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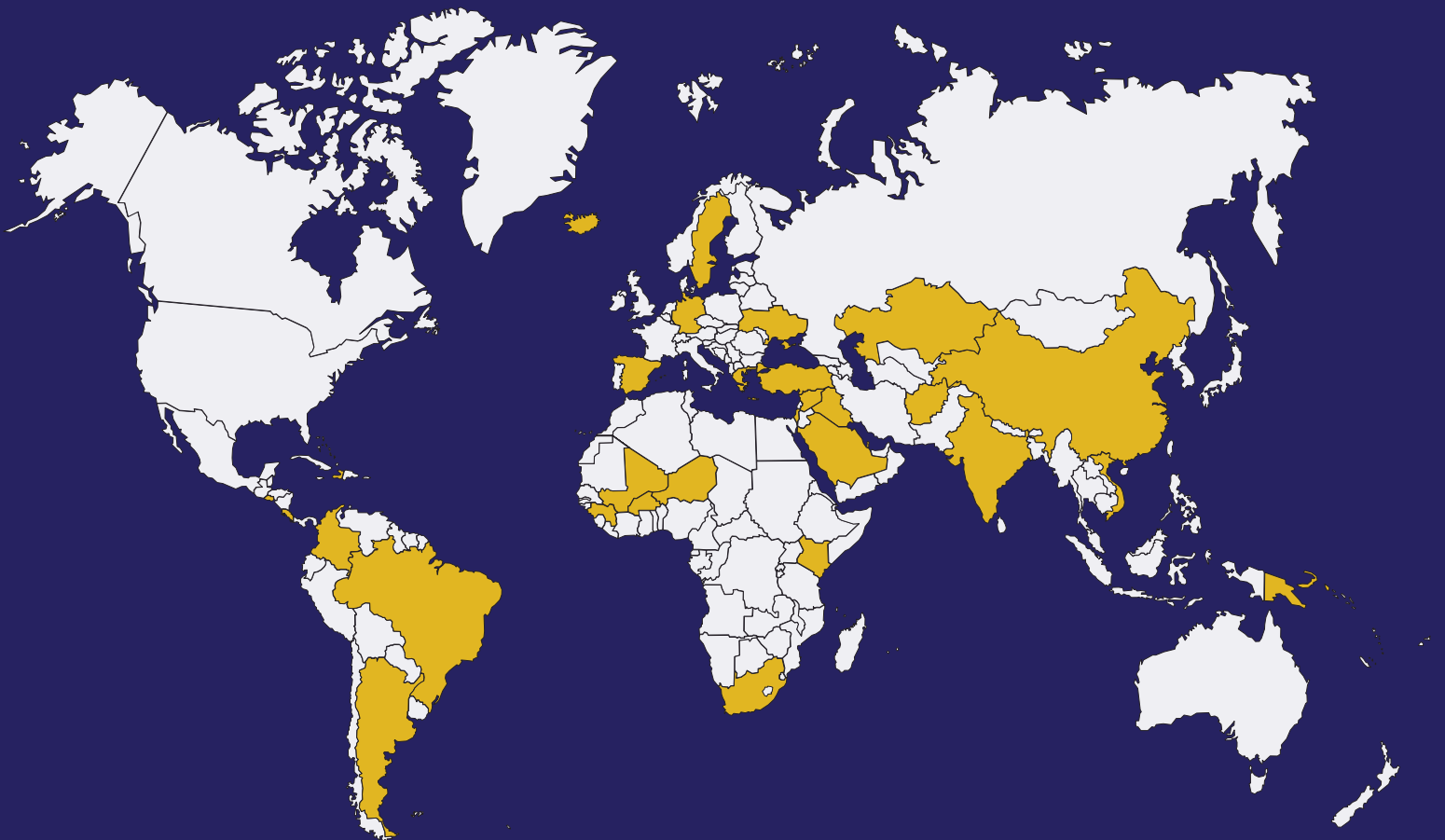
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# SERPENTINE

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

2023 has been a year of quiet change. While global leaders no longer reckon with the astutely visible challenges of COVID-19, the world is facing an evolving set of global threats. Whether it be inequality, environmental degradation, or corruption, these deeply rooted issues have crept onto the world stage and are becoming impossible to ignore. While some nations continue to skirt around these problems, others choose to meet them head on.

This semester, our writers considered how countries are maneuvering around the complexities of the current geopolitical terrain. In the Middle East, Charlotte Dubin sheds light on the international community's cautious dance with the Taliban government. She points out the emptiness behind their whispered promises of women's rights, revealing the facade like a snake revealing its camouflage. Brady Nichols, writer for the Americas region, compares unorthodox political regimes in Argentina and El Salvador. From leather jackets to cloned dogs, the authoritarian leaders stray from convention in their political and personal lives. Brady calls for a shift from extravagance and distractions and a return to long-term solutions to corruption and crime.

Our writers also explored new approaches to economic development. Director of External Affairs Joey Do writes "Vietnam's Rare Earth Minerals: Navigating Opportunities and Challenges in Global Mineral Production." She suggests ways for Vietnam to take advantage of its natural resources while evading the "resource curse" and exploitation by wealthier countries. Dana Dughbaj, staff writer for the Middle East, considers the stealthy impacts of remittances on the Qatari economy, arguing that they play a beneficial role behind the scenes.

