.org>.

Yours,
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The New Horizon

Space and the Security Dilemma

COLBY O'CONNOR

In a world wrought by war, there is one domain in which peace has persevered until now: space. Space has been lauded as an area of cooperation even amongst rivals, with the U.S. working with Russia on the International Space Station and international consensus on agreements such as the Outer Space Treaty. These agreements prohibit the use of nuclear weapons in space and state that the moon and other celestial bodies must be used for the scientific and economic advancement of all.¹ Yet in spite of this, war in space looks ever more likely due to the security dilemma, and its impacts would be catastrophic.

The security dilemma states that an attempt to increase one's security leads to other states feeling threatened, causing them to increase their security as well. It almost always leaves all parties worse off, and can often lead to war. War in space favors the attacker, as it is much easier to destroy a satellite than it is to protect one.² Major powers have put this to the test, with the U.S., China, Russia, and India all having launched anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) against their own satellites. In addition to ASAT missiles, China has developed a satellite, the Shijian-21, with a robotic arm, used to clean up space debris.³ However, this can easily be used to attack neighboring satellites, meaning that the U.S. must treat a potentially civilian tool as a military threat.

Another reason the risk of conflict in space is increasing is the asymmetry of great powers' reliance on satellite technology. The United States has over 8000 satellites while Russia and China have only 1500 and 800 respectively, leaving the U.S. much more vulnerable to attacks in space than other states.⁴ This further shifts the balance of space conflict towards offensive, first strike maneuvers on both sides, as the U.S. cannot allow a widespread attack on its satellite systems and may believe it must strike preemptively, while its rivals can gain a quick and decisive advantage from extensive satellite destruction.

War in space would have devastating effects, as the global economy is almost entirely

dependent on satellites for communication and GPS navigation. The U.S. military, for example, uses satellites for over 80% of its communication and over 70% of its intelligence, and is therefore heavily reliant on its access to space.⁵ Yet the consequences of space warfare would be far more long lasting than disabled satellites, as each one destroyed leaves behind debris, rendering near space less usable for future technology as collisions become far more likely.

With the possibility of war in space becoming more imminent and dangerous as the world becomes more dependent on space, the United States must continue its leading role in space institutions. It should seek to find agreements with Russia and China over this issue, even while disagreeing over other domains. Without this, space could be rendered uninhabitable and full of debris, causing significant environmental and economic damage.

A Need for Space Law Reform

KHUE EDWARDS

On May 13, 2025, the Satellite Industry Association published the 28th annual State of the Satellite Report, highlighting shifts in the commercial satellite industry. The industry has been growing at an unprecedented rate – 11,539 satellites were operating in Earth's orbit at the end of 2024, compared to 3,371 satellites in 2020, representing a nearly 400 percent increase in four years.¹ With the rapid development of satellites, a spike in satellite-based defense spending for national security purposes is inevitable, and following this, international tensions are likely to rise. In light of these progressions, a call for a stronger international governing body of space is imperative to facilitate cooperative interactions in space.

The foundation of space law is built upon the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST), negotiated nearly 60 years ago.² The treaty declares that all states have a right to access space and that celestial bodies are to be used for peaceful purposes, forbids the placement of weapons of mass destruction, and holds states

accountable for their actions.³ At the time of its drafting, space was largely the domain of two major actors: the United States and the Soviet Union.⁴ The treaty reflected the geopolitical realities and technological limitations of the time. However, since the implementation of the treaty, space relations have evolved and the treaty has thus become outdated. Not only do the regulations for space need to be updated, a concrete international governing body of space is also required.

Individual space agencies exist to guide national interests in space, the principal organizations being: NASA, CNSA (China) Roscosmos (Russia), Canadian Space Agency, JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe), & ISRO (India).⁵ At the international level the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) exists as the primary governing body of space governance. However, UNOOSA, in its current state, functions more as a forum than as a governing body, navigating potential disputes in the wake of increasing space competition. Both the 1967 treaty and UNOOSA provide frameworks for space relations; however, they lack mechanisms to promote the implementation of space law.⁶

The question is then posed: what is a viable solution? To formulate a response to this question, we must analyze existing frameworks of the most comparable territory: the sea. The sea is treated as a global “commons” which are spaces and resources that are collectively managed by and for all.⁷ Governance of the sea is based on its classification as a commons, and space should be regarded in the same manner. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the central governing body of maritime affairs focused on enforcing compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a treaty establishing a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities.⁸ The first step toward a more viable solution is reassessing the OST, and taking inspiration from UNCLOS to serve as a model. UNCLOS consists of 17 sections, totalling 320 articles, each specific and comprehensive, defining all necessary technical language.⁹ The OST, however, in its entirety consists of 17 vague articles.¹⁰ While UNCLOS outlines specific laws and consequences, enforced by the IMO, the OST provides guidelines for peaceful cooperation rather than enforceable laws and regulations.

The second aspect would be the strengthening and restructuring of UNOOSA, should it continue to exist as the primary governing body.

The IMO holds much more legal authority over states as it is a specialized agency of the UN that adopts binding international conventions that carry legal weight for member states that ratify them.¹¹ However, UNOOSA is a subsection of the office UN Secretariat and a body of the General Assembly.¹² Due to this, UNOOSA holds no legislative power and instead acts as a guiding force for states, facilitating cooperation. The key issue, however, is that given the rapidly shifting space sector, violations of space law and norms are likely to occur. With no overarching legal authority, states have no incentive to comply with UNOOSA. Thus, UNOOSA should be established as a specialized agency with legal authority, similar to that of the IMO.

Another major consideration which remains insufficiently addressed is the rapid commercial expansion of the space sector over the past decade. Private companies such as SpaceX and Blue Origin have emerged as dominant players in a domain once reserved for state actors. SpaceX, valued at over \$400 billion, conducts frequent launch missions and manages extensive satellite operations, highlighting the growing influence of corporate stakeholders in outer space.¹³ This shift presents a pressing need for updated regulatory frameworks that account for commercial activities alongside governmental ones. Space is no longer merely a frontier for scientific exploration or national prestige. It has become a commercial economic environment with immense financial and geopolitical implications. Therefore, new international treaties and regulatory bodies must incorporate mechanisms to ensure that the commercialization of space remains transparent, equitable, and aligned with the peaceful use principles established under international law.

Space exploration is expanding at an unprecedented rate, driven by both private innovation and strategic national interests. With the rapid commercialization and militarization of space, the absence of a legally binding and enforceable framework presents significant risks to global security. Should the OST and UNOOSA serve as the primary entities of space diplomacy, meaningful change is imperative. Space governance is not solely a technical or bureaucratic issue; it is a defining test of international cooperation in the 21st century. Establishing a concrete international framework is not merely about the management of space, it is about safeguarding global stability and redefining the future of international affairs.

War for the Skies

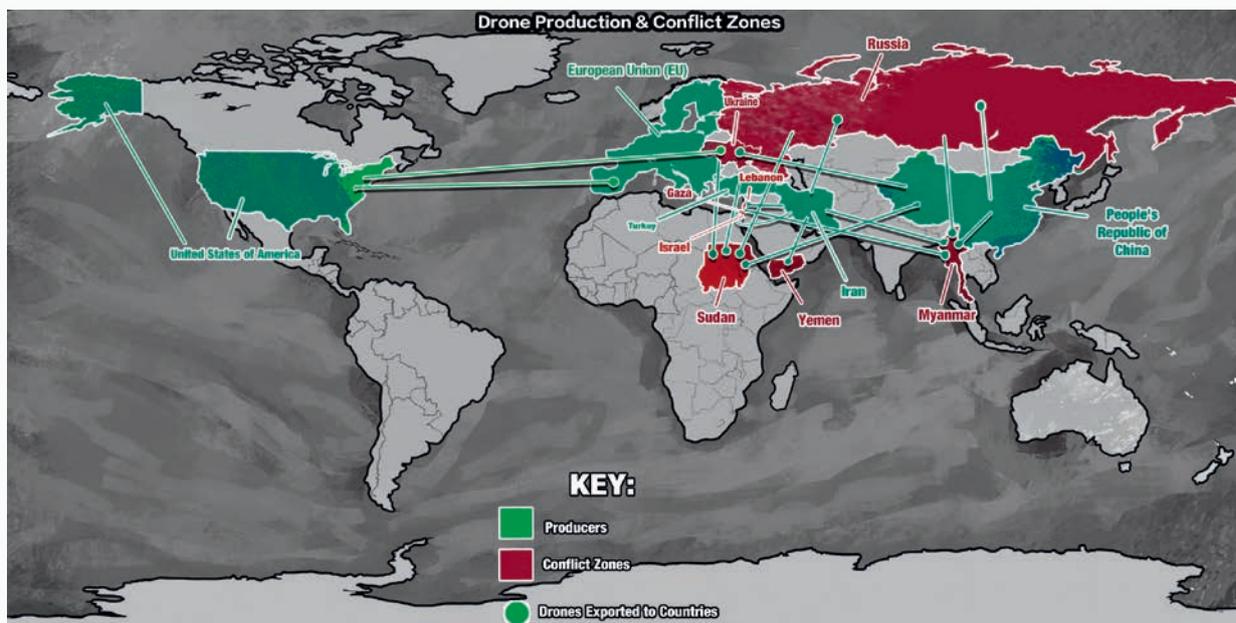
JACK SRIHARI AND NADSEN CHAVANNES

In the last five years, drones have become a ubiquitous weapon on battlefields across the world, from the jungles of Myanmar to the dunes of the Sahara Desert to the plains of Ukraine. However, the majority of these weapons originate from a small group of countries, most notably Iran, Turkey, the United States, Russia, China, and Ukraine.¹ They have become tools not just for war, but for world powers to exert their influence around the world.

Today, drones act as one of the primary tools for states engaging in proxy conflicts around the world. Their cheap cost of production, high level of battlefield impact, and ability to be shipped stealthily enable states to participate in wars they might once have avoided.² As a result, drones from a small handful of countries are now flooding nearly every conflict zone around the world. This article aims to shed some light on the impact of these drones where they are being used, and who is supplying them, while providing context on the conflicts they are helping to shape.

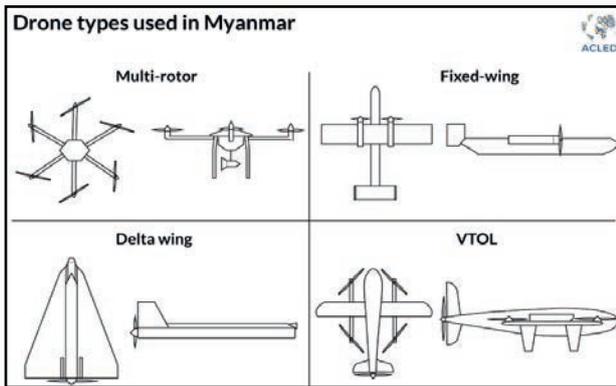
Myanmar

The current crisis stems from armed resistance to the 2021 military coup, reigniting a bloody civil war. Initially, the rebels lacked any source of air power.³ In an attempt to level the playing field with the government forces, each of the rebels began investing in drone technology.⁴ Using a mix of locally produced, retrofitted commercial drones, and some foreign made drones, the rebels were able to effectively control the skies, enabling them to overwhelm government forces. However, in early 2024, the military had learned from the resistance and began the wide-scale adoption of drones.⁵ By the start of 2025, the military had surpassed the rebels in terms of the number of drone strikes and began jamming the frequencies used by the resistance, stopping them from using most of their drones.⁶ The majority of their weaponry comes from Russia and China, enabling them to prolong the conflict into a stalemate.⁷ China



Map of drone production and usage in conflict zones. Graphic credit: Nadsen Chavannes.

has been supplying whichever side they think currently has the advantage in order to secure crucial mineral and investment deals after the war ends.⁸



Graphic credit: ACLED.

Sudan

Sudan's civil war has turned into a drone proxy conflict as several foreign powers have shipped in drones with the hope of getting trade and port deals with the two factions.⁹ Sudan sits on the Red Sea, one of the most vital maritime trade routes, and so nations hope that by supporting one of the two factions they would be able to secure a naval base along the route. This current conflict started in 2023 after a paramilitary group, Rapid Support Force (RSF), tried to oust the ruling Sudanese armed forces (SAF). By 2024, both sides had begun using foreign-made drones in their military operations. The SAF is using an eclectic mix of drones: Turkish drones from Egypt, Russian and Iranian designs, and Ukrainian supplied drones originating from multiple countries.¹⁰ On the other hand, the RSF have been using Chinese drones supplied by the UAE and their remaining supplies of Russian drones.¹¹ Both factions have also begun limited domestic production of their own designs. Drones have drastically changed the conflict's landscape by allowing the factions to launch strikes on cities deep into each other's territory, and played a huge part in the battle and massacre of Al Fasher.¹²

Russo Ukraine

The Russo-Ukrainian war has driven the extensive development and manufacturing of drone technology globally ever since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. From the overwhelming aerial power Russia displayed at the beginning of the invasion, it was predicted by military analysts that Russia would quickly

seize control of airspace.¹³ However, with the help of Western's military aid, Russian aircrafts were unable to make clear airstrikes throughout the European country.

At the beginning of the war, Ukraine relied heavily on larger drones like the Turkish TB2 Bayraktar to nullify Russian air forces.¹⁴ However, as the war continued, Russian air forces were able to detect these types of drones and neutralize them more effectively. Due to this, Ukrainian forces decided to shift from the larger air-models to a smaller drone technology. This pushback led to the inability to break through either country's air defenses, causing both Russian and Ukrainian forces to rely more on long range artillery, especially high-tech drones. Prior, the equipment used would become very easy to track, nullifying the stealth factor needed to carry out attacks with the technology. This would shift both country's battle strategies into utilizing smaller-scale attacks with this newer weaponry.¹⁵ On both sides, the advance As a result, the war's relentless use of aerial technology led to the development of newer drone technology.

The use of drones in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has demonstrated their effectiveness on the battlefield. Their smaller, less costly operations made it particularly appealing to the military, along with their advanced detection protocols and availability.¹⁵ The first-person view (FPV) drones also have higher endurance, utilizing its longer battery life in carrying out precise strikes within enemy territory.¹⁶ These advancements provided Ukraine with immense military power. Ukraine was also provided with aid from multiple countries and organizations — from the U.S alone they received 175 billion USD, used to help through military related operations.¹⁷ Most countries involved in NATO have also played a large role in Ukrainian aid.¹⁸ This aid would consist mostly of budget support, weapons, and humanitarian aid.¹⁹ Through foreign military aid and crowdfunding for recreational engine products, Ukraine continued to create FPV drones with lower expenses.²⁰ As a result these FPV drones continue to play a crucial role in aiding the Ukrainian military's arsenal, that weren't possible with prior tactics.

Maintaining Sovereignty Through Energy Independence

LEAH GLASPEY

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the European Union (EU) responded with a comprehensive sanctions package on Russian goods.¹ In return, Russia restricted gas flow into Europe to 20 percent capacity.² Left with no other viable source for oil, Europe plunged into an energy crisis and intensified its focus on developing clean energy infrastructure.³ Independence from Russian oil meant the EU was able to act in the best interest of the region, rather than pandering to the powerhouse state built on large oil reserves. The European Winter Energy Crisis of 2023 demonstrated how investment in renewable energy is a vital national security strategy, both in limiting the impacts of climate change and building independent energy infrastructure that mitigates conflict over energy security.

In the post-industrial world, adequate energy infrastructure underpins nearly all vital systems. Energy security is fundamental for health, labor, and government infrastructure, along with many basic necessities like heating homes and cooking food. Oil reserves have historically been a vital leverage point in the international arena because adequate energy access is so fundamental to the well-being of a population.⁴ Until 2022, diplomacy between Russia and the rest of continental Europe was heavily colored by energy relations.⁵ Russia's invasion of Ukraine made clear to continental Europe that defending its sovereignty required reduced reliance on Russian reserves. This could be done feasibly through investment in renewables.

Europe's efficient energy transition owes in part to the EU's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050 and a 55% GHG emissions reduction by 2030.⁶ The institutional prioritization of clean energy meant that further investment for a quicker timeline was not difficult to achieve. Additionally, the skyrocketing cost of liquid gas made the price of an energy transition less daunting for individual consumers because the

status quo was already so expensive.⁷ In this case, the EU was primed for a quick energy transition, although the winter of 2023 did include harsh struggles for families caught in the crosshairs of change. Regardless, the EU has been able to cut Russian oil from 27% of imports in 2022 to 3% in 2025, securing a much higher degree of energy sovereignty than three years ago.⁸

A potential drawback to the development of independent energy infrastructure is the elimination of complex interdependence surrounding such a vital resource. Regional hegemony has historically been decided by access to gas and oil reserves, but the capacities of renewable energy sources have the potential to change this. While it may seem beneficial for states to shape foreign policy independently of oil-rich actors like Russia, liberal theory suggests that global peace relies on economic interdependence; without the leverage of energy dependence, the risk of conflict with such states increases. This stance, however, ignores the wealth and military might of oil-rich states. War with Russia has been prevented not only by oil dependence, but more importantly by the state's second place ranking on the Global FirePower Index and status as a nuclear power.⁹ Even without energy interdependence, the international order has the strength to remain stable.



Photo credit: Martin Bergsma.

Russia's Drone Campaign

Moscow's Incursions and Europe's Deterrence Future

NICHOLAS PRATHER

The incursion of Russian drones into Polish airspace on September 9 and 10 signaled the beginning of a new era in European collective security. Across two days, about two dozen drones, each costing approximately \$11,800 to assemble, entered Polish territory. Some advanced hundreds of kilometers deep into the country and threatened vital NATO infrastructure before being shot down.¹

Similar Russian drone swarms breached the borders of Romania on September 13 and Estonia on September 19. Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Norway also faced violations. Suspected drone sightings in Denmark and Germany forced temporary closures of the Copenhagen and Munich Airport, cancelling and diverting dozens of flights.² Cumulatively, this effort represents drone surveillance on an unprecedented scale across continental Europe. Although Russian President Vladimir Putin's grand strategy likely boils down to a bolder form of saber-rattling, he also wants to ascertain NATO capabilities after national sovereignty violations of member states.³ Although not as existential as some European leaders purport it to be, NATO must still meet this challenge head-on and prove to Putin that a strong and mobilized Europe can check the Russian strongman's worst ambitions.

Article 4, which allows member countries to bring an issue before the North Atlantic Council (NAC) for discussion, has only been invoked nine times in NATO's history. Two of those instances followed Russia's September offensives.⁴ On September 10, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk deemed the drone barrage a "large-scale provocation" and an "unprecedented violation" before calling for initial consultations in the NAC.⁵ Estonia then invoked Article 4 on September 23, and

a separate NAC meeting occurred. After the September 10 meeting, Operation Eastern Sentry was launched by NATO as a means of bolstered deterrence along the alliance's eastern flank.⁶ Following the September 23 meeting, allied aircraft were deployed to Estonia to help expel Russian drones. In October, calls were made for a European Drone Wall and an Eastern Flank Watch in the European Commission's Defense Readiness Roadmap for 2030.⁷ The drone wall plan has been heavily criticized for its feasibility along a 3,000-kilometer long border.⁸ The Eastern Flank Watch aims to work with Eastern Sentry to integrate ground defense systems, maritime security, and counterdrone operations across the EU and NATO.⁹

Collectively, these policies are a necessary first step in joint defense against the Russian drone threat but lack requisite practicality and coordination. One area for reform could be in the EU's efforts to counter unmanned aircraft. The organization currently lacks the necessary multilateral coordination mechanisms for drone deterrence. Thus, military exercises could be plotted for specific counter-drone scenarios, whereby the European Commission can work with NATO HQ to establish liaison offices to test this policy. There is also room for the strengthening of deterrence infrastructure as specified by the parameters of the EU Critical Resilience Directive of 2024. Incursions into Polish airspace have galvanized necessary initial reactive actions, but there is still far more potential for European joint defense efforts to capture momentum and reestablish effective deterrence against an encroaching and aggressive Russia.



Graphic credit: Canva.

Surveillance Superpowers:

The Push and Pull of American-Chinese Cyber Relations

ANNA BADER



Xi Jinping in a ropepulling contest with Palantir. Graphic credit: Natalie Meulenbroek.

For the greater part of China's rise as a global superpower, U.S. domestic policy makers have agonized over Chinese access to Americans' information. The real question, however, is what information Silicon Valley has willingly given away. From the newest NVIDIA AI chip to IBM's I2 surveillance and analysis software, it's clear that Capitol Hill is underestimating the extent of these conspiracies.¹ The closer the Chinese internet surveillance system is analyzed, the more it begins to resemble that of the U.S. This technology sharing has led to human rights violations against Chinese citizens, which demonstrates a security threat to the U.S; there are less limits to the aggressions China can mount against a foreign populus, especially that of an adversary.

A deeper analysis of China and the U.S.'s technology sharing demonstrates how intertwined the two systems are. DNA identification technology given to China by American company Thermo Fisher has "empowered the Chinese government to maintain a vice-like grip on a complex society."² Thus, America can be held partially accountable for enabling the widespread internet surveillance of Chinese citizens. Furthermore, blueprints revealed that IBM worked directly with Chinese defense contractors to create China's surveillance system, the "Golden

Shield."³ China is even aware of the United States' role in their ascension as a tech superpower, as China Daily concedes that Inspur (the company behind China's surveillance machine) is the main client for the AI chips of Intel, Nvidia and AMD.⁴ In fact, American surveillance technologies were used in "a brutal mass detention campaign in the far west region of Xinjiang," that forced the assimilation of the Uyghur people, highlighting the US's involvement in Chinese human rights aggressions.⁵

China's human rights violations highlight the risks to American security under autocratic powers. The atrocities committed against the Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups are a microcosm of a greater issue: U.S. technology in the hands of an autocracy such as the CCP has no moral limits. If China is willing to make such moves against its own population, what lengths will it go to to mobilize these capabilities against the U.S., its greatest roadblock to global hegemony?

China is not the only state culpable for rights violations. Palantir, the main contractor for the Department of Homeland Security, has been accused of privacy violations against U.S. citizens, collecting "biometric and medical data, social media data... precise location data derived from license plate readers, sim card data, and surveillance drone data."⁶ Thus, the lines are blurred between a 'good' and 'bad' side in the internet surveillance debate. A former US government official argued that differences in internet surveillance and AI use stem partly from the two countries' contrasting government systems. It's easier to lay the blame on an autocracy that flaunts its rights violations like China than it is to lay it on the U.S. While it is evident that the U.S. has aided China in the creation of its internet surveillance system, it is clear that the US is not only complicit, but directly involved in the creation of these easily abusable technologies.

The Race for Quantum Computing

JOSH LITVAK

Almost a century ago, Erwin Schrödinger proposed his “Schrödinger’s Cat” thought experiment to demonstrate the absurdity of measuring quantum mechanics at the macroscopic level.¹ In this hypothetical, a cat exists in a superposition of being both dead and alive until observed, when its state is confirmed. This idea—that a particle can exist in multiple states at once until measured—helps form the foundation of quantum computing.² But what is quantum computing, and how could it shape international economics in the coming decades?

According to IBM, quantum computing is an emerging field of engineering and computer science utilizing “quantum mechanics to solve problems beyond the ability of ... classical computers.”³ Rather than using a “bit,” or binary digit, a quantum computer uses a “quantum bit,” or a “qubit.”⁴ While a classical bit is either a 1 or a 0, a qubit can exist in a “superposition” of both 1 and 0 until measured.⁵ Each qubit has probabilities for these values. Each measurement favors the higher-probability outcome. As more qubits are added, the number of possible states—and the computing power—increases exponentially. However, we will likely not see a “true” quantum computer—whose work will not have to be verified on classical computers—until the late 2030s.⁶

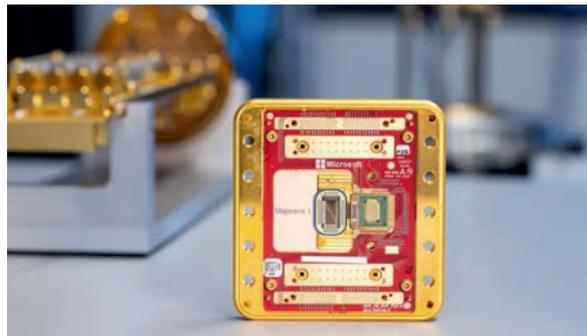
So what is this technology good for? It can benefit industries such as pharmaceuticals, battery development, and nuclear energy by running detailed simulations of molecular interactions.⁷ Quantum computers can also weigh possible scenarios, therefore facilitating manufacturing by presenting accurate estimates.⁸ Advancements in quantum computing would lower manufacturing costs and help companies sell goods at more competitive prices, potentially boosting exports. This makes quantum computing a

major economic priority for many nations.