From Africa, Ian Earl considers humans' interactions with the natural world from an environmental perspective. He describes how South Africa can maintain the delicate balance between promoting growth in the tourism industry and supporting conservation efforts. Ella Frances, from our Europe region, discusses the complexities of navigating the fashion industry in the face of impending climate change. She provides recommendations for EU leaders to improve upon the environmental impact caused by events such as Paris Fashion Week.

Like the twists and turns of a serpent as it changes its path, leaders are shifting their strategies and priorities at both the domestic and international levels in order to maneuver through our ever-changing world. Serpentine explores the challenges creeping onto the global stage and their implications in international affairs.

- *Michigan Journal of International Affairs, Editorial Board*

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# HUMAN NATURE IS TO RIDE AN ELEPHANT

Ian Earl



The sun rises from beneath the Komati River on a late July morning, the banks glowing a light gold from reflected and refracted sunlight on the water's surface. The air is still, and a bite of cold cuts through clothing like a knife. A modified jeep rolls by the river, kicking up dust from the dry ground beneath it, betraying the serenity of the place.

That Jeep, filled with sleepy yet wide-eyed foreigners and grizzled touring veterans, represents an industry in South Africa that makes up 6.4% of the country's GDP and provides the nation's largest financial contribution to conservation. However, that Jeep also represents... a Jeep. A loud, destructive machine requiring the forging of paths and the expulsion of smoke and dust into the air. The question for the nations of southern Africa is which side outweighs the other?

This isn't a new debate. South African activists, scientists, and politicians have long been discussing the impacts of ecological tourism (or ecotourism). Ecotourism is, in essence, a form of tourism that relies on the environment as its main selling point; think wildlife tours, safaris, and parks. The money that flows into the country from ecotourism is undeniable: in 2019, over 10 million tourists visited South Africa, employing over a million South Africans in hospitality, wildlife expertise, and every other facet of tourism.

However, South Africa has also experienced a decline in many of its natural areas due to the ecotourism industry. Soil erosion and air pollution plague many of the protected regions of the country set aside expressly for tourism, and introducing humans can lead to unexpected tragedy in the South African Bush, often involving tourists themselves. For example, in November 2019, a vehicle carrying 13 tourists to a rest camp struck a giraffe, killing both

the giraffe and one of the passengers.

The debate around the impact and ethics of ecotourism in South Africa underlies greater, more complex, yet fundamental questions. Are wildlife communities shown off to tourists our product to sell? Or is that understanding of tourism reductive and missing the mark completely? Do we have a more complicated relationship with the environment, one that can't be lumped into moral disambiguations like 'good' or 'bad'? And what makes riding elephants such an attractive prospect?

Studies have shown the damaging effects of tourism on protected areas for decades. Emily Folk of *The Ecologist* writes: "With increased tourism comes increased pressure to develop areas and make them more inclusive and resort-like. Building more accommodation, businesses, and amenities within these communities and destinations damages and destroys habitats. By damaging the local environment, you increase the pressure on native species."

In addition to the dangers posed to the flora, the native fauna residing in South Africa is also at an increased risk due to ecotourism. A study published in *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* in 2015 found that "tourism can be deleterious for wildlife because it triggers behavioral changes in individuals with cascading effects on populations and communities." For instance, within South Africa, male elephants were found to be more aggressive towards each other following increased tourist pressure in their environments. Furthermore, the presence of humans on African safaris has shown "extreme alterations of natural behavior" to the animal species present there. All of these erratic and problematic animal behaviors can be traced back, at least in part, to human interaction, most commonly from safaris. Life within the African bush cannot adapt to the constant

pressures from humanity, and we may not even see all of the consequences before it's too late.

However, despite these issues, ecotourism has well-documented benefits, at least to a country's bottom line. In 2019, 6.4% of South Africa's GDP came from tourism. Lesego Senyana Stone, a senior Lecturer on Hospitality Management at the University of Botswana, wrote in a 2022 paper, "Protected areas offer a desirable setting for tourism products, tourism provides revenue that can contribute to conservation efforts."

There is also hope that ecotourism could one day prove sustainable environmentally as well as economically. The potential benefits of ecotourism appear promising in one study published in 2022, which found that there exists "a model framework for the development of sustained ecotourism, including supportive government policy interventions to ensure effective conservation of environmental and natural resources without compromising the economic viability and social well-beings of the locals." This study calls for the immediate regeneration of over-tourist areas, implementation of strategic planning, community involvement, and policymakers establishing responsible travel standards, laying out a path towards sustainable tourism.

However, by most accounts, we aren't there yet.

That has resulted in outcries from the general public within southern Africa. My initial proposition of 'the serenity' of the African Bush belies a complexity within these environmental issues unseen to outsiders. Southern Africa's landscape seems serene on the surface, hiding the stormy undercurrent of politics, pollution, and protests surrounding these environmental issues.

In Tanzania, the government attempted to relocate over 150,000 Maasai Tribe pastoralists living in the Ngorongoro crater region. The reason for this complete evacuation? The development of a game reserve. The people of Tanzania have been pushing back; a violent clash between protesters and the government took place in Loliondo during a land demarcation exercise.

Despite the widely publicized negative effects from Asia, elephantback riding remains available and popular within South Africa. On average, a tourist dies from an elephant ride every other year, and someone gets injured every year. However, that doesn't dissuade tourists' desire to get on the backs of these giants. It's as if there's some need, some fundamental aspect of humanity that calls us to touch what is yet untouched. In some ways, it's a noble desire. That ambition urges us to connect with the world around us and relate on a deeper level to that which is distinctly not human. However, that desire is also inherently destructive. You can't experience something without changing it. Africa's humanity is, in many ways, preserved through this desire. The economy is bolstered through ecotourism as the general world becomes more knowledgeable. However, the destruction accompanying our need to ride elephants, feed giraffes, or drive near lions cannot be ignored. As the human is elevated in southern Africa, some argue that the nonhuman has been deprecated. To ride an elephant is to be human. Whether that's good or bad or somewhere in between is left for southern Africa to decide.

# MOO-VE OVER: INSTITUTIONAL ATROPHY IN BURKINABE PASTURELAND CONFLICTS

Ayla Kaufman

For generations, Burkinabe livestock herders amicably shared natural resources with neighboring farmers and resolved land disputes through traditional conflict management institutions. However, violent conflict and extremism implicating Burkinabe herders are escalating. Government records indicate that over 12,000 violent conflicts involved pastoralists between 2005 and 2011 in Burkina Faso, and violent extremist organizations (VEOs) notorious for recruiting pastoralists have proliferated across the country. International media has been quick to blame climate change and ethnic tensions for resource competition. A better explanation for herders' vulnerability to pastureland conflict and VEOs lies in the historic marginalization of Burkinabe herders and their traditional conflict resolution institutions.

Most overtly, the superimposition of colonial boundaries rendered previously effective land management systems obsolete. Burkinabe livestock herders infamously practice pastoralism to adapt to the Sahel's climate. In rainier seasons, pastoralists leave flooded pasturelands in favor of the northern Sahel's arid climate and abundant grazing lands. Once river levels recede in the drier seasons, herders return to the Savannah's re-nourished grazing lands. Before colonization, migration routes aligned with political-ethnic chiefdoms that spanned nine of today's nation-states, but when the French established its Upper Volta colony in 1895, ethnic groups that controlled contiguous economic zones were separated across borders, impairing their mobility and capacity to respond to contemporary climate pressures.

The Liptako-Gourma region, for instance, was divided under colonization into a tri-state area of modern Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, impeding pastoralist movements across the newly prescribed borders. Cross-border transhumance has all but disappeared, with the region instead becoming an epicenter for environmental conflict. In virtually all Burkinabe pastoralist groups studied by the Catholic Relief Services, inequitable access to land resources and subsequent economic opportunities was the driving force behind resource disputes. When faced with rising poverty and insecurity, herders become increasingly susceptible to recruitment by criminal, banditry, extremist, and village self-defense organizations. Whereas pre-colonial conflict resolution systems under the chiefdoms once congruously mediated such violence, national mediation policies hold dubious authority across borders.

Additionally, Burkina Faso's land tenure regimes reified legal power inequities, leaving pastoralists prone to land competition. Pre-colonial tenure law in

Burkina Faso was particularly suited to herders' mobile lifestyle as the grazing lands inimical to pastoralism were treated as common goods that herders could openly access. The French vacancy law and 1984 Agrarian and Land Reorganization policy purged the commons system by declaring "undeveloped" areas as vacant, state-owned land to be privately re-appropriated. This system completely denied pastoralists' customary pastureland rights because, by default, all land that was not-or was irregularly-cultivated due to migratory pastoral cycles was ceded to the state. In an attempt to rectify the crisis, the Pastoral Law of 2002 paradoxically restrained herders' migration by restricting them to "protected" pastoral zones and requiring transhumance certificates to travel. Burkina Faso likewise allocated a third of all funds spent on livestock between 1968 and 2010 to creating protected sedentary ranches for pastoralists, with intent to increase ranches five-fold by 2025. Despite providing the veneer of pastureland rights, these policies territorially confine migratory practices and undermine their climate adaptation benefits. More importantly, protected areas are seldom enforced. A study by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations found that courts rarely consider whether disputed land lies in a protected pastoral area, and pastoralists are often convicted of encroaching on their own land. Collectively, these policies pushed pastoralists to legal peripheries, subverting their legal claims in land dispute proceedings and granting impunity to those who encroach on livestock reserves.

The systematic loss of pasturage rights coincided with policies that pit pastoralists against farmers. Most pastureland under the colonial and post-colonial systems was titled and re-appropriated as cash crop farmlands. Farmers were encouraged to expand landholdings and maximize yield by completely clearing fields and utilizing fertilizers, which intensifies topsoil erosion, pollution, and overconsumption. Postcolonial pastureland water was also increasingly devoted to large-scale electricity generation and irrigation projects used to enhance dry season agriculture. However, herders blame water use projects for draining and diverting floodplain water needed to saturate grazing lands, as well as for blocking migration routes with hydro-structures. Finally, Burkina Faso has experienced a wave of sedentarization as farmers increasingly settle in villages to tend to their crops or their agriculture-supporting infrastructure. Sedentarization permits farmers to secure near exclusive land rights at the direct expense of open property for pastoralists.

Unequal power in land access has violent consequences for Burkinabe

pastoralists. When surveyed, only 41 percent of pastoralists said they were satisfied with resource access compared to 95 percent of farmers, and pastoralists consistently perceived a legal disadvantage relative to farmers. Structural marginalization lends credence to pastoralists' grievances against farmers, which VEOs manipulate to aggravate social tensions and ascribe legitimacy to violent self-protection. Furthermore, when Burkinabe pastoralists lose profits to farmers, they become particularly vulnerable to VEOs recruitment narratives devised to redress pastoralists' economic grievances. Finally, violence begets violence as insecurity caused by the armed groups then forces herders from traditional pastoral corridors towards farmlands, accentuating herder-farmer conflicts. Resulting conflict between Burkinabe pastoralists and farmers, and recruitment of pastoralists into VEOs, represents the visible manifestation of unequal power in land access.