Despite these benefits, quantum computing also poses serious security risks, such as breaking complex encryption keys.⁹ Nations possessing a working quantum computer could potentially access classified documents and systems of other countries.¹⁰ Many U.S. officials are concerned the Chinese government could access U.S. energy grids and nuclear reactors with quantum computing technology, presenting a significant national security risk.¹¹

So who is winning the quantum computing race? It seems to be China. The Chinese quantum computing industry is projected to have \$15.3 billion of public funding in the next five years, while the United States has put forward \$6 billion, with \$3.6 billion guaranteed by Congress.¹² If the U.S. and its allies wish to lead the quantum race, they will need to devote significant public funds to quantum computing research.¹³

With the deadline for a “true” quantum computer soon approaching, quantum computing will have a major impact on international economics and security, regardless of who gets there first.¹⁴ Although it may not have everyday applications that AI does, it enables researchers to reach goals exponentially faster. For this reason, policymakers and computer scientists must continue to monitor the quantum race and invest in secure, ethical quantum research to ensure security.



Microsoft's new quantum computing chip. Photo credit: Microsoft.

Hard & Soft Power in the Koreas

LAUREN COUSINO AND AMY ZHAO



Portraits of the leaders of the two Koreas. Right: Kim Jong Un. Photo credit: NPR. Left: Lee Jae-Myung Reuters).

When people think of North and South Korea, they often focus on their stark differences. What began as a temporary division after Japan's 1945 surrender solidified into a permanent split following the Korean War. This conflict gave rise to two divergent nations: North Korea projects power through its nuclear arsenal and military posturing, while South Korea exerts influence through its booming cultural exports, from Webtoons to films like *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. Despite their contrasting reputations, both nations employ a mix of hard and soft power to assert themselves on the world stage. An examination of their military strength, economic influence, and cultural reach reveals that the two Koreas defy their stereotypes as merely a militarized threat or a cultural powerhouse.

Military Capacity

Despite its small size, North Korea leverages its nuclear capacity to assert itself internationally—a form of traditional hard power. Employing a nuclear strategy of asymmetric escalation, North Korea deters potential conventional warfare from larger nations while showcasing its disciplined conventional forces in military parades, missile displays, and uniform marching as a form of soft-power swaggering.¹ Through these demonstrations, North Korea challenges its reputation as an impulsive, hard-power-driven state. Its actions on the international stage are

deliberate, framed around the goal of regime preservation.

In contrast, South Korea's military strength is both significant and limited. The country ranks among the world's top defense spenders, yet the presence of 30,000 U.S. troops on its soil makes full military autonomy difficult to achieve.² However, recent debates about revising nuclear armament and expanding self-reliant military capabilities demonstrate a growing awareness of vulnerability, particularly amid rising tensions with North Korea and China.³ While South Korea is known for its cultural exports, its growing defense budget reveals another side—a nation shaped by geopolitics. Set to raise its defense budget by 8 percent in 2026, South Korea complements hard power with soft power, using cultural influence to project stability.⁴ This balance makes the nation appear less threatening in the global arena. As a mid-sized democracy surrounded by great powers, South Korea's balance of culture and defense offers a model for nations like Taiwan seeking deterrence.

Economic Power

North Korea conceptualizes economic power primarily in material terms. After Soviet withdrawal, North Korea increased its nuclear weapons production for regime survival, funding the program through money laundering, cyberattacks, and forced labor in

lets North Korea deter invasions and extract concessions through hard power. Kim Jong-il's downplaying of the 1990s famine highlights how North Korea's hard-power priorities dominate its policymaking, especially when confronting material shortage.⁶ Simultaneously, North Korea's nuclear weapons program establishes prestige, attracting smaller anti-Western states and serving as a form of soft power.⁷ With few avenues for international engagement, North Korea emphasizes self-reliance, making its economic strategy a mix of hard and soft power that defines its unique position globally.

Emerging from postwar poverty, South Korea's economic rise is often called the "Miracle on the Han River."⁸ Though famous for its cultural exports, its economy relies heavily on automobiles and electronics.⁹ The nation's success was driven by government-backed industrialization and the rise of powerful conglomerates known as chaebols, which came to dominate both domestic and global markets.¹⁰ This economic strength also functions as hard power: the size of South Korea's economy can be as threatening as its military, giving it leverage through tariffs or shifting investment. Today, South Korea ranks among Asia's strongest economies, drawing revenue from rising industries like cosmetics, which have surpassed U.S. brands in global markets.¹¹ However, soft power has its limits. Although China imports many Korean cultural products, economic tensions continue.¹² Disputes with the U.S. over tariffs, for example, reveal the limits of global integration. Still, soft power remains valuable: economic strength allows South Korea to assert more independence, helping it balance between the U.S. and China.

Cultural Influence

North Korea's culture is highly restricted for outside viewers. Aside from limited intelligence into daily life, everything visible externally is crafted by North Korean propaganda ministers. Driven by extreme nationalism, grounded in

the Juche ideology, and shaped by its geography and history of colonialism, North Korea identifies as a self-sustaining nation that must be protected from hostile imperial powers.¹³ On the international stage, North Korea acts in accordance with this isolationist perspective, relying on an "us versus them" mentality.¹⁴ The country vilifies other states and adopts isolationist tactics in its diplomacy, particularly toward the U.S. and South Korea. Although culture is typically considered a form

of soft power, North Korea transforms it into a tool of hard power through swaggering displays that project dominance and defiance on the global stage.

Few countries have wielded cultural influence as effectively as South Korea. What began as a government initiative in the late 1990s to recover from the Asian financial crisis became a global phenomenon known as the "Korean Wave."¹⁵ The state invested millions into cultural industries, building concert halls and even regulating karaoke bars to support K-pop's growth.¹⁶ Today, Korean entertainment dominates global screens and playlists. Yet despite its cultural reach, South Korea has struggled to turn its soft power into tangible political leverage. Its popularity abroad has not insulated it from trade disputes or reliance on alliances. For instance, BTS's 2022 visit to the White House spotlighted anti-Asian hate but remained largely symbolic, generating mostly media buzz.¹⁷ South Korea's challenge lies in converting soft power into "smart power," where outcomes, not just cultural capital or strength, define power.¹⁸ If South Korea can translate its cultural appeal into real-world influence, it will not only strengthen its own security and economic standing but also offer a model for other emerging middle powers navigating the system.

Despite their opposing images, North and South Korea's uses of power prove more alike than they appear. As Japan's remilitarization and China's assertiveness reshape the region, Seoul is poised to expand its defense investments, while Pyongyang will likely double down on military posturing in response. Ultimately, the Koreas' futures depend not just on their rivalry but on how effectively they leverage their alliances and balance coercion with persuasion in a polarized world.



Populism Across Countries

Beyond MAGA: Anti-Immigration Surges in Britain and Japan

OWEN ZANNI

Donald Trump's resurgence in the 2024 U.S. presidential election represents more than an isolated political phenomenon; it reflects a broader global trend of xenophobic nationalism redefining immigration policy across continents. Immigration was a key issue during the 2024 U.S. election, with data from the Pew Research Center showing that 61 percent of American voters believed that immigration was "very important in their vote."¹ Trump capitalized on these concerns, using xenophobia as a key tool in his rhetoric, most infamously when he claimed that Haitian migrants were "eating the dogs" and "the cats."² The U.S. is far from alone in this shift—across the globe, xenophobic nationalism is reshaping political landscapes and redefining policy.

On the other side of the world, in Japan, Sanae Takaichi of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) successfully campaigned for Prime Minister through similar messaging. Like Trump, Takaichi stressed Japan's need for a reformed immigration policy, calling for restrictions on non-Japanese people buying property in Japan and a crackdown on illegal immigration.³ Furthermore, Takaichi's rhetoric also extended to anecdotal claims that foreign influence was attacking and endangering Japanese culture, specifically referring to unverified incidents of foreigners kicking sacred deer.⁴

In recent years, Sanseito, a strongly conservative populist political party in Japan opposing "excessive acceptance of foreigners," has experienced massive gains in popularity, driven largely by voters who believe the LDP has drifted away from its conservative roots.⁵ Takaichi's anti-immigration stance reflects the LDP's effort to reclaim its grip on Japan's conservative electorate, as Sanseito's Japan First movement continues to attract voters who once supported the LDP.⁶

Paralleling the shift seen in Japan's political landscape, public opinion in the United Kingdom has driven the government

toward increasingly harsh immigration policies. Following a similar trend to the U.S., the percentage of U.K. voters indicating immigration as their top issue has surged since the 2024 general election.⁷ This surge has fueled the populist anti-immigration party Reform U.K.'s dramatic rise in popularity, with polling data showing their current support has more than doubled since 2024.⁸ Like Trump, much of Reform U.K.'s success can be ascribed to their xenophobic messaging, which relies on blaming immigration for creating issues such as "cultural damage" and "broken communities" across the country.⁹

In response to these growing public fears, the U.K. has intensified immigration policy, increasing the number of enforced migrant returns and removal of foreign national offenders between July 2024 and January 2025.¹⁰ Echoing the ICE raids sweeping the U.S., U.K. Immigration Enforcement conducted an astonishing 11,000 workplace raids between October 2024 and September 2025, causing the number of illegal working arrests in the U.K. to increase by 63 percent.¹¹

Donald Trump's success in the United States reflects more than a shift in American politics. Across nations like Japan and the U.K., the growth of anti-immigration sentiment reveals that xenophobic nationalism is a rising—and defining—political force that threatens to continue shaping global politics.

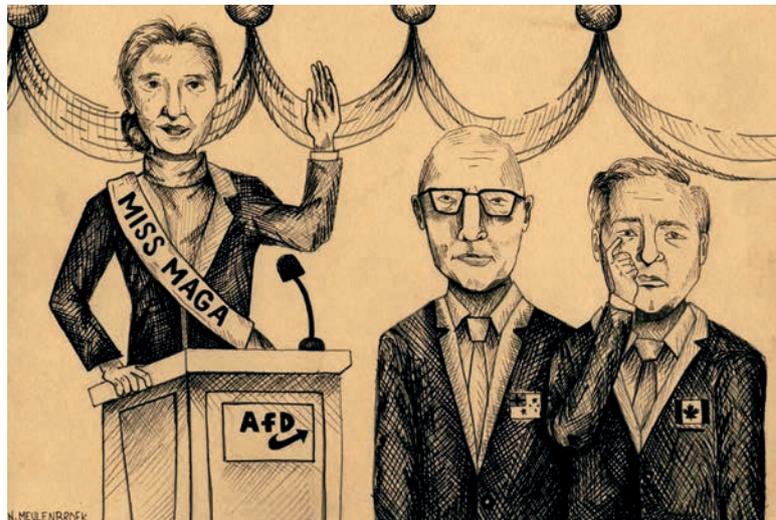
Trumplash

KIERAN DOODY

Halle, Germany - January 25, 2025:

In a breezy banquet hall, thousands of people are bathed in overwhelming blue spotlights as German flags jut out from a sea of black silhouettes. On stage, drowned out by the crowd's roaring cheers, Alice Weidel, the provocative yet charismatic leader of Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD), points to a large screen. Resplendent in her signature suit and stern demeanor, she is surrounded by a colonnade of German flags as a flash of light floods the room and a man's face appears. Distorted by the camera angle, Elon Musk resembles "Big Brother" in *1984*.

Five days after performing a Nazi salute



Cartoon of Alice Weidel accepting a "Miss MAGA" sash and Peter Dutton and Anthony Albanese in the sidelines. Graphic credit: Natalie Meulenbroek.

live on U.S. television, and two days before Holocaust Remembrance Day, Elon Musk begins to speak, urging Germans to move on from their "past guilt."¹ This unprecedented involvement of American political figures in German politics, including American Vice President JD Vance's meeting with AfD leadership, coincided with the party's unprecedented support in Germany's 2025 Federal Elections.² In fact, despite being labelled as a right-wing extremist group by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the AfD doubled their vote share.³ They became the second largest party in Germany's Bundestag, gathering a broad coalition of disaffected voters.⁴

German voters, focused on internal affairs, namely an energy crisis and a sluggish economy, turned to right-wing populism.⁵ However, in nations like Canada and Australia, which have directly confronted Trump's chaotic foreign policy, one begins questioning the viability of the "MAGA persona." Within these nations, a silent majority has formed, an eclectic 'rainbow' coalition composed of recent immigrants to business executives. Contentedly snoozing under the safety of the U.S.-dominated liberal world order, it is only a matter of time before this silent majority wakes up and demands to be put back to sleep.

Across the world, a few months later, in a similar convention hall, there is a stark contrast in emotion. Australian opposition leader, Peter Dutton, delivers an early concession speech to a subdued crowd of supporters. Though his right-of-center coalition led the polls in the months preceding the campaign, the incumbent, center-left Labor Party, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, won in a historic landslide, leaving Dutton as the first opposition leader to lose his seat.⁶ Antony Green, a well-respected Australian

psephologist, attributes this sudden reversal of fortunes to three main factors: Albanese's party running a "brilliant" campaign, Dutton's "dud" campaign, and voters' concerns over instability in Trump's second term.⁷ These three components are closely correlated, as Albanese presented himself concretely against Trump, whereas Dutton embraced the MAGA persona, adopting more populist rhetoric and aligning himself with Trump's geopolitical objectives. The verdict of the Australian people was apparent: Dutton lost significant support among immigrant Australians, namely Chinese-Australians troubled by Dutton's hawkish, Trump-like stance on China; women; and affluent Australians, who opted for more moderate independent candidates.⁸

Within America, Trump's defiant style of populism is a proven potent political force. However, for his Canadian neighbors who have directly grappled with the harsh reality of Trump 2.0, this boon quickly sours into detriment. Despite facing inevitable electoral annihilation, Canada's Liberal Party, led by newcomer Mark Carney, managed to close a 24 percent polling deficit to win a fourth term over conservative Pierre Pollièvre.⁹ Pollièvre, who ran on slogans such as "Axe the Tax," "Canada First," and "Common Sense," brought a Trump-style campaign to Canada, focusing on the cost-of-living and the economic woes of working Canadians. Nevertheless, he met his match with Carney's stability-focused anti-Trump and anti-tariff "Team Canada" message. While conservatives gained support among younger voters focused on the cost of living, the Liberals responded, winning older and more affluent Canadians put off by Trump-like policies.¹⁰ In short, a persona of stability and national unity trumped one of MAGA and populism.

From Screens to Streets

How Nepalese and Thai Youth Combat Corruption

JESSIE LEVINE AND THUPTIM APPLETON

The Thai government has long grappled with issues of corruption. Increasingly, Gen-Z has been utilizing social media to scrutinize government misconduct, particularly the ever-present corruption.¹ Since its popularization in Thailand, social media has played a key role in politics, but this year, it sparked a new nationalist facet.²

To further understand this dynamic, it is necessary to outline Thailand's political landscape. The nation operates on a parliamentary system, and the party divide has evolved to reflect generational discrepancies: Gen-Z voters generally support liberal reforms, while older generations tend to favor the more traditional, conservative parties that uphold



Photo credit: Chaiwat Subprasom.

royalist values.³ However, a large portion of the population does not feel strongly toward either side, which only broadens political confusion.

The first wave of widespread Gen-Z protests occurred in 2020, when citizens spoke out against then Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and called for overall reform of the royal family's power.⁴ Undoubtedly, the most prominent symbol of the movement was a three-fingered salute (pictured above), made popular by the Hunger Games franchise.⁵ In the fictional Hunger Games world of Panem, the salute was performed by oppressed citizens

subject to totalitarian rule. Through Thai social media use, the symbolic image gained mass popularity, marking a convergence of overlooked corruption in Thailand with pop culture references from the West:

“By using a symbol that is popularly understood in the U.S. and globally, it's a way of encouraging people to make that connection between something they do understand, which is Hunger Games, and try to start to say, ‘Wait a minute, is that also what's going on in Myanmar?’ So, absolutely it's a way to draw attention around an issue.” - An Xiao Mina, Internet Social Movement Researcher.⁶

While these protests eventually subsided, they reemerged in 2025 following the controversies surrounding former Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.⁷ The Shinawatra family is well known for the three prime ministers it has lent to the Thai Parliament.⁸ Paetongtarn was recently in a scandal for a leaked audio clip with President Hung Sen of Cambodia.⁹ The public viewed her interactions as unnationalist and saw her words as trying to appease Cambodia instead of strengthening Thailand.¹⁰ As this controversy came to light, additional instances of corruption surfaced, such as budget transfer allegations towards Paetongtarn and the ongoing Alpine Golf Course controversy.¹¹ These events generated significant backlash, culminating in protests against the Thai government and the Boonsin Phenomenon.¹²

Lieutenant General Boonsin Padklang is credited with the nationalistic movement seen in today's youth. Not belonging to an explicit party, Boonsin reflects the ideals of the 2020 protests and has gained Gen-Z Thai support for the border dispute with Cambodia.¹³ The military official has taken to flying military planes around the country, visiting various students and schools as a way to propel Thai patriotism.¹⁴ This is now referred to as the Boonsin Phenomenon.¹⁵

These instances reflect the growing

influence that Thai youth holds over politics. Whatever the future holds, there is no doubt that Gen Z will be the cause of it.

Gen-Z is also making a stand in Nepal. While corruption has run awry in the nation for years on end, decisive action was taken against it in September 2025.¹⁶ After Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli—who has long maintained a dominant hold on power in Nepal—banned 26 social media applications, including Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, widespread unrest followed.¹⁷

The implications of the social media ban run deeper than previously understood. For most Nepalis, social media is their gateway to communication, livelihood, and news. Critics have proclaimed that Prime Minister Oli's social media ban limits press and freedom of expression by removing main channels of transmission.¹⁸ Many businesses, large and small, promote through social media; thus, by banning applications, their livelihoods are in danger.¹⁹ Nuance is added when looking at the recent statistics of Nepal's economy. While the GDP grew four percent in 2024, a majority of citizens are either unemployed or hold insecure job status, further proving Nepal's wealth disparity.²⁰

However, these riots were not solely the result of the government's ban on social media. Rather, it was the final straw in what Nepali Gen-Z perceived as an endless cycle of corruption and silencing. Throughout the generation's entire lives, there has not been a true democracy in Nepal; instead, there has been a revolving door of the same few people in power, none of whom are close in age to the



Photo of Saugat Thapa. Photo credit: BBC.

protestors. This same group of people has had numerous corruption allegations, including that of illegal land grabs, refugee scams, and numerous bribes for political favors.²¹

A main focus of the protesters' anger lies in the concept of "nepo babies." Nepo babies,



Nepal's 'Gen Z' Protests. Photo credit: Alan Taylor, The Atlantic.

or children of corrupt politicians, often flaunt their wealth on social media. The photo above pictures Saugat Thapa, the son of provincial minister Bindu Kumar Thapa, beside his 20 Christmas gifts, all clad in name-brand designer boxes such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton.²² This image sparked outrage amongst Gen-Z Nepalis, who viewed the post as a blatant reminder of the wealth gap that divides the few wealthy Nepalese from the rest of the population.²³

As depicted above, decisive measures against corruption have been taken, such as the burning down of the parliament building, which, as a result, terminated Oli's reign of power.²⁴

While the Gen-Z protests were successful in their task of ousting the previous government, there now exists a power vacuum within Nepal. The government is currently headed by interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki, who is trusted by all parties as an anti-corruption symbol.²⁵ However, she has publicly said that she does not want the role.²⁶ The public is now awaiting general elections that will be held in March 2026; yet, there is widespread belief that the Nepalese Gen-Z protests will not last, as corruption has posed an ongoing problem since Nepal's inception.²⁷ A Gen-Z protestor figurehead named Aditya, with an optimistic mentality, has stated, "We are continuously learning from the mistakes of our previous generation," he says firmly, "They were worshipping their leaders like a god."²⁸ In attempts to reverse this idolatrous treatment, Gen-Z protesters have the opportunity to enact real change.

Convergence or Divergence:

A Comparative Analysis of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia's Current Foreign Policies

LAUREN HIGUCHI



*Top: Armenia, Center: Azerbaijan, Bottom: Georgia.
Graphic credit: Canva, edited by Alexa Licairac.*

The three states of the Southern Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—have been under Russia's control since the 1800s. Now, nearly four decades after gaining independence, a crucial question emerges: are the Caucasus nations finally beginning to break away from Moscow's sphere of influence?

Armenia's faith in Russia began to wane in the wake of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war with Azerbaijan, where Armenians felt unsupported and abandoned by Russia, which did little to support them militarily or

humanitarianly.¹ Armenia has since turned towards the West, particularly in its cooperation with the United States and the European Union. On January 15, 2025, Armenia and the U.S. launched a strategic partnership promising security and economic aid, as well as support for Armenia's recent anti-corruption efforts.² In August 2025, President Donald Trump mediated a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 2023, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan expressed interest in EU membership, stating that "Armenia is ready to move closer to the European Union as much as Brussels considers it possible."³ In 2025, he approved a bill proposing a roadmap for EU accession.⁴ However, pro-Russian officials cite Turkey's exclusion from the EU as proof that Armenian acceptance is unfeasible and that Western support would be unreliable.⁵ Others fear the country's withdrawal from the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union will trigger disastrous economic repercussions.⁶ Despite internal skepticism, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, Kaja Kallas, publicly affirmed that "the EU and Armenia have never been as close as we are now."⁷

In support of its mission to diversify its foreign policy, Armenia is not only looking to the West but also to the East. Recently, in a meeting between Armenia and China, the states committed to strengthening bilateral relations, and Pashinyan reaffirmed Armenia's interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).⁸ In an August 2025 meeting, Chinese President Xi Jinping also "welcomed the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan" and Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" project, suggesting a future for China as a mediating force between the two states.⁹ Russia's role as a major power in the SCO and its overall favorable relations with China could mean that Armenia's shift to China would be more acceptable to domestic skeptics as a less hazardous source of new foreign support.

Armenia's application to the SCO also suggests that it is still willing to accept Russia as a security guarantor, albeit within the framework of a larger regional organization.

Like Armenia, Azerbaijan is also looking eastward for an alternative to Russian power. In 2024, Azerbaijan applied for BRICS membership, and in April 2025, it established a strategic partnership with China.¹⁰ Azerbaijan's strongest push, however, has been towards the Turkic world. In 2024, Azerbaijani President Aliyev affirmed that "The Organization of Turkic States is our primary international organization because it is our family. We have no other family."¹¹ Despite the implied determination not to bid for Western integration like Armenia, Azerbaijan-US relations have been strengthening with the re-election of President Trump after a strained period following the Karabakh conflict. Since the peace deal, Azerbaijan has pursued deeper cooperation with the US. On June 27, 2025, around 50 Azerbaijanis were arrested and then beaten in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on account of a series of murders from 2001–2011.¹² The incident was met with outrage from Azerbaijan, which has been slowly drawing a harder line on what it will tolerate from Russia, and could signal a definitive deterioration in Azerbaijan-Russian relations.