The systematically undermined credibility of Burkinabe chiefs provides another medium for VEO recruitment and the exacerbation of land disputes amongst pastoralists. In precolonial Burkina Faso, chiefs legitimately allocated land rights and adjudicated daily land conflicts, but under colonization, French authorities appraised chiefdoms as an opportunity to create customarily empowered agents of colonial economic interests. Colonial administrators solidified Burkinabe chiefs' military obedience by decreeing friendship treaties with "friendly" chiefs and militarily repressing antagonistic chiefs. In doing so, Burkinabe chiefs became middleman tax collectors rather than respected land custodians. The contemporary modality of such behavior lies in rent-seeking activities. For instance, Jowros (Fulani chiefs), who have been stripped of taxation authorities still use their legacy as feudal elites to exact fees over grazing land rights. The Macina Liberation Front and Ansaroul Islam exploit Fulani pastoralists' grievances over the Jowros' corrupt taxes and elitism to recruit militants. Burkinabe chiefs have subsequently faced waning legitimacy as mediators of land disputes.

Poor representation, elite capture, and corruption within local land management institutions similarly magnify Burkinabe pastoralists' grievances. Burkina Faso instituted several village-level organizations to increase community input over land-use policies, including Peasant Mutual Aid Organizations (PMAOs), Village Land Management Commissions (CVGTs), and Village Development Councils (CVDs). Nonetheless, PMAOs and CVGTs' decision-making authorities have been increasingly curbed by foreign, neoliberal interests that have forced a reliance on foreign NGO financing and required the councils to prioritize regulations favoring larger, more productive farmers over seasonal pastoralists. This cemented an elite group of business farmers beholden to foreign export interests, unaccountable to local needs, and disproportionately influential over land allocation. Moreover, because pastoralists





do not continually live in villages, they are far less integrated into council politics, creating local governments overwhelmingly comprised of sedentary farmers. In contrast to elite capture of PMAOs and CVGTS by foreign interests, CVDs have become sites for local political power struggles and patronage among farmers seeking to dominate land planning and expand their holdings irrespective of pastoralists. Together, the overlapping legal systems of Burkinabe national law, village politics, and co-existing customary

frameworks have produced “forum shopping” as pastoralists and other land-users pursue different and incompatible mechanisms for resolving disputes in self-serving manners. Weak political representation and its consequences have fuelled perceived exclusion from social advocacy and decision-making—staple grievances underpinning violent conflict.

Burkinabe pastoralists’ structural marginalization is a complex web of tenuous land rights, legal inferiority,

inequitable representation, and corrupted decision-making accountability. While each dynamic independently facilitates grievances that underline violence, they most importantly shatter trust in Burkina Faso’s land administration institutions. This has ultimately caused justice mechanisms and dispute resolution to break down, creating regulatory vacuums for vigilante groups, self-defense organizations, and VEOs to step in as violent alternatives to Burkinabe pastureland governance.

# MAKING SENSE OF THE MESS IN MALI: WHO'S TO BLAME FOR MINUSMA'S FAILURE?

*Ella Mannino*

Today, it is widely understood that the United Nations has failed to achieve many of the lofty goals it originally aimed to: securing world peace, ensuring prosperity and cooperation between nations, and eradicating poverty, among other idealistic, utopian objectives. In the past 20 years, failures in African countries like South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic have led to even further criticism of the UN's effectiveness, causing some to call into question whether the organization should exist at all. The failure of the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has brought to light yet another failed attempt to create a world free from peace and conflict. Between armed hostilities, a lack of international support, and logistical barriers in-country, MINUSMA has been left unable to carry out its mission, spelling an uncertain future for Mali and leaving the international community unsure who to blame.

MINUSMA was first chartered by the UN in 2013 following a military coup and a series of armed attacks in Mali by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a group that seized territory in the north with the aim of forming an independent Tuareg ethnic state. Another military coup further destabilized the country, and MINUSMA aimed to assist in the journey towards political stabilization as Mali transitioned from military control to civilian rule, carrying out human rights monitoring, providing humanitarian assistance, and overseeing free and peaceful elections. These were originally secondary goals of the mandate, however, as the socio-political situation in Mali continued to deteriorate it was revised to include more security-focused goals, such as the protection of civilians and reestablishment of state authority, further entrenching MINUSMA in the conflict and establishing UN forces as not just peaceful mediators between the Malian government and insurgent groups, but as custodians of civilian safety. The UN's presence was then expanded outside of the central cities of Timbuktu and Gao into the increasingly unstable northern regions where a patchwork of armed groups continued to operate. These

groups included militias representing other ethnic groups, such as Ganda Koy and Ganda Lzo, and religious fundamentalist groups fighting for an Islamic state in Mali, like Ansar al-Dine, The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. This web of separatist actors operating against the Malian state created a complex front to which peacekeeping forces had to constantly adapt, and the situation was only further complicated by the many other foreign security missions which ran parallel to the MINUSMA.

Though the UN sometimes collaborated in special circumstances with these foreign missions, such as France's 'Barkhane', EU training missions, and G5 for the Sahel, they largely operated independently from MINUSMA. These mission personnel were often indistinguishable from UN troops to locals, however, which led separatist groups to carry out counter-attacks on peacekeepers in retaliation for the actions of non-UN forces. This not only made MINUSMA one of the deadliest UN peacekeeping missions to date, but caused troop-contributing countries to fear sending their soldiers to assist with the mission, leaving the UN without the critical numbers that their work often required. Resources were also strained due to the sheer size of Mali and the weeks-long journeys required to transport supplies from one base to another - at times, up to 80 percent of the mission's resources were allocated towards self-sustainment, inhibiting its ability to carry out its mandate to protect civilians. A host of other problems, such as lack of infrastructure, irregular and hybrid threats from separatist groups, disinformation campaigns, and the need for counterinsurgency campaigns to win the support of the Malian population and prevent defections to terrorist groups made MINUSMA's mission incredibly challenging to carry out. To make matters more complicated, Mali's military junta frequently imposed restrictions on peacekeeping troops, preventing them from utilizing air and ground spaces needed to carry out their missions so as to not interfere with simultaneous missions being carried out by the Russian private military company (PMC) Wagner Group, to which Mali turned to for additional counterterrorism support.

The contracting of Russian PMCs was largely fueled by frustrations over the UN's reluctance to wholly dedicate its forces to counterterrorism operations rather than humanitarian causes, along with discontent within Mali's population for the perceived ineffectiveness of MINUSMA in combating violence and terrorism, backed by claims that UN peacekeepers had failed to intervene in terrorist attacks near UN compounds. Perhaps most importantly, Wagner provided an alternative to France's forces, which were widely unpopular amongst Malians and the subject of many protests and demonstrations throughout the country. French counterterrorism operations were well-known for their egregiously high rate of civilian casualties; though their forces were successfully able to take out around 2,700 Islamic militants, they killed multiple civilians in air raids, and in 2021, murdered 19 civilians at a wedding that they reportedly mistook for a "terrorist gathering".

The Malian Armed Forces' (MAF) relationship with Russia's Wagner Group has been a source of concern for MINUSMA since its development in 2021, when the paramilitary group was brought in to train Malian forces and provide extra security personnel for government officials. It is suspected that, in exchange for providing these services, Russia was granted rights to conduct mining operations in Mali, a practice consistent with the involvement of Russian PMCs in other African countries. Criticism of Wagner's record of human rights abuses directly contributed to the disintegration of the relationship between MINUSMA and Mali's military junta, particularly with the release of a UN report detailing an incident in which the Malian army and

Wagner forces murdered 500 civilians in the town of Moura. This angered the Malian government, which claimed that all reports of human rights abuses by the MAF and Wagner were fabricated and ultimately demanded that MINUSMA pull out of the country.

The patchwork of responses to the security crisis in Mali, the lack of resources and personnel within the mission, and the complicated relationship between the Malian government, the UN, and Wagner Group can all be apportioned some degree of blame for the instability and violence that's been plaguing the country for over a decade. The UN had been in Mali for ten years, but with a variety of actors attacking peacekeeping troops on different fronts, the reluctance of the international community to support MINUSMA in favor of their own independent missions, and several attempts to block UN action by the MAF and Wagner forces, MINUSMA's failure cannot be completely blamed on the UN. However, the ability of the UN to organize a cohesive mission with international actors and oversee negotiations between the MAF and insurgent forces while providing adequate protection to civilians was nothing short of lacking. At the receiving end of these failures are the Malian people, abandoned by their government, targeted both by foreign militaries whose purpose is to assist them and by Islamic militant groups, and now left without the minimal protection provided by the UN. As the international community continues to confront emerging security threats in the Sahel, the failures of MINUSMA should be remembered and future missions must take into account the shortcomings of this mission, with leaders determined not to repeat the mistakes made in Mali.



# BLOWING INTO THE EMBERS OF A DYING LIGHT

Oscar de Castro

In the past three years, four nations within the 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have witnessed military coups, raising concerns about the future of democracy in the region. Niger (July 2023), Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Guinea (September 2021), and Burkina Faso (January and September 2022) have experienced unlawful changes in leadership, casting doubts on ECOWAS's ability to emulate the European Union's model. A fragmented ECOWAS would prove calamitous for West Africa, impeding its ability to unite against regional rebel groups, jeopardizing peace efforts for its citizens, and thwarting the achievement of the envisioned regional economic integration and growth.

ECOWAS, founded in 1975 to develop economic integration across the region, faced initial challenges in advancing its agenda due to severe political volatility and ongoing civil wars within its member states. Recognizing that genuine economic integration relies on sustainable peace and political stability, the bloc amended its founding treaty in July 1993. This revision included a mandate to foster peace, security, and stability in West Africa.

In December 2001, ECOWAS took a significant step by adopting the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The protocol explicitly declares that "every accession to power must be made through free, fair and transparent elections." It further emphasizes member states' obligation to demonstrate "zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means." The protocol encompasses additional provisions related to elections, the rule of law, and human rights. Importantly, it establishes that the "armed forces, the police and other security agencies [in member states] shall be under the authority of legally constituted civilian authorities."

ECOWAS has achieved key milestones in promoting peace and democracy. Notably, it successfully negotiated the restoration of constitutional rule in Mali (April 2012), facilitated the return of Burkina Faso's interim President Michel Kafando after a military putsch (September 2015), and secured a democratic transition in The Gambia (January 2017) following attempts by former leader Yahya Jammeh to unlawfully stay in power. While there was a period of rare stability in West Africa from 2015 to 2020, the bloc's failure to introduce strict term limits for its members proved problematic. In May 2015, ECOWAS ceded its moral authority by abandoning a proposal to restrict West African presidents to two terms after meeting opposition from Togo and Gambia. A leadership failure that initiated ECOWAS underwhelming response to repressive rule and highly regressive political developments in West Africa.