Georgia was an outlier in the South Caucasus, having already undergone a long period of pro-Western governance after the Rose Revolution in 2003 and being seemingly poised for EU integration. However, the 2012 election of Russian-linked oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream (GD) party reversed that trend. GD has accelerated corruption and an authoritarian trajectory that is rapidly eroding Georgia's relationship with the EU and NATO.¹³ The party announced that all EU accession efforts would be paused until 2028 and announced the closure of Tbilisi's EU and NATO information center.¹⁴ GD cites NATO's lack of military aid during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War as proof that Georgia cannot rely on its security assurances and assures that Western interference is what will escalate tensions in the Southern Caucasus, not Russian.¹⁵ Despite this conviction, the 2008 War severed diplomatic

relations between the two states and resulted in the Russian occupation of the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. A critical part of Georgian Dream's election platform was the reassurance that rapprochement to Moscow is the only way to achieve territorial return and economic prosperity.¹⁶

Experts suggest that Georgian Dream is also posturing towards China, allured by its revisionist authoritarian leadership.¹⁷ The two states established a strategic partnership in



The EU/NATO information center in Tbilisi, Georgia, which was closed as of June 2025. Photo credit: Lauren Higuchi.

2023, and China has already made concrete infrastructure investment plans to serve its goal of using Georgia as its strategic crux of the Middle Corridor transit route.¹⁸

The Caucasian states are all seeking new partnerships with China, suggesting a Chinese challenge to traditional Russian power in the region. The trajectory of the Caucasian governments seems to be one of divergence as the three states look to different powers for future cooperation: Armenia turns toward a new relationship with the West, Azerbaijan reforges a pre-colonial alliance with the Turkic world, and Georgia retreats back into the Russian sphere of influence.

THE RISE IN MILITARIZATION AMONG NON-TRADITIONAL MILITARY POWERS

Spotlighting Hidden Shifts in the Global Security Landscape

By Giullia Caico and Anjali Mishra

ROMANIA

Between 2023 and 2025, Romania grew its defense budget from around 1.6% of GDP to 2.24%, some of the largest growth seen among NATO members.⁵ Romania is expected to spend 5% of its GDP on direct and indirect defense funding within the next seven years, displaying its preparation as tensions escalate in Eastern Europe.⁶ Sharing one of the largest NATO land borders next to Ukraine, Romania is advancing its military as a way of deterrence-based defense, so they do not have to get involved in the Russia-Ukraine war.⁷ Romanian leaders have explicitly said that they are strengthening their military operations due to Russian aggression against Ukraine.⁸ By 2029, Romania is expected to spend 45.2% of its defense budget on acquisition spending.⁹ This dramatic increase in new technology is directed towards investments in artificial intelligence and digital security, leading to an approach to modernization.¹⁰ With F-35A fighter jets, M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams tanks, and K9 Thunder artillery, Romania advances toward a more strategically aligned and NATO-influenced standard.¹¹ The new high-tech system will give Romania the ability to compete in the global market, both in the public and private sectors.¹² With technology comes infrastructure, creating new jobs and attracting global investors. As tensions between NATO and Russia slowly increase, the power of Romania to strengthen itself is critical. With an increasing budget and updated technologies become a weakness within the Baltic region. With increasing budgets and updated technologies, small states like Romania are efficiently preventing future conflicts before they escalate.

GUYANA

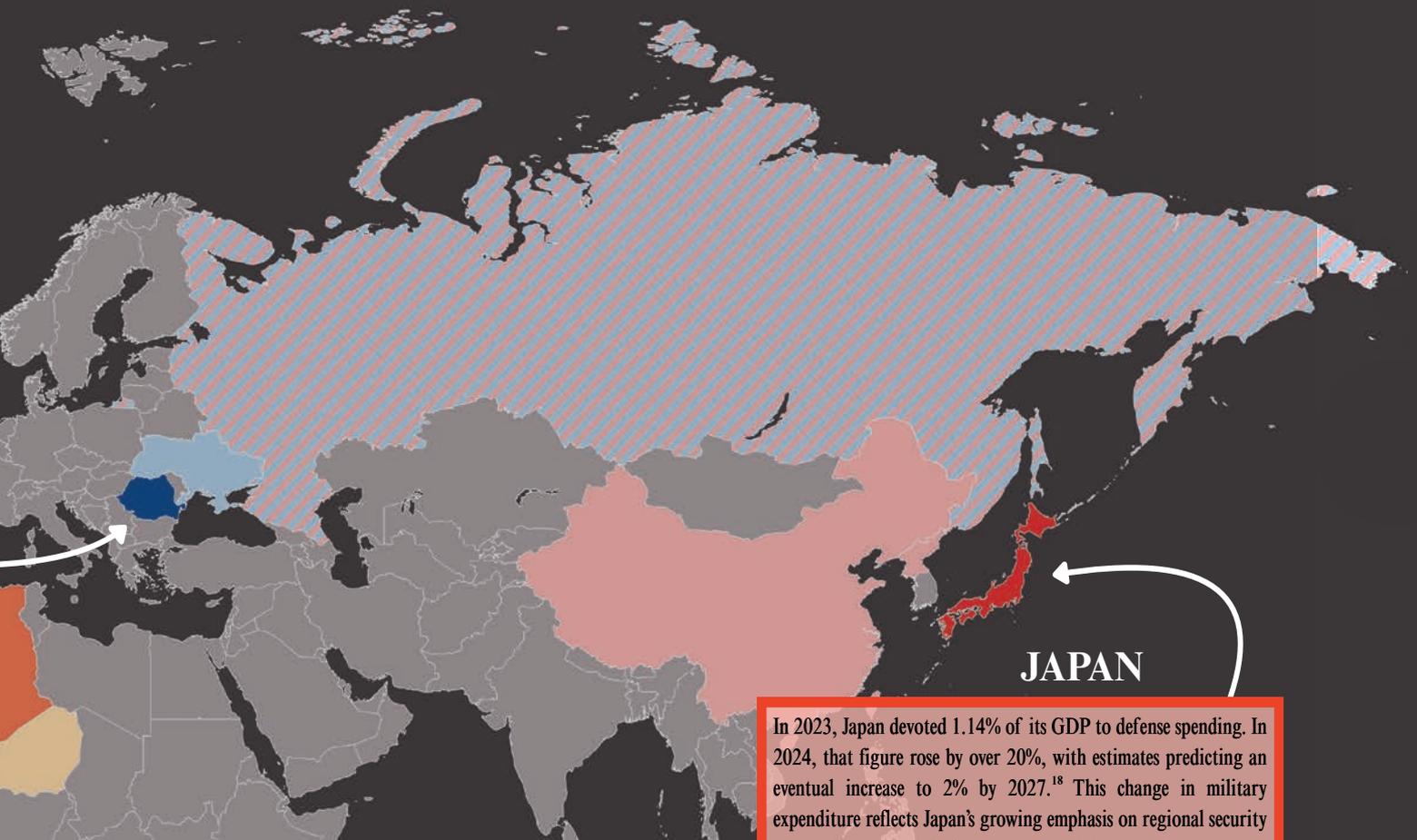
The nation of Guyana has increased its military appropriations by over a third to 0.86% of its GDP, a notable jump from historically low spending that signals the country's growing attention to regional security and strategic positioning.¹ Largely to blame for this increase are rising military escalations by Venezuela. The Essequibo region, located west of the Essequibo River, and its associated aquatic economic zone have been disputed for centuries. Escalations have occurred within the past two years following Guyana's rapid economic growth, fueled by the discovery of significant offshore oil and gas reserves, which have heightened the country's strategic and financial stakes in the region.²

Due to Venezuela's recent military escalations, including a larger presence at Anacoco Island and incursions into Guyanese maritime territory, Guyana now considers the threat of war significant enough to expand both its defensive and offensive military capabilities.³ The nation's chief of defense, Brigadier General Omar Khan, stated in a May 2025 interview that the Guyana Defense Force (GDF) budget has increased by over 800% in five years as part of the nation's strategy of increasing total infrastructure capabilities.⁴ Most of their budget has been allocated towards strengthening their naval fleet through the acquisition of vessels and machinery, as well as the construction of patrol boats and hangars. Guyana's buildup reflects a calculated effort to safeguard its sovereignty and deter aggression, an assertion of stability designed to prevent the very conflict it is preparing to face.

ALGERIA

Between the instability of sub-Saharan Africa and rising military spender in all of Africa.¹³ In 2024, the Alg accounting for 8% of its GDP, which is one of the high. The dispute in Western Sahara territory between Morocco and arms race between Morocco and Algeria. Algeria supports within North Africa, essentially a way to show itself a has become exceedingly high; speculatively, the reason operational aid to the Polisario Front takes a lot of n military force to stabilize its own domestic affairs, as pandemic. Compounding Algeria's desire to militarize Sahel region, most notably the coups in Mali, Burkina instability have propelled Algeria's reliance on military. Algeria generally ranks top 10 in the world for arms well as some smaller portions from Germany and C cybersecurity intelligence to have stronger capabilities they must keep in mind that eventually a tipping point

As traditional military powers grow more assertive on the global stage, their peripheral counterparts are quickly reevaluating their GDP expenditures to enhance deterrent capabilities and modernize their armed forces. These four non-traditional powers – Guyana, Algeria, Romania, and Japan – have proven themselves to be extreme cases when strengthening their military, illustrating how local and international conflicts can affect even smaller states. By increasing defense budgets and modernizing their technology, these states are effectively stifling future conflicts before they start.



ing tensions with Morocco, Algeria has become the largest
gerian government approved a record budget for defense,
hest ratios of defense budget to GDP globally.¹⁴
rocco and the military group Polisario Front has driven an
pports the Polisario Front to reduce Morocco's influence
s a powerful state in this conflict. Their military spending
behind the large budget is because providing financial and
aintenance.¹⁵ Furthermore, Algeria has a history of using
it did following the Hirak protests prior to the COVID-19
e are the numerous coups that have recently occurred in the
a Faso, and Niger.¹⁶ External border tensions and internal
y force.
imports, getting around 75% of its arms from Russia, as
hina.¹⁷ These arms aim to modernize their airspace and
by 2030. As Algeria's regional environment gains tension,
will come with consequences.

In 2023, Japan devoted 1.14% of its GDP to defense spending. In 2024, that figure rose by over 20%, with estimates predicting an eventual increase to 2% by 2027.¹⁸ This change in military expenditure reflects Japan's growing emphasis on regional security and deterrence amid shifting geopolitical dynamics. In response to rising regional tensions, Japanese politicians have successfully petitioned for increased military capability. Escalations such as marine skirmishes between China and Taiwan, North Korean missile launches, and the ongoing Kuril Islands dispute with Russia have all contributed to this push.¹⁹ Most prominent in their rhetoric has been the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the nation's leading conservative party. With their recent political sweep in the 2025 House of Councillors election (gaining 119/125 of available seats), party leaders are pushing for militarization and heightened defense funding to address growing fears of global violence.²⁰ With new LDP-affiliated Sanae Takaichi assuming the office of Prime Minister on October 21, 2025, Japan's defense ambitions have found a voice closely aligned with the party's legacy of national assertiveness.²¹ She inherits a fraught security landscape defined by nuclear-armed neighbors, an emboldened China, and a cautious alliance with the United States, making Japan's military buildup less a sudden shift than a calculated response to the world closing in on it.

Militarism & Diplomacy

The Limits of U.S. Influence in the Middle East

DAWSON CHANG AND SARINA KHANI

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched over 100 drone strikes onto Iranian territory, targeting key nuclear facilities, nuclear scientists, and military leaders.¹ The attack diverged from American interests: U.S. and Iranian officials had planned to discuss a deal that would have scaled down Iran's nuclear program in exchange for U.S. removal of sanctions on Iran. However, due to Israel's attack, the meeting was cancelled.² Although Israel notified Washington shortly before the strike, the attack was an "independent decision of Israel," according to Israel's U.N. Ambassador.³ Several days later on June 21, the U.S. launched Operation Midnight Hammer, attacking three major nuclear facilities in Iran.⁴

The 2025 Israel-Iran war highlighted a core dilemma in U.S. foreign policy: for decades, Washington has treated Israel as a reliable partner in the Middle East to advance shared strategic interests. Yet Israel's increasingly assertive, brutal, and independent security strategy has pulled the U.S. into regional conflicts, undermining Washington's diplomatic flexibility and credibility as a mediator.⁵

Israel's security strategy, known as the "Iron Wall" doctrine, is rooted in deterrence. It states that peace in the Middle East depends on neighboring states' acceptance of Israel's existence, not by diplomacy but rather by Israel's overwhelming military strength.⁶ Over the past two decades, Israel's approach has resulted in continuous, small-scale military conflicts. This practice has been referred to as "campaign between wars."⁷ While this strategy has historically reinforced Israel's defensive strength, it has also entrenched cycles of retaliation, prevented long-term political resolutions, and complicated U.S. efforts to engage with the region diplomatically.⁸

Over time, Israel came to view Iran as the primary threat to its security. Israeli policymakers frame Iran's nuclear ambitions and proxy networks—such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen—as existential threats, justifying preemptive

military action.⁹ However, Israel has increasingly broadened its definition of existential threats to include any militia, state, or movement that opposes its objectives.¹⁰

This expansion of Israeli militarism has furthered regional instability and limited Washington's ability to pursue diplomatic solutions. In April 2024, Israel's strike on

“Washington must recognize that Israel’s military aggression, as opposed to Iran’s nuclear program and proxies alone, contributes to regional instability and can disrupt U.S. interests in the Middle East.”

Iran's consulate in Damascus triggered Tehran's first direct missile barrage against Israeli territory at a moment when U.S. officials were engaged in backchannel talks on sanctions relief and nuclear safeguards.¹¹ By provoking Iran at such a critical diplomatic point, Israel effectively sabotaged U.S. efforts to negotiate peacefully. Similarly, in September 2025, Israel's strike on Hamas negotiators in Qatar, a U.S. ally and regional mediator, damaged the U.S.'s reliability as a partner and exposed the limits of Washington's influence over Israeli military planning.¹² In June 2025, American participation in Operation Midnight Hammer—during which the United States launched strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan—

demonstrated how Washington's commitment to its alliance with Israel can override broader U.S. policy goals. This included the Trump administration's original "America First" approach, which had warned against costly Middle Eastern interventions.

The Operation Midnight Hammer strikes marked a significant turning point in an already shaky U.S.–Iran relationship. Decades of indirect proxy conflicts and small-scale military actions finally boiled over into a direct strike on Iranian soil, laying a dangerous precedent for the region and its future stability. Given the operation's lack of long-term success, as it only set Iran's nuclear program back by less than two years, the strikes prompted broader concerns about the U.S.'s credibility as a mediator in the region and whether Washington accurately weighed the strategic costs of assisting Israel's military campaign.¹⁴

Israel's aggressive actions have also impacted regional perceptions of the West. The war in Gaza, expanding West Bank settlements, and repeated Israeli strikes and ground

offensives in Lebanon and Syria, along with the Doha strike that killed Hamas negotiators reportedly involved in mediation, have altered Israel's regional image. For Gulf states, Turkey, and other key actors, Israel has moved from a potential partner to a destabilizing force.¹⁵ This shift is so pronounced that even Oman's foreign minister named Israel, not Iran, as the region's chief source of instability.¹⁶ Arab public support for Israel's actions, especially in relation to Palestinians, remains extremely low. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE remain close allies of the U.S., they hesitate to pursue agreements with Israel out of fear of domestic or regional backlash.¹⁷ Turkey has also shown hesitation; previously neutral toward Israeli policy, it has now shifted in response to Israel's actions in Syria and Gaza to a more defensive stance, closing its airspace, suspending trade, and increasing its military capabilities.¹⁸

As confidence in the United States deteriorates, countries in the region are looking beyond Washington for new security partnerships and investments. Saudi Arabia has expanded cooperation with China on missiles and drones, partnered with Pakistan for defense infrastructure, and localized production of key weapons systems, raising questions about the necessity of its reliance on the U.S.¹⁹ Similarly, the UAE has purchased European fighter jets and developed missile defense systems with South Korea, Qatar and Kuwait are embedding themselves in European security networks, and Turkey unveiled a "Steel Dome" air defense system comparable to Israel's Iron Dome. Thus, Israel's militaristic strategy has not deterred regional escalation, but fueled it, encouraging states to strengthen their own military capabilities in case of an Israeli attack.²⁰ It also reduces U.S. influence in the region, as states withdraw from U.S. security guarantees and turn to other partners.

Washington must recognize that Israel's military aggression, as opposed to Iran's nuclear program and proxies alone, contributes to regional instability and can disrupt U.S. interests in the Middle East. Continued unconditional support for Israel's military actions risks alienating key U.S. allies like the Gulf states, pushing countries in the region toward partnerships with other countries as their confidence in the U.S. wanes. Addressing the persecution of Palestinians, ensuring the trust of regional allies, and prioritizing de-escalation are critical steps to preserve U.S. credibility and influence as a world leader.²¹

“The 2025 Israel-Iran war highlighted a core dilemma in U.S. foreign policy: for decades, Washington has treated Israel as a reliable partner in the Middle East to advance shared strategic interests. Yet Israel’s increasingly assertive, brutal, and independent security strategy has pulled the U.S. into regional conflicts...”

Border Conflicts

EITAN COHEN

Borders around the Middle East have become focal points of power struggles and bloodshed over the past year. While none of these borders have been officially moved or altered, the way they operate has changed. Border zones around the Middle East are being used to fight proxy wars, project force, and prevent dangers before they reach their citizens. The result of these struggles is a region where borders do not merely create boundaries between countries, but rather dictate where and how nations fight.

Israel, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt

Nearly every one of Israel's borders has seen activity in the last year. In Gaza, Rafah and other crossings have become militarized barriers where only military personnel can travel.¹ Before the October 7th attacks, there were 17,000 Gazans with work permits for Israel, now there are zero.² This is one way the border became completely sealed. In Lebanon, thousands on both sides have been displaced after Israeli airstrikes and Hezbollah rockets.³ Israel also launched a ground invasion into Lebanon, but later signed a ceasefire, withdrawing its troops.⁴ In Syria, Israel has been conducting airstrikes on Hezbollah and Iranian targets, specifically around the Israeli-Syrian border, the Golan Heights, and the Syrian capital of Damascus.⁵ Israel maintains that the goal of these campaigns is to stop terrorism rather than increase its territory. Israel also accused Egypt of breaking the 1979 peace treaty, where Egypt agreed to limit its troop presence on the Israeli-Egyptian border.⁶ Israel accused Egypt of stationing too many troops close to the border, further increasing tensions with Egypt.⁷

Türkiye, Syria, Iraq

Türkiye has been a part of multiple operations abroad. During the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, Turkish forces launched attacks against Kurdish freedom-fighting groups in northern Syria.⁸ Türkiye claims these operations were required for national security, but others believe it was to prevent Kurdish groups from acquiring power in the new Syrian government. Türkiye also launched drones and raids that targeted the Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK), another Kurdish militant group, this time in Iraq's Kurdistan region.⁹ These operations show how the line between cross-border control and counterterrorism has become blurred in Türkiye's war against Kurdish freedom-fighting groups.

Syria, Iraq

The Iraqi-Syrian border, an area that was loosely controlled by Islamic State remnants and militias supported by Iran, has also been unstable. One of these militias attacked a U.S. base in Jordan, killing three American soldiers.¹⁰ In response, the U.S. attacked, launching rockets towards these militias in February 2024.¹¹ The Iraqi-Syrian border remains a hotspot with both governments claiming jurisdiction over it.

Lebanon-Syria

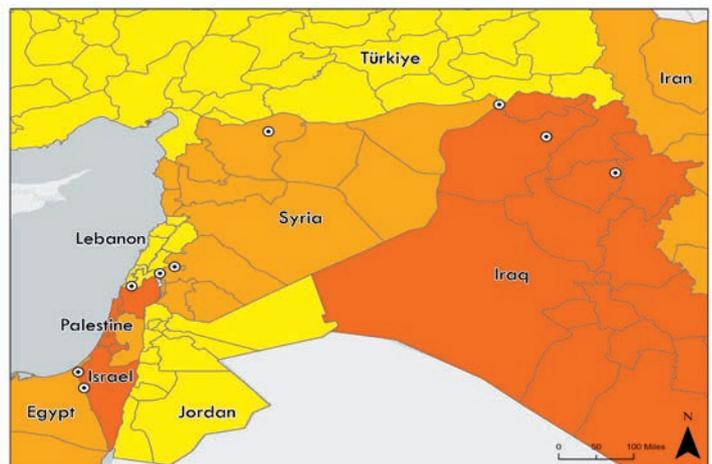
The new Syrian government and Lebanon have resumed border negotiations to restrict militia and smuggling movements.¹²

Iran-Iraq

In June 2025, Iran attacked Kurdish groups in northern Iraq with artillery and drone strikes along the Iraq-Iran border.¹³

Conclusion

Across the Middle East, borders have remained central to how states think about security. These borders have shifted from areas of hostility to low-grade warzones surrounded by conflict. Borders have become increasingly militarized and continue to be hotspots of government or proxy conflicts.



Map of conflicts across the Middle East. Graphic Credit: Lauren Higuchi.

Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

EVELYN BERTOLINI

In the midst of today's increasingly turbulent international political climate, the UN and other global powers have failed to recognize human rights violations they consider less imperative to immediate international order. Cameroon's Anglophone crisis, an armed conflict between English-speaking separatists and the Cameroonian government, is a product of colonialism that has been worsened by international neglect. The conflict, based in deep interlinguistic dissent, has ravaged the country, with an estimated death toll of 6,500 and hundreds of thousands more displaced from their homes.¹

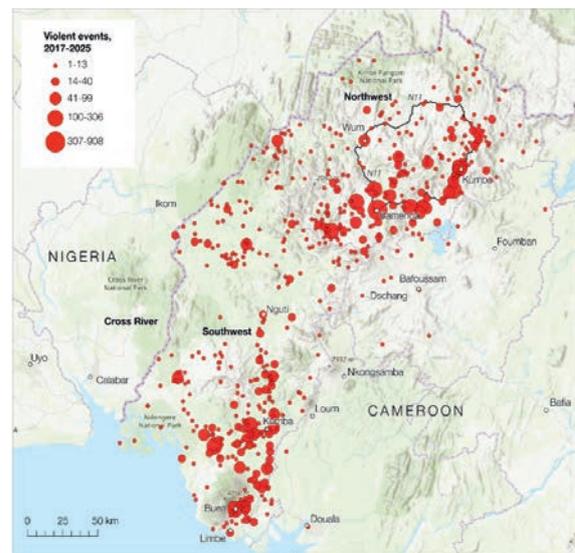
The government's response to a 2016 Anglophone protest, rife with extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and gender-based violence, did little to quell the Anglophone minority's concerns of marginalization at the hands of the Francophone-dominated government.² Since then, separatist groups have contributed to violence in the country's Northwest and Southwest regions and have called for independence of a separate Anglophone state of Ambazonia for the 14% of the Cameroonian population that speaks English.³ Tensions have worsened and will continue to do so in the wake of the 2025 presidential election.⁴ 48 people were killed by government forces as they protested the re-election of Paul Biya, who has held a dictator-like grasp over the country since 1982 and has just entered his eighth term.⁵

Demands for a separate state may appear justifiable given the country's divided history; after WWI, Cameroon was divided between Britain and France, which resulted in a linguistic and cultural split.⁶ The demands for independence, however, don't take into account the state's current political system. In 2022, data showed that Cameroonians severely lacked political and civil liberties while facing a corrupt and autocratic government.⁷ Marginalization cannot be mended with the creation of a separate state; rather, current unrest must be addressed at its root in governmental injustice. Without international intervention and significant

governmental reform, the government-caused conflict will persist, whether as separate states or a nation divided against itself.

Potential solutions are complex but begin with pressures from abroad, which have had a record of success in African countries facing unjust governments. South Africa's Anti-Apartheid movement saw violence catalyzed by extremist group Inkatha, which aimed to create a state of the Zulu people, a major ethnic group.⁸ What proved effective for the South African case was international pressure. For highly unstable nations such as Cameroon, multilateral organizations such as the UN and EU hold a massive amount of sway over the domestic order of the country and should use it to condemn the ongoing human rights violations. In South Africa, this meant installing mandatory embargoes and issuing official condemnations of the discriminatory governmental system.⁹ A similar intervention in Cameroon is necessary to end the conflict.