In March 2020, Guinea's first democratically elected president, Alpha Conde, maneuvered to extend his stay in office



indefinitely through a new constitution, sparking extensive opposition. Despite winning a fiercely disputed election in October 2020 tainted by irregularities and violence, Conde was toppled by Guinea's Special Forces in September 2021. However, ECOWAS failed to condemn Conde's actions, revealing systemic shortcomings.

In the same year, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara secured a controversial third term after winning the October presidential election with 94 percent of the vote, which was boycotted by the opposition and marred by intimidation and violence. ECOWAS leaders did not intervene effectively to prevent damage in Guinea and Ivory Coast, sending a message that rules could be flouted. In February 2022, Ghana's president and then-ECOWAS chairman Nana Akufo-Addo acknowledged the dangerous trend set by Mali's August 2020 coup, but failed to highlight ECOWAS's prior failures in addressing Conde and Ouattara. Currently, ECOWAS is seized with its efforts to reverse Niger's July 26 coup, in which General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the coup leader and former presidential guard chief, has been made the head of state. ECOWAS has suspended Niger's membership, imposed sanctions, closed borders, cut off the electricity supply and threatened to use military force if the coup leaders fail to reinstate lawfully elected President Mohamed Bazoum. As expected, Guinea's military junta has opposed the trade sanctions and the plans to launch armed intervention. Burkina Faso and Mali, meanwhile, have gone a step further and announced that military intervention against the coup leaders in Niger would be considered a "declaration of war" against their nations. ECOWAS

now stands at a dangerous crossroads.

Armed intervention could trigger a war, if not an outright implosion of the region. If a regional war breaks out, several states will undoubtedly leave the union, leaving it powerless in the face of unprecedented turmoil. Yet if the bloc fails to restore Bazoum to power, either through diplomacy or armed force its authority would undergo irreversible damage. The bloc cannot even pretend to be deepening democracy and laying the foundations of a tight-knit economic union while nearly one-third of its members are led by unelected military juntas uninterested in economic integration.

The likeliest path for ECOWAS to survive in name is to keel to the democratic instability in West Africa. Political pundits will claim that "personal ambition and a lack of understanding and cooperation among African leaders" are inescapable foundational unification failures of idealist Pan-African unions; ECOWAS is just the most recent. Rather I believe that it is an opportune moment for ECOWAS to assert itself decisively, signaling an unwavering stance against any future violations of its values and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This requires consistent enforcement of its rule book and the implementation of new regulations, such as presidential term limits, to ensure stability.

Nigeria, ECOWAS's most powerful member by every metric, escaped three decades of military authoritarianism to become the richest country in Africa in the last two decades. Nigeria and Ghana's fervent commitment to democracy and strong open market can help steer ECOWAS members to improved economic outcomes, addressing the root cause of political instability. In persevering through these endeavors, ECOWAS has the potential to not only survive but thrive, fostering a future marked by peace, and economic prosperity across West Africa.



# THE UNSEEN DANGERS OF NONCOMMITTAL CLIMATE ADVOCACY

Mary Tiller

Since his election in September 2022, President William Ruto of Kenya has showcased his wavering support of sustainable policies through a series of contradictory decisions. Meanwhile, western Kenya's access to natural resources has become dangerously unreliable, escalating tensions between pastoral groups across the country. The nature of Ruto's recent actions directly conflict with his advertisement of Kenya's government as fully dedicated to reforestation and climate-conscious action. His endorsement of destructive industrial activity and lack of attention toward disputes fueled by resource scarcity across Kenya will exacerbate the vulnerability of local communities and allow issues of logging, soil erosion, drought, and pastoral conflict to persist. If it continues, Ruto's noncommittal climate advocacy will undermine current progress and hinder any future efforts toward progressive environmental repair.

In August 2023, President Ruto hosted the first Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, inviting experts, diplomats, and state officials from across the world to attend. Discussion at the summit centered around investment in African nations to develop innovative green energy sources. The summit raised 23 billion USD in funding for green energy programs and made headlines across the globe. Many labeled Ruto as a prominent leader against climate change, including Time magazine, which named him one of its top 100 Climate Leaders in Business, a

compilation of individuals who generated impressive business value in their fight against climate change. Similarly, in December 2022, President Ruto launched the National Tree Planting Initiative with the purpose of planting 15 million trees by 2032 to stop deforestation and promote forest recovery.

These seemingly genuine efforts towards climate change mitigation and reframing Kenya's industrial system around sustainable practices deserve to be celebrated, but unfortunately, they are not fully supported by Ruto himself. As of June 2023, President Ruto lifted the logging ban put into place by his predecessor, former President Uhuru Kenyatta, though it had provided Kenya's forests with six years of legal protection from deforestation. This motion was not only executed amidst Ruto's heavy campaigns towards sustainable practices and green energy innovation but also while western Kenya continued to struggle with resource scarcity and flooding—two threats amplified by logging's detrimental side effects.

High amounts of deforestation remove the structural organic matter required for soil stability, leaving it loosened and exposed to wind and water, such that the destruction of Kenyan forest canopy can accelerate erosion by some 20%. This threat, known as soil erosion, not only contributes to low agricultural yields but also impacts the availability of fertile farmland. Without the provision of fertile soil, crops will lack the nutrients required to grow as intended,

which can lead to smaller, lower-quality harvests. Thus, President Ruto's reinstatement of logging as a legal industry not only impacts forest cover density—of which Kenya lost approximately 14% between 2002 and 2020—but also threatens food security and the economic prospects of agriculture in Kenya.