When violence reaches a point where innocent citizens are being harmed, displaced, and killed, and the education of the youth is at stake, it is the responsibility of international powers to uphold moral standards. The well-being of global order is fundamentally linked with the well-being of the order's people; international stability cannot stand where injustice persists.



Violent events including battles, explosions and remote violence, and violence against civilians from January 2017 through mid-May 2025. Graphic credit: Tony Nikolovski and Olivier Walther using ACLED data.

Breaking Belarus's Dictatorship

EVA ZELTSER AND ANONYMOUS

Since 2020, Belarusian authorities have arbitrarily detained over 50,000 people for being linked to peaceful protests, with nearly 1,200 political prisoners remaining behind bars.¹ As of 2024, the government has designated roughly 6,500 online resources as “extremist,” subjecting its users to criminal penalties.² Reports from former prisoners and human rights institutions show widespread torture, isolation, and health risks inside prisons.³ These accounts, only a handful among countless others, reveal the authoritarian underpinnings of modern Belarusian society and highlight the need for a pragmatic approach to achieving change within the country.

This change can be achieved by combining two methods. One, the top-down approach, focuses on using international institutions to pressure the Belarusian government into taking pro-democratic actions. The second, a bottom-up method, ensures that the drive for democratic change in Belarus develops internally, within civil society, as much as externally.

The Emergence of the International Front

One of the strongest leaders of the top-down approach is Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. After her husband's arrest for challenging Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko's decades-long rule, Tsikhanouskaya emerged as the leading figure of Belarus's democratic opposition.⁴ Forced into exile in Lithuania following her victory against Lukashenko during the 2020 elections, Tsikhanouskaya has spent the last five years building international support for a free Belarus.⁵

Under her stewardship, 35 countries, including most of Europe, the U.S., and Canada, have refused to recognize the legitimacy of Belarus's recent elections.⁶ Belarus now has a voice in key security and economic forums, and 30 countries have joined an alliance advocating for democratic reform in the country.⁷ These diplomatic achievements are significant: with increasing international support for democratic

change in Belarus, it becomes easier to exert pressure on the country.

Diplomatic Limits

Yet, several institutional and geopolitical barriers limit the impact of high-level diplomacy in Belarus.

Belarus's refusal to ratify the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC) means traditional international justice mechanisms have no jurisdiction in the country, making it nearly impossible to hold officials accountable for crimes and abuses.⁸ Recently, Lithuania, which falls under the ICC's jurisdiction, requested that the Court investigate Belarusian human rights abuses allegedly committed on Lithuanian territory.⁹ However, it is unclear where ICC jurisdiction begins and ends, complicating the institution's ability to hold Belarus accountable.

Furthermore, Belarus refuses to cooperate with the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which limits domestic and international monitoring of abuses in the country.¹⁰ Additionally, European governments have struggled to create a unified front against Lukashenko. In early 2025, an EU statement condemning Lukashenko's regime and fraudulent elections was ultimately blocked by Hungary.¹¹

Lastly, Belarus's economic and military ties to Russia likely deter other countries from taking decisive action against Lukashenko's regime, which has long sought a reciprocal relationship with Russia as an ally. Foreign involvement in Belarus may aggravate Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has used Belarusian territory in his war on Ukraine and recently enhanced the two countries' defense pact to stave off Western aggression.¹²

This isn't to say high-level actions are ineffective. It is nearly impossible to enact fundamental reforms in a country, especially one like Belarus—where political opposition is promptly silenced—when there is a gap in

international support. However, this top-down approach is limited in its direct access to the Belarusian people, a gap that civil society seeks to fill.

Civil Society in the Crosshairs

Today, Belarusian civil society organizations (CSOs) operate under significant limitations, facing harassment, criminalization, and financial restriction both domestically and in exile.¹³ The government frequently shuts down independent groups, labels CSOs as “extremists” or “terrorists,” and threatens individuals associated with them. As a result, nearly 2,000 CSOs have been liquidated since 2020.¹⁴

Despite these barriers, Belarusian civil society has remained resilient. Following the 2020 crackdown on the democratic movement, grassroots mutual aid networks, informal neighborhood groups, and online communities have emerged as vital support systems.¹⁵ To sustain and strengthen civil society, several key actions are needed:

1. Stronger protection for CSOs abroad

Reporting requirements imposed by foreign donors can expose CSO members to security risks, as Belarusian authorities use this information to target involved individuals.¹⁶ Furthermore, many liquidated Belarusian CSOs seek to re-establish themselves abroad, a process made challenging, as visa and registration requirements in host countries can expose stakeholder identities.¹⁷ Governments that financially support or host Belarusian CSOs should focus on streamlining this process and consider exemptions from certain legal demands, such as disclosing physical addresses or member identities, to ensure the safety of organizations and their involved individuals.

2. Long-term, flexible funding

While project-based funding from international bodies like the EU is valuable, its short-term and conditional nature forces CSOs into continuous application processes, hindering their ability to plan for long-term projects.¹⁸ Sources that allocate funding to these organizations should focus on longer-term assistance, which is less contingent on specific projects and more focused on overarching organizational missions.

3. Investment in local and informal initiatives

Local initiatives play a crucial role in

“Despite barriers, Belarusian civil society has remained resilient. Following the 2020 crackdown on the democratic movement, grassroots mutual aid networks, informal neighborhood groups, and online communities have emerged as vital support systems.”

Belarus’s pro-democracy movement. Unlike large-scale organizations, they are closely tied to the issue at hand and thus better positioned to understand the unique contexts. To ensure these movements can provide their services, continued financial support is integral. Opportunities for these exist through avenues such as the Human Rights Foundation’s Press Freedom Defense Fund, which allocates money for independent Belarusian journalists and media outlets under the attack of Lukashenko’s regime.¹⁹

Conclusion

Over five years after Belarus’s most severe crackdown on opposition forces, Lukashenko shows no signs of easing his repression. It remains vital that action is taken on all fronts to ensure the continued strength of Belarus’s democratic movement. Change in Belarus will not come easily or quickly, but sustained pressure from the international community and support for local civil society can lay the groundwork for progress.

Forced Assimilation and Restrictive Policies in Tibet

DORA ZHANG AND LILIANNA GARBER



Graphic credit: Evelyn Betrolini.

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), a province of the People's Republic of China (PRC), is home to 3.66 million people. Due to their distinct culture, language, and religion, the people of Tibet do not identify themselves with the Han Chinese.¹ Originally seen by the Dalai Lama, a spiritual leader and patron saint of Tibet, as an area for religious freedom, conflict between the Tibetans and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has grown over recent years.²

As a result of the oppression and forced assimilation by the Chinese government, human rights issues in Tibet are rampant. Thousands of Tibetans face death, and tens of thousands flee to India as refugees.³ Resistance to

Chinese oppression is often ineffective, usually resulting in further human rights violations against minority religions and ethnic groups, including Tibetans, in China.⁴ This issue became especially pertinent when the CCP began to shut down all cultural and religious beliefs that they deemed to be signs of "terrorism, extremism, and separatism," also known as the "Three Evils."⁵

Religious repression is the CCP's most apparent human rights violation. Tibetans face restrictions in freely practicing Buddhism, as monasteries are being monitored by the Chinese government.⁶ Furthermore, the Dalai Lama was forced into exile in 1959.⁷ He fled the palace days after meeting with a Chinese general

because the People's Liberation Army, China's land, sea, and air forces unit, killed thousands of Tibetans protesting the conference. The Dalai Lama was granted asylum in India and now resides in Dharamshala, which has become the Tibetan government center in exile.⁸

The CCP also limits and censors Tibetans' use of media and the internet out of fear of the Tibetans exposing the government.⁹ Those who fight against the CCP are punished, often being arrested or held in detention facilities. In January 2023, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that the CCP continues to capture and arrest monks, reporters, journalists, protesters, and other important Tibetan figures.¹⁰ These individuals are held in small cells for months with no access to the outside world, sunlight, sleep, or sufficient food. The authorities often force political prisoners, especially monks and nuns, to learn and perform patriotic songs and dances to praise the CCP. In addition, they are forced to watch propaganda films, and if they are caught showing signs of disinterest, they are punished.¹¹ Even Tibetans who live in mainland China are imprisoned for donating to Buddhist monasteries in India and Nepal.¹² These Tibetans often don't have access to the medical treatment necessary after the cruel torture. Freed prisoners have reported being permanently disabled or facing deplorable health conditions due to the degrading prison treatment.

The CCP has also been attacking Tibetan culture at its roots by shutting down Tibetan run schools. Over the past 15 years, the Chinese government has shut down hundreds, or potentially thousands, of local schools.¹³ In addition to the closure of local Tibetan schools, monastery schools, which preserve the customs and language of the Tibetan people, have been closed down.¹⁴ Tibetan children are sent to government-run boarding schools. As of 2024, one million Tibetan children have been forced to live in state-run boarding schools and preschools.¹⁵ Within these state-run boarding schools, Tibetan children are not only separated from their families, traditions, and way of life, but because they are educated through an exclusively Mandarin curriculum, they have no access to Tibetan textbooks or language.¹⁶

The Chinese government has furthered its suppression of Tibetan language by banning Tibetan students from attending Tibetan language classes during holiday breaks.¹⁷ Many see these practices as a way of forced assimilation of Tibetans into the Han Chinese culture, especially in their efforts to cut off the transmission of Tibetan culture and knowledge

“Those who fight against the CCP are punished, often being arrested or held in detention facilities... the CCP continues to capture and arrest monks, reporters, journalists, protesters, and other important Tibetan figures.”

and enforce Mandarin speaking within the country.¹⁸ The erasure of the Tibetan language is extremely significant and cannot be overlooked. It carries the collective knowledge and values of the distinct Tibetan culture and people. If these practices continue, Tibetan culture falls victim to erasure, which has the devastating potential to wipe out the entire Tibetan community.

The repression of the Tibetan language, religion, and culture by the Chinese government is an intentional campaign of assimilation that goes against the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people. Not only is the Chinese government acting in violation of their own domestic law, but they are violating the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), which emphasize the importance of parental rights and agency in the education of children.¹⁹ To end the cultural suppression and linguicide in Tibet, the international community must move beyond simple condemnation. The United Nations should pressure China to comply with the CCPR and to allow independent monitoring of the TAR. Additionally, global organizations and foreign governments should fund Tibetan language education in exile communities to help preserve Tibetan culture. Only through accountability and aid from the international community can the rights of the Tibetan people be protected, and their culture preserved.

A Reckoning

Massive Anti-Corruption

Article:

LUCY O'BRIEN

On November 1, 2024, a recently reconstructed concrete canopy collapsed at a railway station in Novi Sad, Serbia, killing 16 people. In the following weeks, the disaster became a catalyst for national outrage, as student protesters claimed the faulty construction exposed a broader trend of negligence and corruption in the Serbian government.¹

Gatherings began as peaceful vigils held by local university students and faculty to commemorate the lives lost in the disaster. However, following the government's refusal to take accountability for the tragedy, students moved to the streets, organizing traffic blockades and demanding transparency, effectively shuttering their school in the process.² By the end of December, thousands of university students followed, earning support from agriculture workers and the Bar Association of Serbia.³ The movement quickly gained national attention, as many Serbians saw the government's dismissive response as a clear demonstration of an incompetent government fractured by corruption.

Protesters largely blame President Aleksandar Vučić and his majority Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) for this corruption. Prior to presidential wins in 2017 and 2022, President Vučić served as Prime Minister from 2014 to 2017.⁴ He has spent his political career cultivating deference in the legislative and judiciary branches and consolidating power within the presidency, a position originally intended to be primarily ceremonial.⁵ Although his populist politics express a desire to align with Western values, Vučić has maintained close relations with Russia and China (the renovation was part of a larger initiative with Chinese construction firms).⁶ Under Vučić, the very institutions designed to prevent disasters—such as the one in Novi Sad—from regulatory agencies to the judiciary have been co-opted to shield politicians and the ruling elite, rather than serve and protect public

interests.⁷

Protests have only grown since December. In March, Serbia saw the largest recorded protest in its history. According to an independent monitor, 325,000 people gathered in Belgrade, although the Serbian government reported 107,000.⁸ Vučić, hoping to outlast the wave of dissent, has refrained from exercising the full force of his power against protesters. Since June, SNS-supported police and mob interventions had doubled, with thousands of protesters beaten, chased, and arrested.⁹ Those who violently attacked protesters have been repeatedly forgiven and defended on national television by Vučić himself. Not only has the degraded justice system failed to punish high-level corruption, but it has also been weaponized by the elite to threaten and legally harass their critics.¹⁰ Additionally, the government-controlled media has been utilized to paint the protesters as foreign-backed terrorists bent on destroying Serbia, as well as unlawfully publishing personal details of participants.¹¹

The student protestors have four formal demands: publication of the entire documentation on the reconstruction of the railway station; dismissal of the charges against arrested and detained students, activists, and citizens at protests regarding the tragedy in Novi Sad; criminal charges against all attackers of students, professors, and citizens; and a 20 percent increase in funding for state universities.¹²



Thousands of Serbian protestors in Belgrade, following a railway collapse in Novi Sad,

g for Serbia

tion Protests Persist

Interview:

SARAH GARRETT

I spoke with a Tufts architecture student in her junior year, born and raised in Belgrade, Serbia. She has been active in recent Serbian student protests in her hometown and demonstrations in support of the student movement in Boston.

While she feels her opinions reflect those of other students, she wishes to clarify that the statements made in this interview are not on behalf of the Serbian student movement, nor the Boston demonstrators.

What did the collapse at Novi Sad make you realize?

We are living in a system that has completely neglected the safety of the individual. It no longer cares for us as citizens but only cares about power and money.

Are there any human rights that you wish to see protected in Serbia?

The right to speak freely without being potentially arrested or questioned by the police.

People have lost [a lot] due to speaking up. They have lost their jobs and been fired. They have had their income taken away or limited.

What can you tell us about the community Boston Stands with Students?

It's an independent group of people that have come together through these gatherings,

standing in support of [Serbia] and the students. [...] A really beautiful part of what came out of this for people living in diaspora, specifically in Boston, is that we've met each other. This sad event has brought us together for the first time.

What has it been like seeing the EU condemn state repression in Serbia?'

It's encouraging. [...] I've been dissatisfied with the fact that the EU has not spoken sooner.

If the EU is speaking up about these things, then it gives more legitimacy to the issues.

The end goal [of the protests] is not reaching the EU. Recognition and EU support is important in putting pressure on Vučić but also on the rest of the government to fulfill their public service towards the [Serbian] people and not break international law.

Was there a moment in the protests you've attended that stood out from others you've attended?

It was around December 20th [2024], at one of the main roundabouts in Belgrade. There was a large protest that was announced and organized by the students, which we all went to. I mean, my family, my friends, and many people I know.

Everything at the protest was centered around celebrating the lives lost to the collapse. There was 15 minutes of silence that happened, where 100,000 people went silent. The only thing you could hear was the occasional cry of a baby.

There was something in being together in the middle of winter, outside, with so many people from your city that made you feel like this was different. [...] Everybody felt like we needed to get out of this situation. We need to get out of the darkness that we've been living in.



Serbia. Photo credit: Igor Pavicevic.

Helpless Puzzle Pieces: Understanding

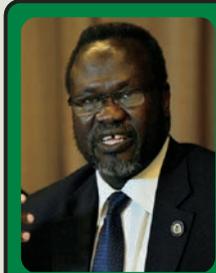
Despite certain differences, these East African nations face detrimental human rights violations being prevalent

2011–2013

- South Sudan achieves independence in 2011. Ethnic tensions lead to a divide between
- **President Salva Kiir** and **VP Riek Machar**
- South Sudan's dominant ethnic groups, the **Dinka** and the **Nuer**, align with **Kiir** and **Machar**, respectively.¹
- Division erupts into **civil war** from 2013 to 2018



President Salva Kiir (Source EaHealth)



Vice President Riek Machar (Source France24)

2013–2018

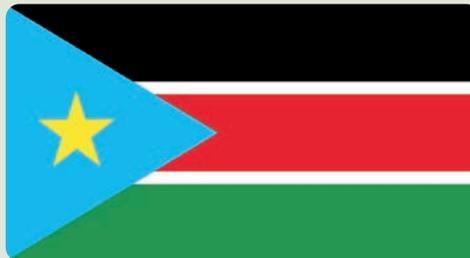
- 2014: **1 million** South Sudanese displaced²
- 2015: **2.2 million** displaced³
- **Kiir** and **Machar** attempt peace treaties in 2015 and 2018, but there is still significant political instability **post-2018** agreement⁴
- **Migration + food shortages** plague the nation



Displaced Civilians in Northern South Sudan (Source Human Rights Watch)

2018–2023

- 2018: Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
- Influx of **UN support** with United Nations Mission in South Sudan (**UNMISS**) for humanitarian issues
- 2022: United Nations (UN) projection that **9.4 million** South Sudanese (76% of population) will require aid by 2023⁵

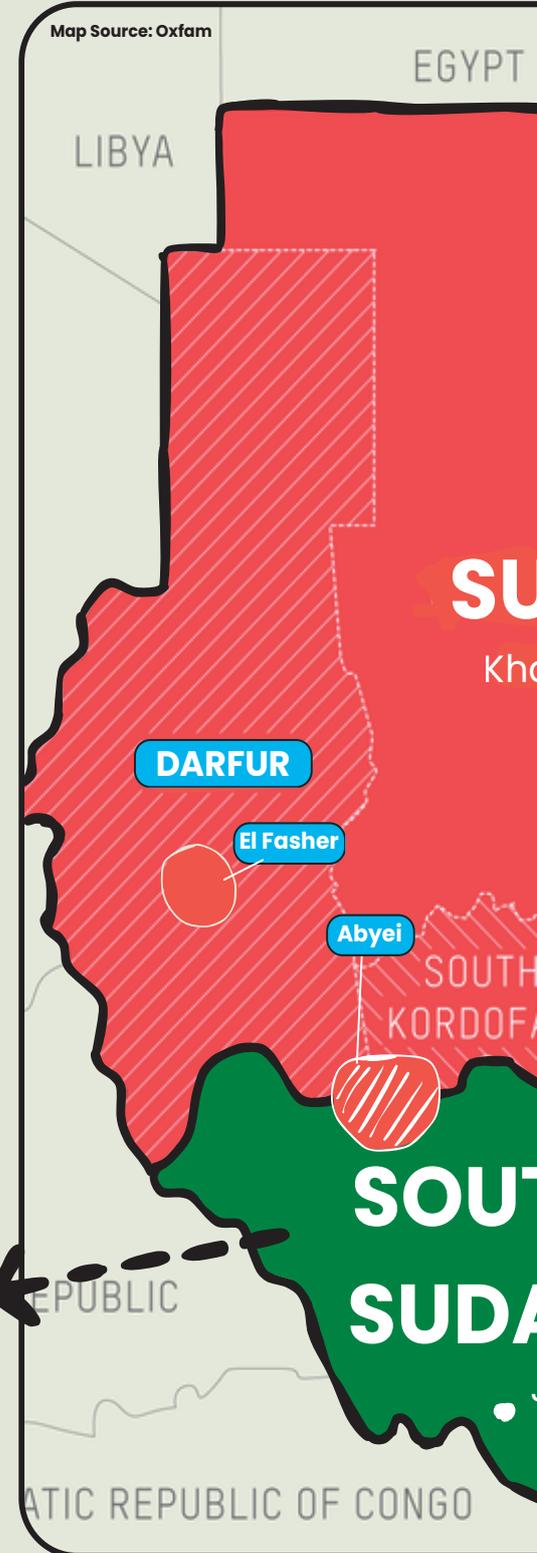


TODAY

- Though the 2018 agreement reinstated **Machar**, he is now on **trial** and **house arrest** for **murder** and **crimes against humanity**⁶
- Over half of South Sudan is facing **food insecurity**, and the elimination of **USAID** has **cut humanitarian programs** like **Save the Children**⁷
- Tensions continue as **civilian militias** that were supposed to be stripped of arms **post-2018** have **retained weapons**⁸
- **Political corruption** is still running rampant, as the UN has published a report on South Sudanese **government officials stealing billions** from the oil industry⁹



UNMISS Peacekeepers in South Sudan (Source UN)

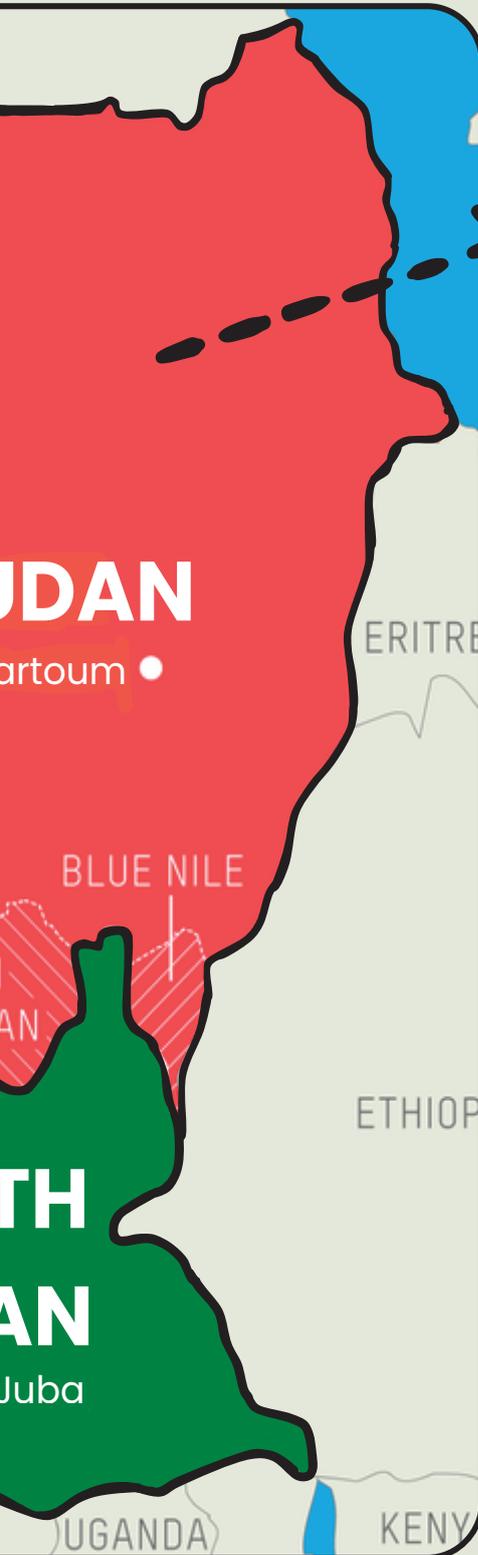


The presence of **militant groups** has **increased** in South Sudan, causing **border disputes** over **resources**, particularly in the **Abyei** area.

Understanding South Sudan and Sudan

environmental crises, with patterns of political corruption and human rights violations. How did this happen?

By Ruby Gonzalez



Al-Bashir post-1989 Sudanese coup d'etat (Source Wikipedia)

1989

- 1983–1989: Democratically elected president Sadiq al-Mahdi represses non-Arab ethnic groups during the Second Sudanese Civil War¹⁰
- 1989: Military leader Omar al-Bashir and other civilian rebels arrest al-Mahdi's administration and assume power

2019

- 2018: To prevent economic collapse from US oil sanctions, the government imposes cuts to subsidies on goods like oil and food¹⁴
- Protests occur against al-Bashir amid these policies as he tries to run for a third term
- Many reject the fusion of Sudanese society with conservative Muslim values¹⁵
- 2019: coup against al-Bashir, institution of military government

Darfur War 2003–2007

- Al-Bashir eliminates political parties, restricts free speech, and supports Islamization of Sudan's government¹¹
- He alienates non-Arab groups in Darfur → 2003: insurrection by civilians¹²
- Al-Bashir supports violent Arab paramilitary groups (Janjaweed) against insurrectionists → hundreds of thousand of Darfur civilians die
- 2004: ceasefire between militias and civilians
- 2008: UN prosecution of al-Bashir¹³



2023

- 2021: Military government is overthrown by Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, but both disagree on the division of power and the direction of the nation¹⁶
- Results in conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAD, led by al-Burhan) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF, led by Dagalo)

TODAY

- Violence grips Sudan's cities as the RSF and SAD fight for territorial control
- At least 12 million Sudanese have been displaced¹⁷
- October 2025: the RSF captures El Fasher in the Darfur region, killing ~1,500 citizens¹⁸
- The SAD and RSF were fighting over control of military bases in the area, which the RSF took in during the siege on El Fasher¹⁹



2025 destruction in El-Fasher (Source: UN)

Increased tensions between Sudan and South Sudan over security and interrupted trade routes, particularly in the south Darfur areas²⁰

Book Review:

Migration as a Political Tool

EMILY TRAN



Photo credit: MIT Center for International Studies.