Ruto's reasoning for disbanding Kenyatta's logging ban is primarily economic; the re-introduction of logging is meant to act as a support for Kenya's economy by providing a stable job market and refurbishing businesses that previously depended on lumber. Kenya's historical dependency on logging can be traced back to the 1970s and their charcoal industry which required high quantities of lumber to eventually produce approximately 96% of the total charcoal exports of Africa. Prior to the 1970s, the British colonial state in Kenya was established on the cultivation of cash crops such as arabica coffee and maize, which required the constant provision of cleared, arable land. These practices fueled an economic dependency on deforestation and a constant lumber supply. A return to that foundation would most likely provide Kenya with economic stability, but risk significantly hindering agricultural production due to increased soil erosion. Furthermore, increased logging will inevitably place more strain on the natural resources provided by Kenya's forests and thus intensify current pressures over land and resource distribution.

Limited resources in Kenya's forests stem from an ongoing drought across East Africa that has brought an influx of farmers and herders from neighboring countries in search of water and land, causing a surge in tensions between pastoral groups. Conflict over land distribution in Kenya has been a constant issue since Kenya's occupation under British colonialism. After gaining independence in 1963, the president of Kenya was given direct power to allocate and redistribute land as desired, causing high politicization over what land belonged to whom and which axes should be used to define property ownership. This eventually led to a peak in violence following the 1993 election where approximately 1500 were killed and up to 3000 were displaced. Currently, displacement issues center around insufficient grazing land to accommodate settled citizens and newly displaced peoples. Pressures are also escalating from the inevitable deterioration of existing pastures, should the drought continue indefinitely, alongside existing concerns of overgrazing and forest mismanagement. While citizens raise concerns for their livestock, crops, and future productivity, Ruto has yet to address or formulate a plan to aid the influx of displaced peoples or provide guidelines for resource access.

In addition to resource distribution

concerns, Kenya's Great Rift Valley, which holds a quarter of the nation's population, currently faces high-risk flooding and possible submersion from rising water levels in the Rift Valley lakes. It is expected that, should water levels continue to rise unchecked, Kenya will also soon be faced with a large population of displaced citizens. This would be in addition to the current problems of soil erosion, pastoral tensions, and threats to agricultural production, proving how vulnerable Kenya's population is to the effects of climate change and displaying clear need for foundational action.

While Ruto's industrial activism for innovative green energy projects is a step in the right direction, it will not solve the myriad of issues plaguing the people of Kenya and their livelihoods. These concerns are cyclical, intertwined, and exacerbated by Ruto's reinstatement of logging as a legal industry, inflicting environmental damage that overrides both the economic benefits and any positive progress made by past sustainability initiatives. A stable job market is beneficial—but not if the employees are displaced from their homes due to flooding, the farmers have smaller and smaller harvests each year from soil infertility, and the tensions over resources come to a violent, deadly extreme. While reforestation and green energy initiatives are important, they do not immediately address the more complex problems that impact local communities on a direct level. In regressing back to a logging-based economy, President Ruto is both undoing the progress he has made over the past year and also setting up Kenya for future economic, social, and environmental dilemmas.

So the question remains: how can a solution be found that both supports the economy and preserves environmentally protective practices?

Firstly, any solution aiming to address both issues should be implemented at the local level. Only addressing climate change and its remedies on an industrial or commercial stage leads to an obvious state of detachment and can overlook the issues that directly impact citizens daily. Secondly, the economy should be built up through other foundational industries (such as? If you're able to, give examples!) while logging and other environmentally detrimental practices are prohibited. If the nation is to build a strong foundation that can prevail through the vulnerability climate change amplifies, it cannot rely on harmful industries that promote future instability. Thus, President Ruto must fully commit himself and the Kenyan government to climate advocacy, beginning with the reinstatement of Kenyatta's logging moratorium and continuing through the implementation of sustainable policy that supports citizens and directly protects their livelihoods.



# THE AMERICAS

# THE 'SANTO DO PAU OCO' RESURGES IN BRASÍLIA

Tiago Galera Rogano

Last year's election in Brazil put an end to Jair Bolsonaro's term as the country's leader as it welcomed an old president. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) ruled the South American nation from 2003 to 2010 and is back to the country's capital, Brasília, after thirteen years of criminal changes, data manipulation, legal maneuvers, and—most importantly—one year and seven months in jail. The “hero of the poor” is once again the head of the executive power, but his situation is quite different from his previous terms in office. Since then, multiple criminal charges have been issued against him, mainly for crimes of corruption. While the right-leaning media emphasizes such records, his new wave of supporters paints him as a hero the country needs to maintain the Brazilian democracy's safety. Lula and his companions adopted anti-Bolsonaro rhetoric as a way to gather approval from other parties. Blinding the masses through a falsely egalitarian speech, he resurges in the presidency to install his populist agenda in Brazil's national government and disseminate his allegedly corrupt system through the three powers once again. Eager to deceive and steal the people *de novo*, Lula is back.

Ciro Gomes, who placed fourth in last year's presidential election, smartly describes Bolsonaro as Lula's primary electioneer. The wave of polarization regarding both candidates took over the last two Brazilian presidential elections and shifted the role of voters from choosing their preferred candidate to choosing the “least bad” option. In 2018, Bolsonaro (PSL/PL's candidate) won the election against Fernando Haddad (PT's candidate) because Lula was in jail while being indicted for corruption. His campaign strategy focused more on disparaging the other candidate than on his actual policy intentions. One would assume that the lack of substantial political material would drag supporters away from him, but it did the opposite. People were not interested in the new president, but they wanted the old one to leave—a phenomenon that happened in both 2018 (get rid of PT) and 2022 (get rid of PL) elections. In uniting multiple political ideologies, Bolsonaro rose to power as a promise to extinguish the PT dynasty—eight years of Lula, six of Dilma Rouseff, and two of Michel Temer (PMDB)—and all of its ramifications.