Kelly M. Greenhill is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, Director of the MIT-Seminar XXI Program, and a research fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

In her book *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, Greenhill delivers a groundbreaking and unsettling study of how human movement can be weaponized in international politics. Drawing on over five decades of case studies and quantitative data, Greenhill argues that mass migration, often portrayed as a humanitarian crisis, can also serve as a deliberate instrument of statecraft, in what she terms “coercive engineered migration.”¹ Her model of two-level asymmetric coercion shows how challengers, states, or non-state actors seeking to influence another government can pressure target states not through military force, but by imposing domestic social and political costs.

Greenhill sharpens this two-level asymmetric coercion framework into two interlocking strategies: swamping, which overwhelms a target’s capacity to absorb migrants, and agitating, which exploits domestic divisions and normative commitments to undermine its willingness to absorb migrants.²

Methodologically, Greenhill balances

large-N analysis, her broad quantitative examination of many coercive migration cases, with close comparison, using detailed case studies to capture the political dynamics. Between 1951 and 2006, she identified at least 56 cases of coercive migration, nearly three-quarters of which achieved at least partial success, meaning the target state complied with some of the challenger’s demands by changing a policy, reversing an action, or offering concessions.³

Her case studies illustrate the theory’s wide range of application: Chapter 2 reconstructs three Cuban episodes, showing how the United States’ early refusal to negotiate with Castro magnified later costs.⁴ Chapter 3 examines Kosovo and NATO in 1999, where a generator (Milosevic’s failed gambit), an agent provocateur (the Kosovo Liberation Army), and an opportunist (neighboring Macedonia) each tested alliance cohesion by manipulating refugee flows.⁵ Chapter 4 argues that the 1991 to 1994 Haitian boatpeople crisis reveals how migration-driven coercion, orchestrated by exiled President Aristide of Haiti, forced the Clinton administration into a reluctant military intervention to restore Haiti’s democracy.⁶ Chapter 5 shows that in the 1990s to early 2000s, fears of a North Korean refugee surge bound migration and nuclear politics: China propped Pyongyang to avert collapse, while international activists and NGOs staged high-visibility events like filmed escape attempts of asylum seekers to pressure China through global media, which grew North Korea’s bargaining power.⁷ Across these chapters, the pattern holds: coercion succeeds when challengers tie cross-border movement to pre-existing domestic fractures.

Philosophically, the book examines how states instrumentalize people as bargaining tools and how migrant cooperation or resistance shapes those dynamics. When displaced populations align with provocateurs, coercion becomes more potent; when migrants pursue independent goals – departing in greater numbers, choosing new routes, or refusing to perform expected roles – coercion can fail.⁸

Greenhill never loses sight of this agency: migrants are not passive objects but active participants who can strengthen or unravel coercive designs.

One of Greenhill's most insightful concepts is "hypocrisy costs," the reputational penalties incurred when liberal democracies violate their own humanitarian ideals.⁹ Inverting the logic of "audience costs," she argues that moral rhetoric can backfire: the higher a leader's ethical claims, the greater the pressure to concede when those claims are tested.¹⁰ Greenhill stated in an interview, "In the current political environment, hypocrisy costs are playing a substantially diminished role in many cases, given the willingness of many potential target states to ignore, eschew, or sidestep their traditional obligations. Unfortunately, though, coercers have just placed greater reliance on other levers of influence."¹¹

Perhaps Greenhill's most unnerving claim concerns the unintended consequences of humanitarian norms: as post-1970s rights commitments and NGO activism grew, they inadvertently gave weaker actors leverage to exploit liberal states' own values.¹² This dynamic produces what she terms a "normative blowback effect," in which the very norms designed to protect the vulnerable increase

the attractiveness and efficacy of "coercive engineered migration" against democracies, prompting some targets to tighten asylum and immigration policies in response.¹³

Ultimately, Greenhill shows that liberal democracies face an ethical paradox: the very norms that define them, transparency, compassion, and legality, can become tools of pressure that undermine their moral credibility. However, sustained education efforts, community compensation, and detailed contingency planning can meaningfully reduce the power of coercive migration when conditions allow.¹⁴

Asked what she hopes readers, especially those outside academia, take away from the book, Greenhill emphasized "an understanding and appreciation for the frequency and real-world geopolitical and humanitarian consequences of a quite common but poorly understood phenomenon that was long . . . hiding in plain sight."¹⁵ I would recommend *Weapons of Mass Migration* to scholars, policymakers, and students seeking to understand how moral ideals can become strategic vulnerabilities. Greenhill's work compels readers to rethink not only how states respond to migration but also what it means to uphold moral responsibility in an interconnected world.

Key Terminology:

1. **Coercive engineered migration:** The deliberate creation or manipulation of large-scale population movements to pressure another state into political or military concessions.
2. **Two-level asymmetric coercion:** Greenhill's model showing how weaker actors pressure stronger ones by turning international disputes into domestic crises, exploiting divisions and humanitarian values within target states.
3. **Challengers:** Governments, rebel groups, or other actors, such as humanitarian NGOs, multinational corporations, and international organizations, use or threaten migration to influence more powerful target states through political, military, or social means.
4. **Generator:** The main actor, often a state, that deliberately triggers or directs a migration crisis for political gain.
5. **Agent provocateur:** A group or actor that escalates displacement to provoke outside attention or intervention.
6. **Opportunist:** An actor that takes advantage of an existing migration crisis to pursue its own goals.

Trump's Immigration Policies

Reshaping America's Democracy

AMANDA ALATORRE WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ANONYMOUS



Detention of an immigrant. Photo credit: US Immigration and Customs Enforcement/X.

Since returning to office this past January, President Trump has mobilized the most powerful tools at the hands of the U.S. government to pursue a fierce fight against immigration. In an Executive Order titled “Protecting the American People from Invasion,” the Trump Administration asserted a vast amount of authority to carry out this mission, including the right to supersede local authorities if their actions don’t align with the rules of the Trump Administration.¹ Trump’s use of the word “invasion” to describe undocumented border crossings marks a bold shift from the term’s conventional meaning, which historically refers to an organized military coming across the border. Stanford Law professor Lucas Guttentag views this change in meaning as a way of creating “a fiction in order to increase the power of the president in ways that are completely inapplicable to this situation.”² In other words, Trump manufactures the threat of a migrant invasion to increase the coercive powers of the state. As a result, executive actions such as military deployment to cities, the erosion of legal protections, and increased surveillance technologies become legitimized, contributing to democratic backsliding and the abandonment of liberal values core to our nation.

Experts McKenzie Carrier and Thomas

Carothers contend that Trump’s actions reflect the broader pattern of executive aggrandizement, a form of democratic backsliding characterized by the steady centralization of power within the executive branch and the weakening of institutional checks and balances.³ Through his aggressive immigration policies, Trump has sought to assert dominance over the states and the judiciary, an approach that aligns with the tactic of making the executive branch increasingly more powerful.⁴

A key example of this trend is the administration’s recent deployment of the National Guard to major U.S. cities without the consent of state governors.⁵ In June, Trump sent 4,000 troops and 700 active-duty Marines to Los Angeles to suppress protests sparked by large-scale ICE raids in the city.⁶ This marked the beginning of an alarming trend of excessive military force against civilians. Since then, Trump has deployed troops to Portland and Chicago, while also threatening to send them to more cities.⁷ In response to threats against San Francisco, California Attorney General Bonta argued that there was “no basis to send National Guard troops [...]. No emergency. No rebellion. No invasion. Not even unrest.”⁸ Although no threat existed, Trump sought to invent one to justify expanding his coercive authority at the expense of states’ autonomy.

In doing so, he bestows the presidency with more power while taking away the powers of state authorities, normally those he has deemed political opponents. During his recent trip to Asia, Trump reasserted his authority to use military force, stating he could send the “Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, [...] anybody [he] wanted” into U.S. cities “if [he] thought it was necessary.”⁹ In a country with a federalist system that divides power between the federal and state governments, Trump’s willingness to use military force in states against the wishes of their governors is a troubling step away from democratic norms.

The Trump Administration has also weakened safeguards against unjust uses of



National Guard deployed in Union Station, Washington. Photo credit: Scott Applewhite.

coercive power by weaponizing U.S. courts. Since May, ICE has targeted courthouses, producing scenes of “chaos, tears, and heartbreak.”¹⁰ Individuals attending mandatory hearings now risk facing “life-threatening imprisonment, swift removal, and the prospect of indefinite family separation.”¹¹ Simultaneously, the Trump Administration has pressured immigration judges to deny immigration hearings altogether.¹² Skye Perryman, CEO of Democracy Forward, argues that “weaponizing immigration courts by threatening people who follow the law and appear for their hearings as directed by the court [will] chill participation in the legal process and violate the fundamental due process and fairness that underpin our legal system.”¹³ These developments set a harmful precedent, as courts, historically protectors of civil rights, become sites of rights infringements.

The Trump Administration has weakened the integrity of judicial institutions, transforming them into yet “another tool for mass deportation.”¹⁴ By attacking and constraining the judiciary, Trump undermines a crucial check on executive authority, a pattern associated with executive aggrandizement.¹⁵

Beyond military and legal measures, increased use of AI surveillance technology has strengthened the Trump Administration’s capacity to enforce immigration policy, bringing immigration enforcement activities to the homes and workplaces of Americans. ICE’s recent partnership with Palantir Technologies brings a highly capable AI-powered data processing machine to the forefront of immigration enforcement.¹⁶ Palantir systems like FALCON pull together vast amounts of data and detect patterns to “identify, track, and deport suspected noncitizens.”¹⁷ This has made possible some of ICE’s most aggressive tactics, such as workplace raids, large-scale enforcement operations, and investigations involving asylum seekers.¹⁸ A particularly concerning aspect of this partnership is the type of data used, constituting a severe invasion of privacy not just for migrants but all Americans. Data is drawn from various sources, including social media posts, location history, tax information, and other government databases, such as Medicare and Social Security.¹⁹ The extraordinary capacity of such a system to conduct mass surveillance has raised the concerns of some Palantir engineers who fear that “building systems, especially without sufficient oversight, that are capable of mass surveillance crosses a dangerous line—from protecting the civil liberties that underpin democracy to blatantly undermining them.”²⁰ This shows that Trump’s actions extend beyond physical force and even involve covert, intelligence-based operations to make such an exercise of power possible. As legal protections erode, these invasions of privacy expose Americans to the threat of forceful repercussions enacted by the state.

Although U.S. democratic institutions have historically demonstrated resilience, scholars warn that “U.S. democracy is being put to the test as never before in the country’s modern history.”²¹ As the powers of the state continue to increase under Trump’s migration regime, the American public should be increasingly wary about what this pattern has in store for the future of democracy.

1000 Years of Survival:

The Druze's Struggle Against Erasure

CALEB AKLILU AND GRACE SHOUIFI

Amidst the ongoing religious and political conflicts in the Middle East are the Druze, a religious minority that has avoided erasure by obscuring their presence through their cultural practices and political maneuvering.

As a neutral minority in a constantly shifting region, the Druze have a long history of enduring oppression. The Druze originated in Cairo around 1017 AD, following their complete separation from Shia Ismailism.¹ The early days of the Druze religion coincided with a period of fierce religious conflict between Islam and Christianity during the Crusades. Because the Druze belief in reincarnation didn't align with other Abrahamic religions, the Druze in the Levant found themselves positioned between two powerful forces with little compatibility, hindering the development of a natural kinship. In the first instance of a trend that would dominate the group's policy for centuries, the Druze bandwagoned with the more immediate threat, the neighboring Abbasids, by guarding the Levantine Coast from Crusader incursions.³ Consequently, the Druze, despite their non-Muslim status, became an integrated part of the Muslim world, taking on a reputation as warriors and guardians of the Middle East.⁴ This alignment wouldn't last, as when the Christian threat subsided, the Muslim rulers began to look inwards, and the non-Sunni minorities in this realm became the predominant threat.

Even after European colonialism and the foundation of Israel disrupted the hegemonic control of Sunni rule, the Druze continue to exist in an unstable environment. The Druze and Israel's shared opposition to fundamentalist Islamic movements has caused the Israeli Defense Forces to seek Druze integration into Israeli society, rather than expelling them.⁵ Israel has also coerced the Druze into accepting citizenship and pressured their social integration under violent and heightened instability in Syria. The Druze, entangled in geopolitical and social tensions, along with policy incentives, had to accept Israeli citizenship and jeopardize their core values of communal independence



Distribution of the Druze communities in the Levant. Graphic credit: Juan Cole.

and religious secrecy.⁶

In Lebanon, a centuries-old rivalry exists between the Christians and the Druze, causing a series of conflicts that left Druze communities massacred. This divide stems largely from the fact that the Druze belief in Pan-Arabism sharply contrasts with the Maronites' emphasis on the country's Phoenician roots.⁷ Eventually, the Maronite increase in power decreased the Druze position, incentivizing the Maronite government to encroach on historically Druze territory.

In Syria, the Druze lived in comfortable coexistence with the Alawite Assad Regime, as they are both rooted in Shia Islam and

aligned against the forces of the Sunni Islamist majority.⁸ However, following the Arab Spring of 2011, many Druze supported the pro-democracy activists, sacrificing their privileged position as a protected minority by presenting themselves as a threat to the Assad regime's control. This led to increased friction between the Druze community and government forces in Suwayda, resulting in the dismantlement of pro-democracy groups and the proliferation of Hezbollah's presence, which caused numerous violent clashes and kidnappings. This showcased how the protected minority status of the Druze was not a partnership but a veiled subjugation.⁹

In the face of continued oppression and the absence of its own nation-state, the Druze community has shown its unique position in resisting oppression. The practice of taqiyya commands the Druze to obscure their faith from outsiders by outwardly adopting the practices of the dominant religious group, allowing this community to survive in hostile states and practice their faith in secret.¹¹ Additionally, the faith is divided into two groups: the Uqqal and the Juhhal. The Uqqal is the smallest and consists of the group's religious scholars who have direct knowledge of the faith's scripture and secrets. The Juhhal is the majority of the Druze community and is not granted access to scripture or Uqqal assemblies.¹² This separation enables their preservation by concentrating the majority of the faith's religious obligations into a small elite minority, relaxing the commitments on the Juhhal as to allow them to practice Taqiyya. The resulting secretive nature of the Druze religion has allowed it to survive as a stateless religious minority in a region dominated by hostile nations.

Today, the Druze continue to adapt to the conflicts of the Middle East by integrating into neighboring geopolitical and domestic power structures. Despite making up only 5 percent of Lebanon's population, the Druze are well-represented in Lebanese society and government, guaranteed both cabinet posts and parliamentary seats.¹³ This power has been achieved through the influence of the Jumblatt and Arslan Druze families, who have leveraged their political power to ensure Druze presence in Lebanon.¹⁴ This governmental power allows Druze culture to be recognized during times of crisis, as Druze government representatives likely pass legislation that favors them.

Amidst the current instability in post-Assad Syria, the Druze continue to ensure their survival and sovereignty by forming militias.

The Druze National Guard, for example, was established to protect the Druze community and the Suwayda region against external threats.¹⁵ These militias have also called on Israeli asymmetric support to prevent potential genocide and displacement of the Druze after the fall of Assad by the Syrian Transitional Government.

To continue to reject assimilation and ensure the survival of their culture, the Druze have actively participated in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) since the 1950s.¹⁶ This participation began after Druze leaders themselves sought conscription to secure equal status, social mobility, and protection within Israeli society. The Druze Initiative Committee, a Druze organization opposing forced conscription policies, has also provided a platform for resistance through demonstrations against land confiscations and citizenship issues.¹⁷

For over 1,000 years, despite not having their own nation-state, the Druze have maintained their culture through traditions that emphasize confidentiality and integration into local power structures. From Lebanon to Syria to Israel, their resilience reveals not only a history of survival but also of continued assertion of agency in hostile environments. While nation-states rise and fall around them, the Druze remain anchored in their centuries-old strategy of preservation through adaptation: a people without borders, yet deeply rooted in their heritage.

“The Druze and Israel’s shared opposition to fundamentalist Islamic movements has caused the Israeli Defense Forces to seek Druze integration into Israeli society, rather than expelling them.”

Interview with Thethar Thet

JUNE MYINT

Thethar Thet is a Myanmar advocate who works in climate change and is currently based in New York. The following interview is a conversation highlighting her lived experience during the 2021 Myanmar coup, the impact of her activism, and advice for the international community concerning approaches towards human atrocities in foreign countries.

How were you involved in the civil uprising movement?

My involvement took two forms: physically protesting and digital activism. My first protest was on February 9th, 2021, when I went to one of the city centers for one of the first major demonstrations. When the internet was cut, we used group phone calls to coordinate [protests]. I joined demonstrations around embassies and international spaces.

Online, I used Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to post eyewitness accounts, safety resources, and documentation of abuse. I worked with Burmese people abroad to amplify our message and coordinate calls for global action. I posted every day until I left the country and continued activism from exile.

What motivated you to be so active instead of staying silent for safety reasons?

When Aung San Suu Kyi, a key Burmese political leader and diplomat, came to power, it felt like the door to the world had opened slightly for Myanmar. The 2021 coup felt like the military trying to slam that door shut again.

Speaking out was a moral imperative. Staying silent felt like complicity. The coup threatened our rights and livelihoods. Collective action mattered—visibility and solidarity protected people in ways silence couldn't.

Protestors in Myanmar used so much innovation and creativity in their methods of resistance. Can you tell me more about this?

Art played a huge role. People came up with incredibly creative forms of protest. Digital art, murals, songs, and videos all helped

communicate emotion and solidarity in ways facts couldn't. Art humanizes movements and builds shared symbols. The three-finger salute came from *The Hunger Games* and became viral. Art makes resistance contagious—it sustains morale and grabs global attention.

Can you share any personal stories that touched you deeply during your time in Myanmar?

My friend, Ko Yaw Mang, worked with me at the UN. He called me from Chin State and told me, "You should go to the U.S., study; help us from the outside. When we win the war, we'll need people like you to grow the trees again."

That phrase—"grow the trees again"—means so much to me. It reminds me that my role now is to help rebuild, even from afar.

Now that you're in New York, how can the global community help the people of Myanmar and "grow their own trees"?

Fund local civil society and community organizations, give unrestricted funding, and trust local leadership. Amplify verified testimony from within Myanmar, and don't speak over local voices. Support local organizations that have been doing the work before, during, and after the coup. If you care about human rights globally, take moral responsibility and engage meaningfully.



Water Color of Thethar Thet. Graphic credit: Evelyn Betrolini.

Taiwan:

Identity Centered in Democracy

SAM LIU

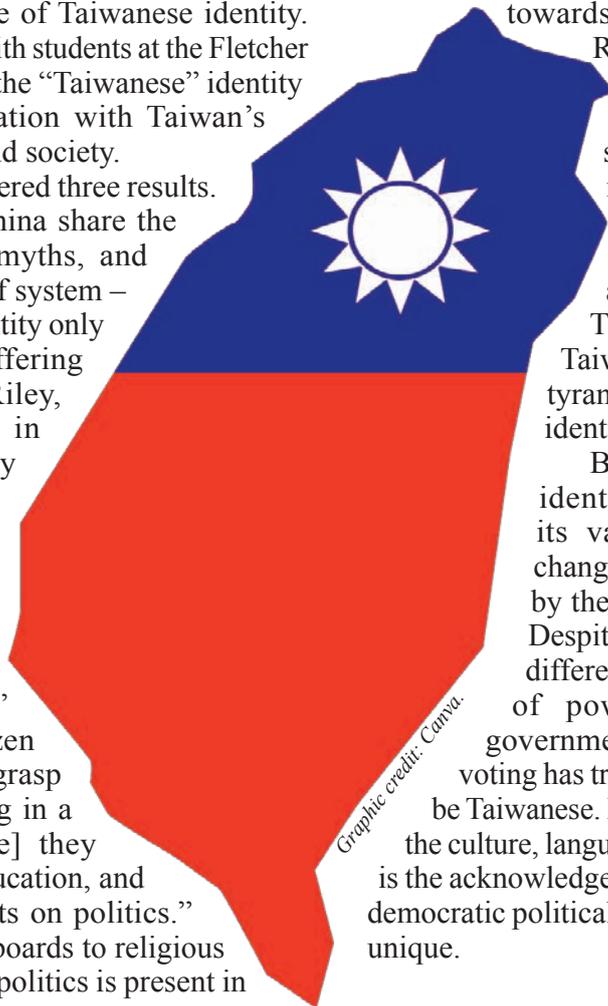
Since lifting the martial law in 1987, Taiwan's shift towards democratization catalyzed a wave of freedom for Taiwan's youth; and the ensuing eight democratic elections, that observed three transitions of power, defiantly cement liberal democratic values at the doorsteps of Communist China.¹ Taiwan's democracy's significance lies in not only a starkly contrasting Chinese authoritarian rule, but fostering a rise of the "Taiwanese" identity, which challenges China's claim of Taiwan. For over three decades, National ChengChi University (NCCU)'s survey revealed the proportion of individuals identifying as Taiwanese rose from 17.6% in 1992 to 62.5% in 2025, those as Chinese fell from 25.5% to 2.3%, and those identifying as both decreased from 46.4% to 30.5%.² The finding posits a correlation between years since democracy and a rise of Taiwanese identity. Through interviews with students at the Fletcher School, I investigate the "Taiwanese" identity and its possible relation with Taiwan's democratic system and society.

The findings garnered three results. First, Taiwan and China share the origin of cultures, myths, and even Confucian belief system – hence Taiwanese identity only actualizes in the differing political systems. Riley, a first-year M.A. in Law and Diplomacy (MALD) student from Taiwan, argues "[the] drastic difference [is] that [Taiwan] has a voting system, which corresponds to a democratic system," and a Chinese citizen "would never truly grasp the nuances of voting in a democracy [because] they received differing education, and hold distinct concepts on politics." From advertisement boards to religious activities, in Taiwan, politics is present in daily life.

Second, the construct of a Taiwanese identity is time. Ashley, a second-year MALD student from Taiwan, proposes that "as time passes, younger generations in Taiwan see historical ties with China [as] increasingly distant." In addition, Riley argues a demographic shift to the youth, born in Taiwan rather than older generations who moved from China, forged a stronger unity of Taiwan. For every younger generation born and educated in democratic values, the Taiwanese identity is further established, and farther from being Chinese.

Lastly, Fohua, a second-year MALD student from China, claims that the Taiwanese identity stemmed from the struggle for democracy. Enduring nearly 40 years of martial law under the Chiang family, Fohua argues the recency of the struggle evokes memories of the path towards democracy. Ashley and Riley argue that the youth critiquing the White Terror and tearing down statues of Chiang Kai-Shek is "unsurprising" due to the connection to China, the symbol of dictatorship, and a time lacking democracy. Thus, the collective will of Taiwanese citizens, to combat tyranny, formed the Taiwanese identity.

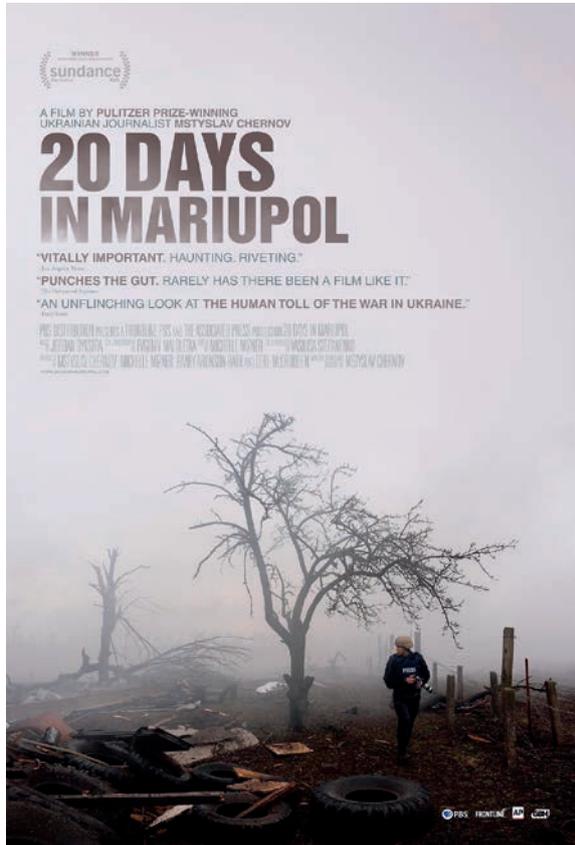
Being Taiwanese is an identity of democracy and its values, built through the changes over time but embraced by the memories of the struggle. Despite their cultures similarities, differences such as the separation of power, check-and-balance government, impartial, transparent voting has transformed what it means to be Taiwanese. Being Taiwanese is not only the culture, language, ethnicity, or location, it is the acknowledgement and experience of the democratic political system that makes Taiwan unique.



Film Review:

20 Days in Mariupol

KEIRA KLEIN AND MIA NEWMAN



20 Days in Mariupol Poster. Photo credit: Associated Press.

20 Days in Mariupol is an Oscar award-winning documentary that follows Associated Press reporter Mstyslav Chernov during the first 20 days of the Russia-Ukraine war in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. As a journalist, Chernov records the series of events as Russian forces attacked civilians and blocked humanitarian aid from entering the city. His captured footage is almost exclusively the only footage released from Mariupol, as the Russians cut off all radio and internet access. The publication of the footage released in *20 Days in Mariupol* is crucial in documenting the potential war crimes committed by the Russian army — footage that has continually been defamed as fake by Russian authorities.

Summary

From one of the opening lines, “Wars don’t start with explosions; they start with silence,”

Chernov establishes the documentary’s unsettling tone. The first day of attacks are marked with terror and confusion. Russia targeted the city of Mariupol because it would provide access to the coast and serve as a key connection to the Russian-controlled territories of Crimea and Donbas. Despite Russia’s insistence that civilians would not be targeted, Chernov’s footage and reporting quickly disproves this notion. Moments after Putin’s official declaration of war, the first strikes in Mariupol begin. The handheld camera, shaky and urgent, immediately immerses the viewer in chaos. Chernov hides in a basement with several Ukrainian families, capturing the reactions of a panicked woman worried about her son and a tearful child who wakes up to discover that war has begun.

On Days 3–11 of the crisis, Chernov hides in Emergency Hospital II, where he captures small, impactful moments such as zooming in on a dying woman’s hand shaking tremendously before suddenly stilling, and filming a man hugging his 16-year-old son, Ilya, who died playing soccer. Chernov additionally displays bloody children’s shoes on the floor and a woman kissing her 18-month-old child, Kyril, goodbye before collapsing into tears. The choice to focus on such intimate, human details instead of large-scale destruction gives the film its devastating power. Chernov sends this footage to his editors saying, “This is painful to watch. But it must be painful to watch.”

On Days 14–16, the hospital overflows, morgues fill, and bodies are buried in mass graves. Chernov wonders aloud whether some of the corpses being tossed into pits are people he filmed just days before. When the maternity ward is bombed, his camera captures shattered cribs, splintered incubators, and the desperate cries of an injured pregnant woman, Iryna. In one of the film’s most heartbreaking sequences, Chernov learns that both Iryna and her baby perished during doctors’ tireless efforts to save them. With the help of a local doctor named Vladimir, Chernov transmits this footage to his editors. Soon, the images of the destroyed maternity hospital appear on major news sources. The publication of this

footage sparked international outrage, placing a spotlight on Russia’s human rights violations — despite Russian insistence that the footage was staged.

On Day 17, Chernov spies Russian tanks, embellished with their signature “Z,” approaching the hospital from a distance. While escaping, Chernov captures the panic of the moment, his unsteady camera rattling with every stride he takes. Even while fleeing, Chernov remains committed to his role as witness.

On Day 20, Vladimir brings Chernov to the city’s Red Cross convoy, as he learns that this will be one of the last chances for him to escape. While they drive, Chernov captures the gray skies and destroyed buildings of Mariupol, narrating, “The city is slowly dying, like a human being.” The film ends with a haunting shot of a gray, destroyed Mariupol and a Russian flag rising over its ruins. The somber background music fades into silence, marking the official end of Ukrainian control in Mariupol.

Our Thoughts

20 Days in Mariupol is more than a documentary; it is an act of witnessing. Through his commitment to documenting the siege of Mariupol, Chernov ensures that viewers of his film become witnesses to this tragedy and to the suffering of its people. It is one thing to read an article or to examine statistics about a conflict, but watching direct footage of those affected evokes a deep sense of empathy — bringing audiences closer to the human reality of war rather than only the geopolitical dimensions. By capturing the honest and raw truth of Mariupol and highlighting individual stories, Chernov guarantees that this piece of history will never be forgotten.

While *20 Days in Mariupol* is especially useful to those studying the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its effect on civilians, everyone can benefit from watching this documentary. This film allows us to virtually step into the shoes of Ukrainians, making this complex conflict tangible, and compelling us to imagine the loss of their city, despite never having met these people in reality. The power of film ensures the story of Mariupol is shared and heard, keeping the catastrophic impact of the Russia-Ukraine war relevant along with immortalizing it. We strongly encourage everyone to watch this documentary and share the responsibility of bearing witness to Mariupol’s history.



Filmmakers. Photo credit: Associated Press.



Film Still. Photo credit: Associated Press.



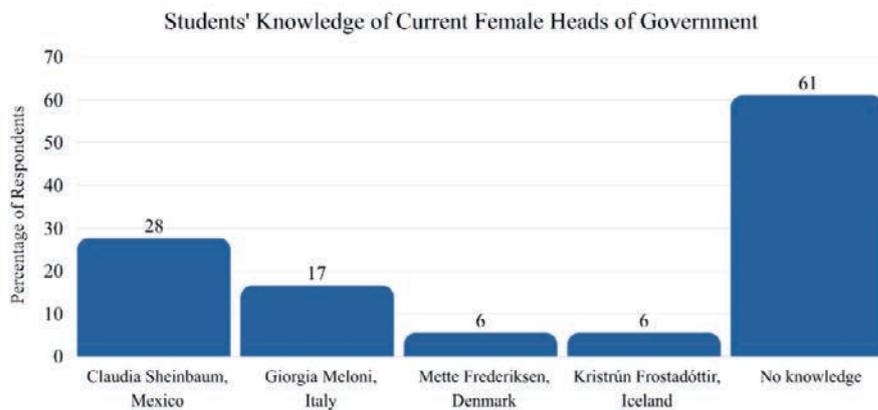
Film Still. Photo credit: Associated Press.



Film Still. Photo credit: Associated Press.

Gender in Political Leadership

HAILEY RENICK



Graphic credit: Hailey Renick.

When asked to name a woman currently serving as a head of state, the majority of students interviewed could not do so, reflecting how deeply gender disparities persist in global politics. Over the past year, the number of women in government positions has decreased, further inhibiting global progress toward gender equality.¹ What remains is a political landscape dominated by “strongman” leaders who embody the neorealist tendency of hard power to secure influence through aggression and force, showing that political institutions still reward masculine traits. Traditionally, hard power is depicted as masculine, while its reciprocal, soft power, which consists of diplomacy and collaboration, is associated with feminine qualities. The assertive use of hard power establishes an illusion that quick-acting leaders are more capable, while reflective, cooperative leaders are less decisive and often dismissed as weak.² The gendered framing tied to these ideas creates a specific perception of an “ideal leader.”³ As this ingrained power imbalance persists in political systems without apparent progress toward change, the following Tufts students shared their perspectives on ensuring more representative leadership:

Gavin Evans (*Freshman, studying History and Economics*):

Gavin pointed out that in many regions, particularly parts of the Middle East and Africa, cultural and religious traditions continue to shape resistance to female leadership. “You can’t necessarily change people’s moral and cultural values,” he noted, though he acknowledged

signs of gradual progress. For him, globalization and technology offer a path forward. As younger generations connect across borders, exposure to global ideas of gender equality may soften these cultural barriers.

Savvy Thompson (*Senior, studying International Relations at*

The Fletcher School):

Savvy warned against performative representation. Elevating women merely to check a box, she argued, risks undermining the credibility of qualified candidates. Instead, she emphasized the need for structural support, like campaign infrastructure, funding, and mentorship, to allow women to succeed on equal footing. “Women shouldn’t be evaluated as women, but as people,” she said, adding that true equality means assessing candidates by merit, as representation alone is not progress unless it is grounded in capability and genuine inclusion.

Isabela Silvaes Lima (*Junior, studying International Relations and History*):

Bela discussed that a solution should be founded on a societal shift in the perception of leaders rather than the simple act of acquiring more representation. In communities where women are encouraged toward traditional gender roles, fewer women feel empowered to pursue political power. This cultural conditioning sustains the expectation that leadership must look masculine, and she states, “The roles held within international politics remain guarded by societal gender roles rooted in patriarchy.” She pointed to nations like Finland, Australia, and Sweden as examples of how cultural acceptance normalizes female leadership. In contrast, countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia still reinforce patriarchal norms that confine women to domestic roles. For Bela, dismantling patriarchal politics requires a societal reimagining of who can lead.

Understanding Cuba's Health & Economic Crisis

DANIEL FIGUEROA

The *bloqueo*—the U.S. embargo on Cuba imposed in 1962—has long shaped the island's economy and society. It restricts nearly all trade, financial transactions, and investments between the U.S. and Cuba.¹ While originally framed as a political tool to fight communism and promote democratization, its largest impact has been on everyday life, particularly in public health. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these vulnerabilities, showing how economic isolation easily translates into health insecurity.

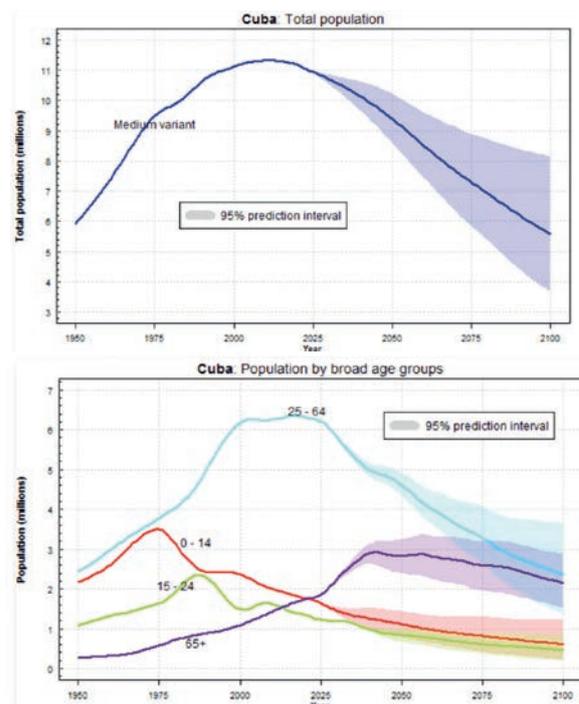
After the 1959 Cuban revolution brought Fidel Castro to power, Cuba invested heavily in public health infrastructure, including primary care clinics, preventative medicine, and free access to care.² These new developments became a source of pride: “We were proud of our healthcare system, which was first-rate in many regards like primary care, life expectancy and so much more.”³

Despite this, the end of Soviet subsidies in 1991 triggered the Special Period: an economic depression that weakened health services and brought the country to the brink of famine.⁴ Although humanitarian goods like food and medicine are still exempt, complex licensing and shipping restrictions make their distribution difficult.⁵ This was very difficult for the majority of Cuban citizens: “During that time, we were forced to cut corners everywhere, and everything; medicine, food, technicians, disappeared.”⁶

The Special Period ended in 2000. However, the Covid-19 pandemic combined with another economic crisis following a pause in Venezuelan oil exports has presented Cuba with a situation similar to the Special Period, as falling incomes and budget austerity have led to supply shortages and strained the health system.⁷ Even with strong infrastructure, the system is showing disruptions in treatment and care. This has prompted limited available healthcare: “We tried to take our aunt to the hospital when she got sick, but there were no ambulances to take her, even when we tried to bribe a driver. With a wage of \$30 USD monthly, how can you expect care when doctors have trouble providing for themselves?”⁸

Furthermore, over 70 percent of medicines on Cuba's “Basic Drug List,” many deemed essential by the U.N., are severely undersupplied.⁹ The same applies to food imports, which provide 75 percent of the country's food supply.¹⁰ Fearing sanctions, Cuba is forced to purchase food through intermediaries at inflated prices. The state rationing system, the cornerstone of Cuba's welfare model, has slashed bread rations to 60 grams a day, pushing households to informal markets with unaffordable prices.¹¹

The result has been the exodus of over 1.5 million people since 2020, accompanied by a loss of faith in governing institutions and widespread food/health insecurity, with no end in sight.¹³ Among many causes for this crisis, two stand out. First, the U.S. embargo, which has isolated Cubans for so long that most know no alternative. Second, the Cuban government, which has resisted reforms that could promote democratic governance or economic freedom, either of which would help alleviate the crisis. Many citizens feel trapped between these forces, punished by one and neglected by the other, leaving an uncertain future.



Graphic credit: United Nations.

China's Debt Comes Due

EVAN KRAUTHEIMER, ROGERS TAN, AND SAM WEINSTEIN

Since the 1990s, China has registered impressive growth rates, fueled by market-oriented reforms, extensive trade liberalization, and greater integration into global supply chains. This sustained expansion allowed the Chinese economy to outperform its peers, making it the second-largest economy globally, and rapidly closing in on US economic dominance. Historically, China's GDP growth rate averaged an astounding 8.9% between 1980 and 2012, before moderating slightly to 6.4% from 2013 to 2019.¹ Despite this period of consistent substantial growth, these achievements have been accompanied by the steady buildup of structural imbalances and rising financial vulnerabilities. The country's immense growth was predicated on a model that favored rapid capital accumulation and heavy investment over consumption.² To maintain their appearance of growth, Beijing has injected massive credit, and China's banking system has swelled to a monumental \$59 trillion, with over \$30 trillion in new bank assets since 2008.³ Excessive investment in infrastructure and housing during the 2010s, enabled by persistently high household saving rates, has led to elevated debt levels for both property developers and local governments.

Real estate has long been the most critical sector for China's immense growth, but the era of robust returns from this sector appears to be concluding, transforming it into a source of economic vulnerability. Real estate investment accounted for more than 10% of China's GDP in 2020 and 2021 and was responsible for approximately 1.3 percentage points of GDP growth annually between 2010 and 2020, indicating how important real estate is to the Chinese economy.⁴

The Chinese property and construction sector's collapse since 2020 has had a profound impact on household wealth and financial stability, wiping out an estimated \$18 trillion.⁵ The financial repercussions have been particularly severe for Chinese families, exceeding the impact of the 2008 U.S. financial crisis on American households, as Chinese households today have as much as twice as much of their net worth in real estate compared to Americans at that time.⁶

Empirical analysis confirms that real estate construction is running into diminishing returns. Decades of construction at "breakneck speeds" have dramatically increased the quantity and quality of China's housing stock.⁷ Per capita living space rose from 7.1 square meters (71 ft²) in 1990 to over 48 square meters (517 ft²) in 2022, a level that reaches or nears that of many wealthy advanced economies.⁸ The sheer volume of cumulative building suggests the pace of construction must shrink significantly over the next two decades, limiting the growth potential of this market. Correction is necessary to bring the sector back to a sustainable size as demand for housing is projected to decline by 35% to 55% over the next 10 years.⁹ Ultimately, China's reliance on its real estate market as a primary growth driver is no longer viable. While the market currently benefits from debt-fueled subsidies to project short-term stability, this approach is unsustainable. China must face this reality and prioritize diversification away from continuous real estate expansion.

China's local government debt problem is another of the consequential but veiled risks to China's long-term economic health. Over the past decade, local authorities, especially those strongly focused on new industries like AI or electric cars, have relied heavily on Local Government Financing Vehicles (LGFVs) to keep the projects that are under deficit funded. These infrastructure or industrial projects are either led by subsidiaries of state-owned enterprises or the government itself, and are often too large or too risky to fit within formal fiscal limits. Thus, these entities borrow money through bonds and bank loans, allowing cities to maintain high investment growth with steep liabilities. Today, the combined debt is estimated to exceed 100 trillion RMB, equivalent to almost 13.7 trillion USD.¹⁰

The structure of this debt is as perilous as the debt itself. Many LGFVs depend on transfers from the central government to support their liabilities. In poorer inland regions, fiscal stress has already forced spending cuts and delayed public salaries because of the reductions in local investment. The economy almost entirely depends on central bailouts. This growing

reliance on Beijing's interventions reinforces political centralization. Thus, the local debt issue is not just a financial challenge, but a structural weakness embedded in how China's growth has been planned for more than a decade.

On the optimistic side, many people believe that China's debt is fundamentally different from any other emerging economy. The debt itself is domestic, meaning it is RMB structured and largely held by state-owned banks. The risk of a total collapse of this debt is limited. The central government will always be able to maintain the status quo. One way would be rolling over the current old short-term loans with new long-term bonds, giving local governments more time to pay the new debt. The government also uses its control over state-owned banks to keep the current system stable. Banks can be ordered to extend deadlines, lower interest rates, or restructure payment structures when borrowers face troubles. These measures make the possibility of a wider financial crisis significantly lower, at least in the short term.

Despite its internal makeup, many, including Chinese officials, see the current system as fundamentally unsustainable. To these critics, the debt crisis is not a temporary liquidity issue but the result of an exhausted financial model, where local governments depended on rising property values and continuous investment to generate revenue.¹¹ For them, that model no longer works in the current state of China's economy. Productivity growth has fallen below 1%, and demographic decline has reduced both the labor force and housing demand. Political centralization has constrained local innovation and private-sector vitality. Debt has increased, a result of funding to stimulate the economy and projects, while the strict control of cash flow inside government and state-owned enterprises often slows down the process, creating a self-contradictory system. Without reform, China might enter a prolonged period of stagnation. The real danger is not an immediate financial collapse, but the slow erosion of growth potential under the weight of a debt-dependent system.¹²

Tufts' own Michael Beckley, an expert on U.S.-China relations, examines this question of Chinese economic vitality in a recent piece published in *Foreign Affairs*, titled "The Stagnant Order and the End of Rising Powers." Beckley posits that the decades of national investment and growth that have powered China into competition with the United States may be nearing their end. Beckley cites "three perilous bets" that gross output will prove more important than net

returns, that showcase industries can overshadow lack of economic dynamism, and autocracy can outproduce democracy, all of which are on their way home to roost. While these gambles have generated "spectacular output," Beckley warns that such liabilities on a national and global scale can be "decisive" in a country's downfall.¹³

In this article, Beckley argues that China's growth is hinged upon these "gambles." Similar to the concerns diffused across economic circles about the condition of America's debt, China's situation poses a danger to its global influence and push for hegemony. As mentioned, China's debt first reared its ugly head this decade with the real estate collapse of 2020. This collapse revealed the fragility of what was once believed to be a cornerstone of Chinese national investment. Whereas in the United States, a real estate crisis meant a collapse of an asset of the banks, in China, it was the people. Beckley notes that middle-class households were "stripped of their life savings," as both disposable income and consumption have stalled at \$5,800 per person and 39% of GDP, respectively.¹⁴ While China hopes to make up for losses such as this by "subsidizing strategic industries," specifically R&D sectors dominated by EVs, batteries, and renewable energies, these areas altogether only make up "barely 3.5% of GDP." As a cornerstone of their "gamble," these industries look to at least attempt to offset the mounting costs. These pits of liabilities, combined with a future contingent upon both a working-age population that is only a third of which are high school educated, and an elderly population of 500 million deep, point out the hemorrhaging that may be upon the CCP.

So, is this to be the fate of China? That part is not certain. Actions such as disarmament and detente with the U.S. could theoretically bring down over-spending. However, as Beckley points out, China does not see concession as an option. Backing down on spending would mean leaving these debts sunk and their military stagnant as they relinquish any hope of keeping pace with the Americans. Thus, from a pragmatic standpoint, this dead weight which originates in spending to keep up with the U.S cannot be simply willed away. As a seemingly core part of the aggression between the two powers, Chinese debt will not be traded away with a treaty.

Will these debts be quelled by another great Chinese leap? Or will they prove too massive to overcome as the United States achieves its "Stagnant Order" as Beckley and many others pose? Only time will tell.



Tariffs for Dummies

GIA GHOSH AND LAUREN NADOW

In early 2025, searches for “tariff” increased by 2,400% compared to 2024, following Trump’s election in 2024 and his use of the word during the presidential debate.¹ Yet, only 45% of Americans know what a tariff is.² Tariffs are “taxes imposed by a government on goods and services imported from other countries.”³ This means that when goods are imported, they may be taxed at higher values, which in turn results in higher prices for consumers.

In order to understand the relevance of tariffs today, one must understand the tariff’s evolution. Tariffs have long been employed as a tool with uses far beyond the range of exports and imports, and have been a prominent aspect of how nations interact since the dawn of international trade. Ancient tariffs in Mesopotamia, for example, were implemented for governments acquiring additional sources of revenue.⁴ Tariffs on imported goods became very common. Britain’s 17th century Navigation Acts required that goods imported to its colonies came via British ships, often with tariffs that discouraged buying from foreign competitors.⁵

Eventually, tariffs became a policy tool for the United States. Tariffs were the primary source of revenue following U.S. independence in 1776, and quickly became a source of contention within the country. The 1828 “Tariff of Abominations” raised the price of raw materials and manufactured goods, angering Southern politicians and businessmen who felt victimized by Northern industrial power. The 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act aimed to combat the effects of the Great Depression by raising U.S. tariffs on imported goods, prompting retributive tariffs from other countries and a global collapse of trade.⁶

In modern global relations, tariff agreements can be interpreted as a bridge to strengthen diplomatic ties. The 2025 U.S.-Indonesia trade agreement cut tariffs on 99% of goods, further boosting trade in technology, agriculture, and green energy.⁷ This deepened economic cooperation, thereby strengthening security ties between the U.S. and ASEAN.

Although some states view tariffs and tariff agreements as an opportunity for connection,

many disapprove of tariff use, especially regarding the U.S.. The use of tariffs can often be seen as a barrier, specifically during the 2018-2020 U.S.–China trade war, during which the U.S. imposed tariffs up to 25% on \$360 billion of Chinese goods, prompting China to retaliate with its own tariffs on U.S. exports.⁸

In the modern day, tariffs have transformed from being a means for gaining revenue to a strategic instrument for both economic and political ends. New tariff rates for dozens of countries were introduced in August, including a 50% tariff on Indian goods, 30% tariff on South African goods, and 20% tariff on Vietnamese goods. The announcement comes in the wake of ongoing exchanges of threats from both China and the U.S. regarding 100% tariffs.⁹ Tariff policy has led more than 30% of firms surveyed in the first quarter of 2025 to identify trade and tariffs as their most pressing business concern, which is a sharp increase from 8.3% in the previous quarter. This rapid rise points to firms’ heightened sensitivity to tariff-related economic disruptions, reflecting widespread concern among business leaders about the potential economic consequences of recent tariff proposals.¹⁰

President Trump was accused of sending the global economy into turmoil upon his announcement of the introduction of tariffs. Although financial markets have since recovered, the International Monetary Fund predicts that tariffs will still lead to uncertainty and slower economic growth. Important U.S. trade partners, such as Canada and Mexico, are experiencing an increase in unemployment rates, while the U.S. itself is experiencing rising inflation and a weak job market.

Tariffs are a double-edged sword in international economics: they can act as barriers that provoke retaliation, disrupt global trade, and generate economic uncertainty, whereas their removal can serve as a bridge, fostering economic cooperation, strategic alliances, and diplomatic trust. The interpretation and use of tariffs is often case-dependent, and can be viewed as both a tool for policy and a source for tension in global trade.

A Poultry Economy

SASSON ZIV-LOEWY

While UK-US relations have been rocked in recent times by Donald Trump's insistence on tariffs as the sole conduit of international trade, UK-EU trade relations are currently dealing with opposite problems. Brexit's immigration and self-determination narratives may have flooded the headlines surrounding the UK's decoupling with Europe, but the exit of the UK from the European single market is having consequences on the same scale.¹

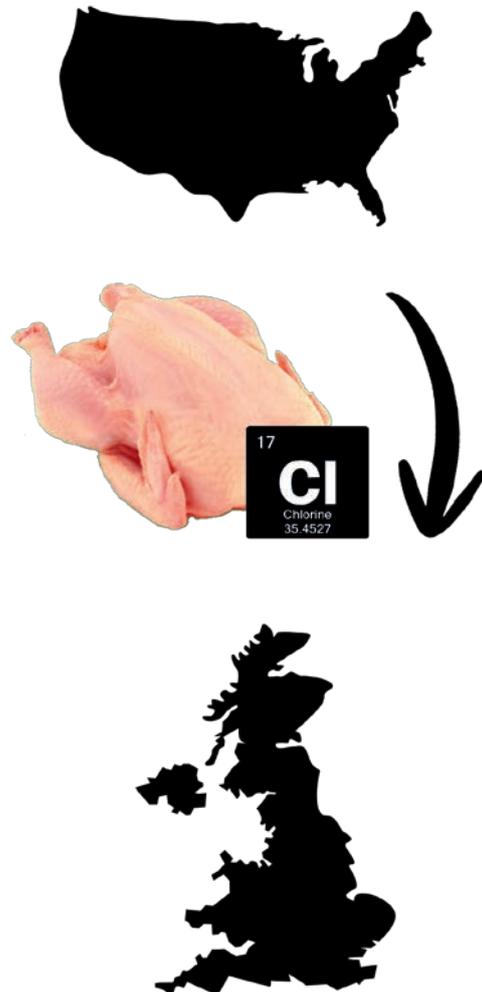
The European single market, while not as flashy as the EU, commands vast importance within the European economy: the standards and regulations implemented by the European single market have a huge sway over European affairs, particularly, imports and exports.²

Take the example of chlorinated chicken. For many years, the United States has been pressuring European countries, particularly the UK, to accept shipments of chicken cleaned in baths of chlorine.³ While a member of the EU, it was impossible for the UK to break with the standards of the European single market, which don't allow chlorinated chicken. However, now that the UK is no longer a signatory, the US has redoubled its efforts to force its chlorinated chicken on the UK.⁴ After a drawn out saga, the UK decided to reject chlorinated chicken, primarily as a result of the sheer disgust expressed by the British public.⁵

The example of chlorinated chicken is, however, not indicative of the UK's approach to trade; while the UK has not yet stooped to the level of US standards for agricultural imports and exports, the UK has by no means raised their own standards to those of the EU. This, currently, is the largest trade barrier between the UK and EU; these non-tariff barriers comprise most of the decline in trade, and the present debate within the UK to solve this issue is a persistent and existential one.⁶

It seems that, despite the Europeans themselves concluding that chlorinated chicken poses no credible health risk, the UK still finds it in their best interest to align their standards with those of the European single market, or at least has decided against stooping to US standards.⁷ Presently, given the UK's awkward position on this global trade spectrum, there is

a lively debate over how to best arrange the UK's standards for goods. The UK lowering its standards to those of the US is implausible, as non-tariff barriers are already damaging the UK's trade with the EU, and the fact that almost half of UK trade is conducted with the EU emphasizes the importance of this relationship.⁸ At this moment, rejoining the European single market seems effectively impossible, however, a plausible alternative is for the UK to alter its standards to match those of the European single market. As the UK would be de facto included within the European single market for all intents and purposes, this would solve many of the UK's trade problems by eliminating non-tariff barriers. Nevertheless, whether this solution has the political will behind it to be feasible is another question altogether.



Graphic credit: Canva, edited by Alexa Licairac.

Silicon Hegemony

How Semiconductors Are Rewiring U.S.-China Power

DROR KO AND MAX DRUCKMAN

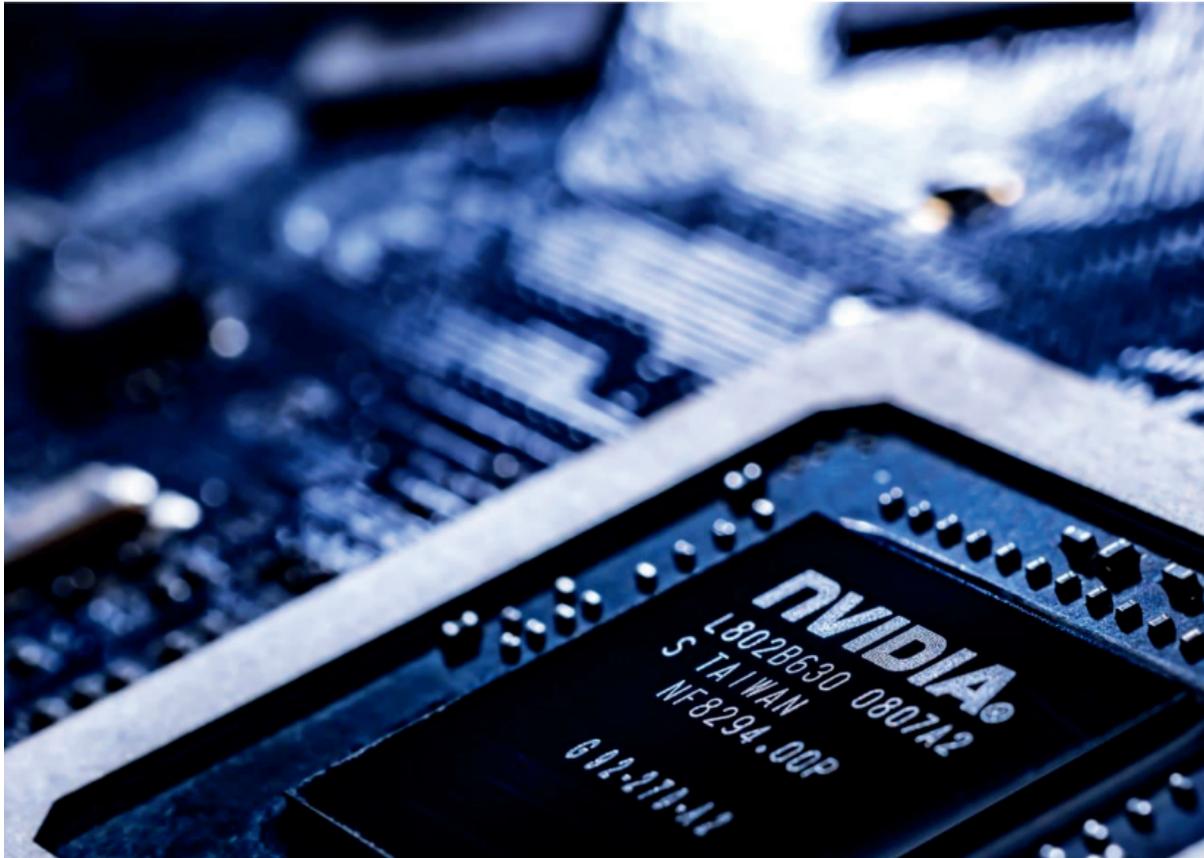


Photo credit: Joel Saget.

Whereas World War II was won with steel and aluminum, and the Cold War with nuclear weapons, the coming conflict between the US and China will be determined by silicon. This idea was first articulated by Fletcher’s Chris Miller in his 2022 book *Chip War: The Fight for the World’s Most Critical Technology*, in which he argued that the race for dominance in the semiconductor industry will define the contemporary balance of power.¹ To summarize the situation, Miller wrote in a message to *Hemispheres* that, “[c]hips are the key driver of progress in AI and both the U.S and China are racing to create better semiconductors. Today, the U.S. and Taiwan retain a significant lead in chip manufacturing but China is spending billions of dollars trying to catch up.” From missiles to laptops, semiconductors are essential components of most modern technologies. To

capitalize on using chips to develop AI, the world’s greatest powers are vying for primacy in this industry. In recent months, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump have exchanged public blows in an escalating trade war waged over the future of semiconductors.² The broader dynamic is a multidimensional battleground with several key players, each possessing its own strategic interests and capabilities. The most advanced semiconductors are designed in Silicon Valley by corporations like NVIDIA, fabricated by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), and are impossible to make without rare earth minerals controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³ This article will examine the logistically complex semiconductor supply chain that is ensnaring the world’s most powerful nations in escalating economic warfare.

The past year has seen successive bouts of escalation in the Sino-American trade war. After Trump announced his “Liberation Day” tariffs in April, the response was prompt and biting. China implemented its own tariffs and constrained the global supply of rare earth minerals.⁴ These minerals, of which China is the world’s most dominant producer, are essential ingredients in everything from semiconductors to magnets used in electric cars.⁵ While sweeping tariffs and export controls are among Trump’s formidable weapons, some analysts believe that Xi’s iron grip on rare earth minerals constitutes his “high card.”⁶ At trade talks in May, June, and July, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent resumed negotiations amid pressure from American manufacturers to bring rare earths back home.⁷ This pattern—raising tariffs, suffering China’s retaliation, and backing down—has been perceived as a weakness, prompting the widespread use of the acronym TACO (Trump Always Chickens Out).⁸ In early October, the CCP announced even tighter restrictions, declaring it necessary for foreign countries to obtain licenses to trade, even amongst themselves, any products containing rare earth minerals.⁹ Xi’s tightening of control is partly a bargaining tactic, increasing pressure on Trump ahead of trade talks scheduled for the end of October in South Korea.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Xi’s favorite bargaining chip casts a long shadow over the global semiconductor industry and spells out trouble for prospects of American primacy in AI.

Moreover, in the race to become the next major AI player, Taiwan has made itself an indispensable asset by producing over 90% of the world’s most advanced semiconductors.¹¹ Located about 100 miles off China’s coast, the unrivaled productive capacity of TSMC positions Taiwan at the fulcrum of competing ambitions for global technological supremacy.¹² Taiwan’s semiconductor industry dates back to 1976, when American chip manufacturing technology was transferred to the Industrial Technology Research Institute.¹³ Since then, TSMC has played a vital role in developing the global chip industry, yielding innovations like the “fabless” chip, akin to what Nvidia uses. Taiwan’s highly educated workforce, well-paying semiconductor production jobs, and minimal labor protections have ensured that its semiconductor industry has continued to flourish.¹⁴

Hence, China’s aggression toward and claims of sovereignty over Taiwan, pose a

significant economic risk to the region and the world. If China were to invade Taiwan, the global semiconductor supply chain would be shattered. Some scholars point to Beijing’s attempts at self-sufficiency in the semiconductor realm as a method for combating a potential disruption to the semiconductor flow if it invades Taiwan.¹⁵ Therefore, as the global center of the semiconductor industry and as the apple of the PRC’s eye, Taiwan both invites aggression from China and serves as a partial rationale for its pursuit of self-sufficiency. As Miller put it, “China’s threat to Taiwan is a major risk—both because of the security ramifications but also because Taiwan is an irreplaceable producer of semiconductors.”

Additionally, while many semiconductor companies have attempted to profit from the AI revolution, one company is best positioned to do so. Nvidia, the largest publicly traded company in the United States with a market capitalization of over \$4.5 trillion, is ushering in a new age of semiconductor production and usage.¹⁶ Nvidia gained ground by producing more Graphics Processing Units (GPUs), as opposed to Central Processing Units (CPUs). GPUs can more easily handle large-scale calculations, in line with those necessary for large language models.¹⁷ A native of Taiwan, Nvidia’s CEO Jensen Huang has gained international headlines for calling Taiwan a “country,” as opposed to a region of China, the CCP’s long-held claim, adding a personal element to an already intense, burgeoning rivalry.¹⁸

Nonetheless, Huang maintains that Nvidia’s mission is to ensure that “people can access this technology from all over the world, including China,” thereby expressing disappointment at Xi’s barring of Nvidia from the Chinese market.¹⁹ Huang had previously struck a deal with Trump, agreeing to pay 15% of Nvidia’s Chinese revenues to the US government, after a period without sales was ended by Huang’s intense lobbying.²⁰ Whether Huang is motivated by “the advance of human society” or simply access to new markets, it appears that, thanks to an international smuggling network, his chips still pervade into China, though without publicity.²¹

Thus, while Nvidia’s semiconductors may not induce the same fear as the Cold War’s nuclear weapons, the future of the standoff between the US and China will be defined by their necessity, availability, and ingenuity. The technology of the future could be the present’s primary issue.

Djibouti's Peculiar Pecuniary Problem

ARJUN MOOGIMANE AND FINN BARRETT

Few nations have direct territorial claims to global trade chokepoints. Djibouti, a small country in the Horn of Africa, is one of them, making it a focal flashpoint of global trade security. Its strategic position as one of only four countries with direct access to the Bab-Al Mandeb strait has made it very important to global powers who maintain active military influence around the region.¹ Of those four, Djibouti is the most attractive to foreign influence. Despite recent shifts towards openness towards China, Eritrea has a long history of being closed off to the influence of foreign actors; Yemen hosts no foreign military bases, but is most closely aligned with the Saudi government while their legal government continues to struggle against Houthi rebels; and Somalia has much less land overlap with the strait.² This leaves Djibouti as the ideal location for global powers to base their Red Sea operations. The United States, China, Italy, France, and Japan all maintain military bases near the capital of the nation, with the U.S. Camp Lemmonier being the largest foreign military base on the continent.² These bases exist largely to protect those great powers' access to the Bab el-Mandeb strait with the US, for example, intervening in late 2023 to early 2024 when Houthi rebels disrupted the passage.³

Today, however, a more interesting relationship to examine is the one between China and Djibouti. As of 2025, Djibouti is carrying over \$2B USD in foreign debt—a significant number when considering its GDP is only \$4B USD.⁴ That makes its debt nearly 70% of its GDP, well beyond the IMF threshold for being in debt distress.⁵ Even more startling is that China owns nearly half of that outstanding foreign debt, making them by far Djibouti's single largest creditor.⁶ Adding to the intrigue of this relationship is the recent opening of China's first, and currently only, official overseas military base in Djibouti.⁷ China could have chosen anywhere for this base, but the strategic importance of the location—overlooking the entrance to the Bab



Graphic Credit: Peter Fitzgerald, amendments by Burmesedays.

al Mandeb strait, through which around 12% of all global trade passes—certainly played a big role in their decision.⁸ Therefore, the crux of the issue comes down to the relationship between these two countries and confirms that it is one worth examining.

Since its inception in the early 2010s, Chinese investment in Djibouti has been double sided in nature. It serves strategic and security purposes while simultaneously remaining closely linked to Djibouti's infrastructural development. Despite Chinese investment in Africa picking up in the early 2000s, it wasn't until 2013 that significant investment arrived in Djibouti.⁹ It was in that year that a Chinese state-owned company purchased a 23.5% stake in the Port of Djibouti.¹⁰ The half decade following the announcement of Chinese investment in the port was a busy one. In 2017, the two governments revealed the opening of the joint military base.¹¹ Then in 2018 The Doraleh Multipurpose Port was completed by a state-owned Chinese partner,

“Since its inception in the early 2010s, Chinese investment in Djibouti has been double sided in nature. It serves strategic and security purposes while simultaneously remaining closely linked to Djibouti’s infrastructural development.”

and in that same year, Djibouti became a part of China’s Maritime Belt and Road Initiative, an economic cooperation and development group led by China.¹²

This flurry of investment raises the question of its success and impact: What has this massive influx of capital achieved for Djibouti? By some measures it has driven important successes. GDP doubled between 2013 and 2023, which caused infrastructure growth not only within its borders, but in the broader region of the Horn of Africa through projects like the Addis Ababa Railway project: Africa’s first electrified rail project between Addis Ababa and Djibouti’s capital.¹³ At the same time, aggressive investment and debt-trapping lending practices have left Djibouti in a position of financial peril. To combat this, in 2022, the government suspended debt repayments to Chinese creditors citing costs of debt servicing, and soon after a moratorium agreement was reached.¹⁴ Clearly the growth and investment has come at significant cost. Turning now beyond Djibouti, it is important to consider how this investment and Chinese influence more broadly has impacted the broader region.

One important downstream impact of increased Chinese investment has been growing concern from the West in regards to economic alliance shifting. For example, as Chinese influence rises, other global powers have noticed the United States taking a keen interest in the Somaliland independence movement.¹⁵ Somaliland is located in the northernmost region of Somalia, right alongside the border with Djibouti.¹⁶ Somaliland established an independent government from Somalia in 1991 and has been self governed ever since.¹⁷ The breakaway state enjoys a relatively democratic government with historically peaceful

transitions of power.¹⁸ They have also received support from the United States in recent years, resulting in the proposition of the Republic of Somaliland Independence Act in 2025, as well as the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act which declared that Somaliland is to be recognized as a distinctly different part of Somalia.¹⁹ Furthermore, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed an agreement in 2024 which would allow Ethiopia direct access to the Red Sea in exchange for recognizing Somaliland as its own nation.²⁰ Although the United States does not currently recognize Somaliland’s independence, there is legal precedent for them to do so.²¹

The case of Chinese economic interaction in Djibouti stands as a particularly unique case in modern geopolitics: US-China competition for dominance over international trade routes has not only affected Djiboutian internal affairs but made it evident that the competition unfolding in Djibouti has rippling effects throughout the political economy of the Horn of Africa.



Truck passes through the main gate of Djibouti International Trade Zone. Photo credit: AFP.

The Importance of Marine Conservation

MONICA REILLY

The ocean has often been a foreign concept for many of us. We grow up glorifying space travel and nature reserves, but we have little, if any, experience with ocean exploration or deep sea creatures. This disconnect can make it easy to push marine issues aside, or to assume that we don't need legislation in order to protect it. We are surrounded by wildlife reserves, zoos that educate us about endangered species, or national parks that exist solely for the purpose of preserving certain parts of nature. Despite this, the ocean is infinitely more important to the planet than the land on which we reside. 71% of the planet is covered in ocean, of which 5% has been explored.¹

In the context of our current climate crisis, the ocean is more relevant than ever. Our oceans are one of the main carbon "sinks" on our planet, meaning that they absorb carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas), thereby preventing it from going into the atmosphere.² We have similar carbon sinks on land, such as forests, but oceans hold so much more carbon due to their vastness. This means that ocean health, something we as a planet have historically not prioritized, is incredibly important. Every day, due to the steadily increasing temperature of the planet, the ocean's ability to absorb carbon weakens, making it evermore essential that we make ocean health a priority.³ Not only that, but we need to enact and enforce legislation that will force countries to preserve the well-being of the ocean and marine life. Many mainstream perspectives on maintaining the planet push very individual solutions, like "reuse, reduce, recycle," or calculating your carbon footprint.⁴ But, in fact, the vast majority of damage done to our ecosystems is performed by major corporations. The carbon footprint calculator was even invented by British Petroleum as a way of passing off the burden of protecting our planet onto consumers.⁵ Without actual regulation, nothing about the state of our world will change.⁶

However, passing laws to maintain ocean health is easier said than done. The phrase

"international waters" means that efforts to pass a law limiting deep sea mining or waste dumping in the ocean is exceptionally difficult. The ambiguity of who is responsible for our oceans can also lead to another phenomenon known as the "Tragedy of the Commons." Originally coined in the 1960s, this term refers to the idea that, when presented with a public and free resource, people will attempt to use it as much as possible in favor of their own interests, thus depleting the resource.⁷ The most famous marine-related example of this occurrence is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, or a patch of debris that spans from the West Coast of North America to Japan.⁸ Applying the theory of the "Tragedy of the Commons," factories want to dispose of waste in the water, as it is a free method of waste disposal. When most factories decide to use the ocean in this manner, the patch grows.

Despite these worrying statistics, hope is not lost. For the past two decades, the "High Seas Treaty," a plan to enforce conservation zones and sustainable marine usage, has been under debate at the U.N. In order for it to pass, it needed at least 60 countries to approve it, and this past September, the 60th country, Morocco, voted to ratify an international treaty at the U.N., which would establish marine conservation zones.⁹ Under its enforcement, 30% of the ocean will be under conservation zone status, meaning strict limits on activities like fishing, deep-sea mining, and shipping routes.¹⁰ While not a perfect plan – as there has already been some criticism as to how the standard for a conservation zone will be established between country to country – environmentalists agree that it is a significant step in the right direction. Protecting our oceans means protecting our planet, and thus the human species as a whole. Via legislation like this, and others in the future, it will be possible for us to restore the health of our planet.



AOSIS and the Politics of Climate Survival

KAASHVI AHUJA

65 million people and one-fifth of the world's biodiversity, including 40 percent of the ocean's coral reefs, are currently trapped on the very frontlines of a massacre of our own making.¹ Decades of relentless burning, ignorance, and political neglect now unfold in real time, culminating in a reckoning that is punishing those least responsible for its cause.

When climate change was dismissed as “the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world” before the United Nations General Assembly, the statement was less surprising than it was emblematic.² It reflected a persistent trend among major powers to sacrifice long-term climate governance in favor of short-term political or economic interests. For many states, particularly members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), such rhetoric reveals a widening gap between those who can delay action and those who cannot afford to.

AOSIS, representing 39 low-altitude, climate-vulnerable nations, occupies a distinct position in global climate politics.³ Though lacking the material power traditionally associated with international influence, the coalition has consistently shaped the discourse on equity, adaptation, and responsibility. Since its founding in 1990, AOSIS has framed climate change not only as an environmental issue but as a matter of sovereignty, development, and survival.⁴ Through coordinated diplomacy, it helped secure recognition of “loss and damage” in the Paris Agreement, as stated under Article 8, which calls for a cooperative and facilitative approach among parties to address climate change-related loss and damage, emphasizing support for vulnerable countries.⁵ Later, the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 demonstrated how resilience can emerge from communities with structural vulnerability.

The contrast between the relatively recent U.S. withdrawal from climate commitments and the sustained engagement of small island states illustrates a reconfiguration of global climate leadership.⁶ In an era marked by geopolitical

fragmentation and selective multilateralism, AOSIS exemplifies how coalitions of the vulnerable can exert disproportionate normative influence. By coupling moral authority with procedural expertise, AOSIS has maintained agenda-setting power within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and related forums.⁷ Its diplomacy relies less on coercion than on coalition-building, framing climate in terms of existential risk and distributive justice.⁸

This model of engagement holds lessons for other regions facing acute climate threats. Coastal and deltaic nations in South Asia, West Africa, and Latin America could replicate the AOSIS approach: developing regional blocs that aggregate bargaining power, coordinate adaptation financing, and articulate shared security narratives. Such structures would not only amplify collective influence in negotiations but also create mechanisms for resource-sharing, insurance pooling, and technical collaboration.⁹

Moreover, AOSIS proves that true legitimacy in international and climate affairs arises from moral clarity, not material strength. In an era when great-power politics often erodes trust in multilateral institutions, the alliance's persistence offers a framework for rebuilding credibility through principled cooperation. Its success illustrates that small states, when organized and united around coherent normative goals, can reshape the parameters of global governance.

As climate change intensifies and political will among major greenhouse gas emitters fluctuates, AOSIS remains an essential reminder that international leadership is no longer synonymous with size or strength. The capacity to articulate a shared vision for survival and embed it in institutional practice may yet define the future of the global climate regime.

Confronting Environmental Injustice in Asia

JASMINE GRIFFIN



Aftermath of Super Typhoon Ragasa in Taiwan. Photo credit: Ann Wang.

Within days, the scenery of a quaint, mountainous town in Taiwan turned into something nightmarish. Typhoons and high-magnitude earthquakes that have recently plagued Southeast Asia show the alarmingly high rate at which climate change is engulfing the region. Historically, Southeast and East Asia have been vulnerable to natural hazards, as exemplified by three major river deltas: the Chao Phraya Delta, stretching from Bangkok to Suphan Buri in Thailand; the Mekong Delta, extending from Phnom Penh in Cambodia to An Giang Province in Vietnam; and the Mahakam Delta in East Kalimantan, Indonesia.¹ These low-lying delta environments that exist at the site of urban expansion simultaneously face the stress of sustaining agriculturally dependent economies, coping with greenhouse gas emissions from rapid urbanization, and confronting the impacts of sea-level rise and natural disasters. Who actually bears the brunt of these consequences? Looking deeper into this question exposes a dire reality and humanitarian crisis that transcends the borders of Southeast Asia.

The Problem of Environmental Injustice

When discussing the impacts of global climate change in both developed and developing countries, environmental injustice—the disproportionately heavy exposure of poor, minority, and disenfranchised populations to environmental hazards, overexploitation, and global climate change—is central.² In many Southeast Asian countries, coastal populations

face significant wealth gaps since large segments of their populations are dependent on agriculture and fishing.³ The Mekong River, which flows through China, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam, has suffered from overfishing, flooding from monsoons, and rising sea levels.⁴ The wet season brings about devastating losses of crops and rice production, accompanied by flooding that makes its way into village streets and threatens the livelihood of millions.⁵ However, despite emitting disproportionately high levels of greenhouse gases, those that live in Ho Chi Minh, another city in Vietnam, reside in modern housing and enjoy infrastructure tailored to the country's environmental vulnerabilities.⁶ This structural disparity demonstrates the unjust manner in which the lower classes experience less protection from natural disasters despite releasing less harmful emissions than the wealthy who live comfortably in a metropolis.

Typhoon Ragasa's Wake-Up Call

In Northern Luzon and Taiwan, Super Typhoon Rasaga, a Category 5 storm with sustained winds of up to 165 mph, severely flooded the Taiwanese town of Guangfu.⁷ This disaster killed 18 people, ravaged structurally weak buildings, and left nearly 700 acres of vital farmland inundated.⁸ If the world were two degrees Celsius warmer, the damage would be estimated to be 27 percent more severe.⁹ Such risk for catastrophes applies to many other small, rural townships across Southeast Asia, simply due to the region's density of informal, structurally weak settlements in floodplains and storm-prone regions.

With historical mass migrations from rural areas to major cities in Southeast Asian countries, overcrowding is another issue, leading governments to funnel significant resources to these areas, often at the expense of rural communities.¹⁰ This inequality adds to the vulnerability of communities akin to the Guangfu township in Taiwan, and will only worsen in communities throughout Asia as the climate crisis approaches its climax.

Selva Valdiviana:

Conservation and Crime in the Temperate Rainforest

JAKE LANIER

The Selva Valdiviana, in southern Chile and Argentina, is the world's second largest temperate rainforest.¹ Although temperate rainforests don't receive the same attention as their much warmer brothers, tropical rainforests, they are hotspots of biodiversity in their own right. Arriving in the Selva Valdiviana is incredible – one of the greenest places on the planet, it's wet and cloudy almost all the time, and it rains for what feels like months straight in the winter. The Selva Valdiviana is home to numerous unique plant and animal species, like the pudú, the world's smallest deer, and the copihue, a small bell-shaped flower whose fruits are edible.²

The Valdivian forests span from moderately wet forests in the northern and inland parts of the ecoregion to some of the wettest non-tropical areas on Earth in the south and along the Pacific coast.³ Visually, the Valdivian forests are beautiful – they're cut by deep, fast-flowing rivers, and snow-capped volcanoes rise above. Some of the world's most famous whitewater rushes through the volcanic canyons, and unrivaled fly fishing is located here in the clear, clean rivers. The impassability of the land means that some parts of it remain unsullied by human exploitation. But the race is on to keep it that way.

In 2024, Julia Chuñil, a 74-year-old indigenous Mapuche activist and leader of the local Putreguel Mapuche community, disappeared in the Selva Valdiviana, in a disputed piece of land known as Reserva Cora Número Uno-A.⁴ The land is the subject of an ongoing dispute between the Mapuche community and a logging company named Ganadera Juan Carlos Morstadt Anwandter E.I.R.L.⁵ CONADI, a Chilean government agency whose job is to support the development of the indigenous people of Chile, bought the land on behalf of the local Mapuche community in 2011, but in 2015, a judge annulled the purchase.⁶ The Mapuche community, along with CONADI, claim their money was never returned and that the annulment is invalid.⁷ A

court ordered Morstadt to return CONADI's payment for the land, but he refused, even after an appeals court upheld the requirement for payment.⁸ The logging company owned by the Morstadt attempted to begin cutting the trees after the annulment of the purchase.⁹ However, Chuñil and other native activists resisted the action, settling in the disputed piece of land. After this, Chuñil went missing.¹⁰ Immediately, her disappearance was seen as suspicious, as her family alleges Morstadt had made threats against her after she settled on the land.¹¹ Chuñil had said "If anything happens to me, you know who it was," presumably in reference to Morstadt.¹² Additionally, footprints thought to be hers and tire tracks were found near an abandoned cabin on the land.¹³

In the 11 months since Chuñil's disappearance, there have been protests, often using the slogan "¿Dónde Está Julia Chuñil?" ("Where Is Julia Chuñil?"). Recently, lawyers for Chuñil's family claim to have intercepted a telephone call by Morstadt, where he stated "La quemaron" ("They burned her").¹⁴ This has renewed discussion over the status of indigenous rights and protection of land defenders in Chile from extrajudicial action.

In 2022, Chile's government, led by president Gabriel Boric, signed the Escazu Agreement, a treaty among the nations of Latin America concerning the environment.¹⁵ This treaty was written partially in response to the danger faced by environmentalists in Latin America, and its Article 9 contains a provision binding nations to protect defenders of the environment:

"Each Party shall also take appropriate, effective and timely measures to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or intimidations that human rights defenders in environmental matters may suffer while exercising the rights set out in the present Agreement."¹⁶

Julia Chuñil's son petitioned the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance of the Escazú Agreement, which found Chile to



An aerial view of the Valdivian Coastal Reserve. Photo credit: Nick Hall.



Salto de Pichi Ignao, Riñinahue. Photo credit: Francisco Mendez.



Photo credit: Elciudadano.com.



Protest against the disappearance of Julia Chuñil in Santiago de Chile
Photo credit: Lucas Aguayo Araos.

be in violation of the agreement, and activated the treaty's rapid response mechanism for the first time ever.¹⁷ Critics of the agreement have, however, pointed to its failures in preventing cases like Chuñil's, alleging it to be too weak or poorly implemented.

The case of the Selva Valdiviana and Julia Chuñil highlights an ongoing tension, especially in Chile and South America, where interests often clash over the status of natural resources. Native groups and environmentalists favoring conservation have frequently been targeted extrajudicially by representatives of the extractive industries. Latin America in particular is the world's most dangerous place for environmental activists. Global Witness, an organization that tracks murders and disappearances of land defenders and environmental activists, has reported 146 people killed or disappeared in 2024.¹⁸ Of these, 119 were in Latin America.¹⁹ This number is likely a major undercount, but it demonstrates the danger to activists in Latin America.²⁰

At the same time, the extractive industry is central to Chile's economy, with mining and forestry two of the country's biggest industries.²¹ In 2023, copper made up about half of Chile's exports, and forestry products contributed about 14% to exports.²² In addition, Chile is the world's largest producer of iodine and the second-largest producer of lithium.²³ The interests of these industries have frequently been at odds to the people native to the land, but it's difficult for the state to act against the extractive industries, since they fill the national coffers, and in Chile have been a major driver of the nation's economic success, with continued GDP growth and one of the highest average salaries in the region. In the end, it falls to local governments and policymakers to ensure sustainable development and protect the communities native to the land.

Global Health in a World Without USAID

QUINCY COULLAHAN

The United States has long stood as the world's largest donor of international aid, disbursing nearly \$72 billion in foreign assistance in 2023, with roughly 61% administered through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).¹ For nearly 60 years, USAID has served as the backbone of global health initiatives, from leading efforts to eradicate smallpox in the 1960s, expanding access to HIV medication for millions, reducing malaria mortality in sub-Saharan Africa by nearly half, and delivering emergency relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.² USAID's approaches have been more than just short-term interventions, they have built lasting initiatives to aid nations to independently withstand crises.

However, under the current administration, the U.S. has begun to dismantle this foundation. In 2025, through a combination of executive and legislative action, funding was frozen and programs were canceled, with about \$8 billion of aid retracted from this agency.³ Now, USAID's operations have been largely absorbed by the State Department, which may put an end to its role as the leading global health contributor.⁴ This marks a dramatic retreat from global health leadership with potentially catastrophic effects for millions.

Immediate Effects

Health and Mortality

Defunding USAID would have immediate and severe repercussions for global health, most notably an increase in preventable deaths.

Forecasting models have estimated that continuing these cuts could lead to over 14 million additional deaths by 2030.⁵ This includes about 700,000 preventable child deaths each year.⁶ These losses would be attributed to an end to international health programs and consequential failures in nutrition and sanitation.

Researcher Davide Rasella equates this immediate increase in the death toll to a global pandemic or major armed conflict.⁷

Global Influence

Soft Power

USAID's contributions are not driven solely by philanthropy. Its effects have strengthened domestic politics as a form of soft power for the U.S. Through its operation in more than 130 countries, USAID has built alliances, promoted democracy, and fostered goodwill internationally. Such alliances, relationships, and reliance among other nations on the U.S. have strengthened the country's global influence. The sudden dismantling of USAID not only severs these partnerships, but poses a threat to the U.S.'s stance as a global superpower by lessening international reliance on American support.

Disease Control

These cuts pose a threat to longstanding systems who have been integral in containing infectious diseases. USAID has made immense progress through its programs working with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Its contributions have supported treatment for over 18 million people with HIV and helped cut global AIDS related deaths by half.⁸ Additionally, it has supported networks and labs for surveillance to detect outbreaks and health threats.⁹ Without USAID, these systems may weaken or be completely removed. This can lead to a greater risk of disease outbreak, with a more vulnerable and less prepared world to respond to it.

Power Vacuum

By pulling back on its foreign aid towards global health, a power vacuum is created, providing the opportunity for other nations to step in to fill the void and take over these initiatives. This process has already begun, seen through Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, which can step in to fund the health programs previously provided by the U.S.¹⁰ This move signals a possible shift in political leverage. As the U.S. backtracks from its global health leadership, its geopolitical power diminishes along with it. Defunding USAID is more than just international harm, it's also a national security threat.

Pre-Hospital Care in the U.S. and China

DHYEY MAHARAJA



Graphic credit: Canva, edited by Alexa Licairac.

The ‘Golden Hour’ in Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is the hour after a traumatic event, where prompt medical treatment at a hospital has the highest chance of preventing death. EMS staff, who need to sustain and transport patients to the hospital, need to arrive at the location as quickly as possible, usually in 10 minutes (called the response time).¹ This time is rarely achieved in rural areas.² This is one of many serious problems facing EMS systems all around the world. In both America and China, new technology is being used to solve vital problems in the pre-hospital EMS system, and the country to solve these problems will be much safer and resilient.³

In the United States, the biggest issues with the pre-hospital systems are the disparity between rural and urban areas and the cost of the ambulance and hospital care.⁴ The paramedics in rural areas have less training than their urban counterparts.⁵ Ambulances have to travel much further to trauma centers or EDs, and arriving to the location takes roughly 25 minutes.⁶

In China, this disparity is heightened. Road infrastructure is inefficient compared to urban areas, and arriving at the location takes much longer.⁷ The call center technology is frequently overburdened, with patients sometimes waiting several minutes for 120 (China’s 911) to pick up.⁸ Due to this, the average response time is 46 minutes in Hengyang, with rural areas having even slower times.⁹ The decision to not use an ambulance is widespread, with the perception that a private car may go faster.¹⁰ This creates an unsafe situation due to the lack of medical professionals and sophisticated medical equipment on board private cars.¹¹ Ambulances in rural areas lack reliable communication devices, so hospitals often do not know what issues the patient is facing until they arrive, meaning they do not have time to prepare for medical procedures.¹²

During the COVID pandemic, weaknesses in the pre-hospital system were shown. This led to new innovations in this field. Telemedicine, proven to be effective during epidemics, was implemented more broadly after the pandemic.¹³ In both the United States and China, the pandemic led to greater funding of initiatives.¹⁴ However, under the new Trump administration, this funding is being cut.¹⁵ In China, however, the initiatives are not cut. The EV-Call 120, is a new innovation. It is a modern communications system, connecting EMS to hospitals through voice and video.¹⁶ Computer assisted decision making, with specialist clinicians on the other line, makes the EV-Call 120 more effective and advanced than the 911 systems used in America.¹⁷ In instances where the first aid is extremely time critical, an emergency medical drone has been tested in China to deliver critical ‘blood lines’ to have blood and other first aid delivered quickly to EMS on the scene.¹⁸ If China succeeds in carrying out these initiatives, the country will be healthier and more productive. The United States should follow in its footsteps.

THE FORGOTTEN WEAPON OF WAR: WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH STRUGGLES IN CONFLICT ZONES

CONTEXT:

PROPER REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTHCARE IS VITAL FOR WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD. HOWEVER, ESPECIALLY IN CONFLICT ZONES, THESE CONCERNS ARE SHOVED OUT OF GLOBAL ATTENTION, DESPITE ONLY INCREASING IN IMPORTANCE. THIS PIECE HIGHLIGHTS THREE CASE STUDIES OF THE REGIONS OF SUDAN, THE GAZA STRIP AND UKRAINE. THESE ARE CASE STUDIES AND NOT THE SOLE AREAS OF CONCERN FOR REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH.

SUDAN:

- ▶ IN APRIL 2023, CIVIL WAR BROKE OUT IN SUDAN BETWEEN RIVAL FACTIONS OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT: THE SUDANESE ARMED FORCES AND THE RAPID SUPPORT FORCES.
- ▶ THE CIVIL WAR IN SUDAN HAS BEEN CLASSIFIED AS THE LARGEST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE WORLD, WITH 64% OF THE POPULATION IN NEED OF AID AND 12 MILLION DISPLACED, MORE THAN HALF OF THEM WOMEN AND CHILDREN.¹
- ▶ IN THE YEARS SINCE WAR BROKE OUT, TWO THIRDS OF THE MEDICAL FACILITIES IN SUDAN'S CAPITAL, KHARTOUM, AND THE SURROUNDING REGION HAVE BEEN DESTROYED OR DECLARED OUT OF SERVICE.²
- ▶ REMAINING HOSPITALS HAVE SEEN MORE THAN A THOUSAND BIRTHS PER MONTH AND CONSISTENTLY EXCEED CAPACITY, LEADING TO A SURGE IN MATERNAL MORTALITY.³
- ▶ SUDAN HAS SEEN AN INCREASE IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE, WITH 12.1 MILLION WOMEN (25% OF THE POPULATION) BEING PLACED AT RISK.⁴
- ▶ GENITAL MUTILATION IS A COMMON PRACTICE IN SUDAN, AFFECTING APPROXIMATELY 80% OF THE FEMALE POPULATION, CAUSING THEM TO FACE OBSTETRIC RISKS.⁵

GAZA STRIP:

- ▶ ON OCTOBER 7TH 2023 CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE BROKE OUT WHICH RESULTED IN THE DEATHS OF 41,000 PALESTINIANS AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF 75% OF THE POPULATION.¹² THIS CONFLICT HAS ESPECIALLY AFFECTED WOMEN WHO FACE SEX-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE PROLIFERATION OF DISEASES.
- ▶ SINCE OCTOBER 7TH OF 2023, THERE HAS BEEN A 300% INCREASE IN MISCARRIAGE RATES.¹³ THIS INCREASE IS A RESULT OF WIDESPREAD FOOD SCARCITY AS WELL AS THE DESTRUCTION OF REPRODUCTIVE FACILITIES THAT SPECIALIZE IN FERTILITY TREATMENT.¹⁴
- ▶ A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF WOMEN ALSO FACE A HIGH DISEASE BURDEN RELATED TO NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASE WHICH ENCOMPASSES THE TOTAL IMPACT OF DISEASE ON A SELECTED POPULATION.¹⁵ AROUND 162,000 WOMEN ARE AT RISK OF NCDs, WHICH INCLUDE HYPERTENSION, DIABETES, AND OTHER CARDIOVASCULAR CONDITIONS.¹⁶
- ▶ MALNUTRITION AND CONDITIONS RELATED TO ANXIETY HAVE ALSO MADE BREASTFEEDING AND CARING FOR CHILDREN IN PALESTINE DIFFICULT.¹⁷ RIGHT NOW OF THE 155,000 WOMEN IN PALESTINE BREASTFEEDING, JUST UNDER 70% OF THEM HAVE FACED CHALLENGES INCLUDING ANEMIA, URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS, PRE-TERM LABOR, AND HYPERTENSION.¹⁸
- ▶ 75% OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN ALSO REPORT DEPRESSIVE EMOTIONS, WHICH IS NOTABLY HIGHER THAN THE PROPORTION OF MEN.¹⁹ ANOTHER 62% REPORT ISSUES WITH INSOMNIA AND 65% FACE PERVASIVE ANXIETY.²⁰

UKRAINE:

- RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE STARTED ON FEBRUARY 24, 2022, AND LEAVING 40,000 CIVILIANS DEAD.²⁸ ADDITIONALLY, 10.6 MILLION PEOPLE WERE DISPLACED.²⁹ RUSSIAN SOLDIERS HAVE USED SEX-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST UKRAINIAN CIVILIZATIONS AS A WEAPON OF WAR IN THEIR INVASION.
- AS OF FEBRUARY 2025, THE WHO HAS REPORTED OVER 2254 ATTACKS ON HEALTHCARE FACILITIES, WHICH IS A VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW ENSHRINED IN THE GENEVA CONVENTION.³⁰
- REFUGEES FLEEING WAR-TORN AREAS WERE 90% FEMALE DURING THE FIRST MONTH OF THE WAR, AND THE CURRENT REFUGEE POPULATION FLEEING UKRAINE IS 63% FEMALE.³¹
- THE LARGEST UKRAINIAN REFUGEE POPULATION RESIDES IN POLAND AT CLOSE TO 1 MILLION, DESPITE THE COUNTRY HAVING SOME OF THE MOST RESTRICTIVE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS IN THE EU.³²
- UKRAINE IS A HOTSPOT FOR SURROGACY PROGRAMS, WITH AROUND 2,500 BABIES BORN A YEAR THROUGH SURROGACY, AND HAS THE SECOND-LARGEST HIV EPIDEMIC IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA, WITH AN ESTIMATED 250,000 PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AS OF 2022.³³
- DURING THE FIRST MONTHS OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION FROM JANUARY 2022 TO NOVEMBER 2022, BIRTH RATES DECREASED 30% FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.³⁴

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

SUDAN:

By Sadie Nelson

In the two years since Civil War broke out in Sudan during Ramadan in April 2023 between rival factions of the military government, it has amounted to the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. The war has resulted in millions being displaced or in desperate need of aid, more than half of them women and children.⁶ However, damage caused by the war has severely limited access to essential aid. In Sudan's capital, Khartoum, and the surrounding region, more than two thirds of medical facilities have been destroyed or out of service. Concurrently, Sudanese women are experiencing extremely high pregnancy rates, with more than a million women being pregnant and in urgent need of maternal health care and services.⁷ A million women are in need of prenatal care but lack the ability to access it due to the crumbling health infrastructure. One of the few surviving hospitals, Port Sudan Maternity Teaching Hospital, has seen more than a thousand births per month and consistently exceeds 100% capacity. An eighth of the population in Sudan is in need of maternal services but lacks proper access to health care facilities as a result of the war, leading to an increase in maternal deaths.⁸ The war has also increased gender-based violence and sexual abuse, for example, there was an on slaught against 1,000 people in October of 2023 during which many were killed or raped, the majority of which were women aged 17-35.⁹ The failing healthcare system in Sudan leaves these women without mental health counseling and physical care to assist in their recovery. Women's health is also deteriorated due to the prevalence of genital mutilation in Sudan, which affects approximately 80% of the female population.¹¹ These women are in need of care to cope with obstetric issues, but in the current climate are unable to access needed resources, putting them at fatal risk. The Sudanese Civil War has exacerbated the health crisis existing in the country and has disproportionately impacted women, leaving them without proper maternal care or resources to cope with both the physical and mental injury associated with gender-based violence and high pregnancy rates.

GAZA STRIP:

By Eli Brigham

Since October 7th of 2023, Palestine's Health infrastructure has been decimated by blockades of food and medical supplies.²¹ Thus far over 1000 attacks against health facilities have occurred while conditions such as malnutrition soar, ballooning to around 30% in children under 5.²² As a result many Palestinian women have fled the country residing in some of the 58 recognized refugee camps in other nations within the Middle East.²³ Migrating out of Palestine to refugee camps or other countries is extremely dangerous and risky. Food insecurity, poverty and the destruction of infrastructure are just three obstacles which most acutely affect women in Palestine, especially those fleeing.²⁴ The intersection of these conditions and risks can make it difficult for women to migrate out of the conflict zone, or live a safe life within Palestine. Moreover, the effect on pregnant women and new mothers has also been pronounced. The autonomy to choose whether or not to have a child has been continually violated and the ability to raise children safely has become inaccessible.²⁵ Access to contraceptives and abortion has disappeared in Palestine which has resulted in an increase in unwanted-pregnancies which strain mental and physical health in conflict.²⁶ At the same time, the destruction of health facilities has made raising children difficult due to the absence of regular check-ups and necessary medical supplies which include anesthetics and natal vitamins.²⁷ The impact of various non-communicable, maternal, and mental conditions primarily impact women and require a coordinated global response to ensure this inequity does not persist.

UKRAINE:

By Amelia Pauly

Global Implications: Russia's war on Ukraine has devastated the country, creating reprehensible damage to healthcare facilities, infrastructure, and facilitating a refugee crisis, with over 6.8 million Ukrainian refugees scattered across Europe. This refugee population is overwhelmingly female.³⁵ This implies that reproductive health concerns are at the forefront of medical issues for fleeing refugees. Further exacerbating the issue, these women are increasingly escaping sex-based violence. This becomes a global conversation into what options should be made available for women who have suffered great tragedies, but become refugees at the will of the recipient country's reproductive policy.³⁶ Access to care in the face of sexual based violence is minimal, as hospitals and clinics transform into basements and shelters to escape bomb threats.³⁷ In addition to necessary care, the trauma of war and sexual violence necessitates mental health resources that are minimal to none in conflict zones.³⁸ Even successful migration into countries belonging to the European Union does not eliminate barriers to healthcare for these women. Overwhelmingly, Ukrainian refugees reside in Poland. Although an EU member, Poland had increasingly become hostile to reproductive healthcare, creating several barriers to access to abortions, contraception, and resources for assault victims.³⁹ This is unique to reproductive care, and usually goes unnoticed in global policies that are more concerned with immediate medical attention. Ukrainians are faced with a decision of remaining in a war-torn country with more open policies regarding reproductive care and fewer communication barriers, or finding physical safety while facing more limitations to proper reproductive resources.⁴⁰ This is not a choice people recovering from immense trauma should be forced to make. The EU needs to address the issue of access to reproductive healthcare in refugee responses, not just in countries like Poland, but in broader responses to humanitarian crises. This is pertinent in addressing the war crimes committed by Russia, as the destruction of hospitals is considered a violation of the Geneva Convention.⁴¹ Under international law, countries also have a duty to respond to migrant crises, which absolutely includes issues in sexual and reproductive health care.