The issue with Lula is not only that he relies on populist strategies to obtain a large supporting base, but he manipulates data to justify these actions. In 1994, then-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso solved a huge economic crisis that saw inflation



rates nearing three thousand percent a year. Cardoso governed until 2002, when Lula finally won the election. The Brazilian economy, practically resurrected by the previous president, was booming. The Brazilian Real was worth half a U.S. Dollar and the country exported an extremely high amount of commodities (with a trade surplus in 2002 of over 13 billion USD in agricultural products). He takes credit for the prosperity of the country brought on by another president, but ignores the fact that his government set the stage for one of the most severe economic crises in Brazilian history, caused by his party colleague Dilma. PT rulers were responsible for the downfall of Latin America's most valuable company, Petrobras, and for the embezzlement of 18 billion Reais (approximately 9 billion dollars then) from 2004 to 2012—discovered by the Operação Lava Jato.

In addition to his shameful economic performance, Lula makes an effort to convince his audience that he is a truly paternalistic figure for the poor. He uses simple statistics to prove that life was better under his command. Although there is a significant decrease in the percentage of the population that lives under the poverty line considered as a “hunger state,” he ignores the fact that the impoverishment of these same people began with him and Rouseff. Since the recession in 2014, during another PT government, the average income of Brazilians decreased by seven percent, while incomes of the poorest tenth of Brazilians decreased by fourteen percent. Lula and Dilma also decreased the amount of money a family must earn to be considered middle class in 2012. Their Secretary of Strategic Matters (SAE) defined the then-new middle class as families that earn from 145.50 to 509.50 dollars per capita (making the size of the middle class increase by fifteen percent). This “study” did not reflect the country's economic situation, as the average increase in income over that period was just 3.5 percent. The opposition summarizes this social maneuver as “Lula has eradicated hunger in Brazil with the stroke of a pen”. This manipulation of data serves to advertise that “we helped Brazilians leave poverty” on his campaign posters, which once again proves that there exists no

interest in actually helping the population or effort to become a hero for workers.

The most shocking factor in Lula's reelection campaign is the absence of the public questioning the criminal allegations against him and his time in jail. There are two charges that led to Lula being found guilty, both of which the statute of limitation had expired after a shameful political move to remove him from jail. He was found guilty in these two cases by Judge Sergio Moro in the Federal Criminal Department of Curitiba. In the year following his conviction, a minister appointed by a PT politician to the Supreme Court of Justice (STF), Edson Fachin, decided that Moro was biased in the case, so it should be re-examined in the Federal Criminal Body of Brasília. During the transition, the charges were expired because Lula is older than seventy years of age and the Brazilian law states that at this point, the time for the charge to expire is halved. Lula is said not to owe anything to the Brazilian justice system anymore and that he is “guilty of being innocent”. Both of these are incorrect from a legal standpoint. As a result, people not only “believed” him but blamed Bolsonaro for it.

Lula is back after years of plotting his triumphant return. In Brazil, during the 18th century, the taxes for gold to leave the then-colony and go to Portugal were extremely high. To save this money, miners started to send Lisbon multiple hollow saint sculptures made in wood filled with their metal. This became the expression “Santo do Pau Oco” (“Hollow Wooden Saint”) to describe someone who looks polite, and harmless, but is actually not saintlike at all. That is the truth most people do not want to see. Lula is the perfect hollow wooden saint, as most populists are. His flawless rhetoric and incredible manipulative skills have given him the key to Brazil's Planalto Palace. Hidden behind the anti-Bolsonaro speech, he will continue to systematically implement his strategies to inflate his ego and wallet. For those who voted against him, there is the certainty of scandals and flawed policies. For the ones who believed in him once more, the inevitable disillusion. His game won't change. And we all know how he likes to play.

# SCRIPTA NON MANENT

Amer Goel

Note: All quotes have been translated into English by Amer, who speaks Portuguese and Spanish, and may not reflect nuance or retain original meaning.

*Viva la revolución!  
Independência ou Morte!  
Vive la révolution!*

Over a century after their birth, these impassioned calls for revolution—once echoing hopes of self-governance across Spain and Portugal's colonial domains—have become the echoes of unfulfilled aspirations. Under newfound independence, numerous Latin American nations grappled with a series of political upheavals and constitutional overhauls, driven by persistent discontent with legal failures. Such constitutional instability often stems from governmental corruption and indifference but is fundamentally rooted in inherent deficiencies of the law. This is evident in a series of Brazilian constitutions, whose texts reveal a pattern of indistinct separations of governmental powers and unclear mandates that weaken law enforcement and governance. The bureaucratic machinery and the judiciary rule of law enshrined in these documents lack the legal robustness necessary for effective governance.

To understand the roots of these failures, it is important to understand how the laws evolved. The language that contemporary constitutions use often appears precise and well-crafted, hiding underlying flaws beneath a veneer of specific and standardized language. However, close examination of the structure and language of historical legal codes reveals fundamental shortcomings. These insights can be applied to modern legal text to uncover similar inadequacies in their structure.

The Portuguese colonial legal system in Brazil, as articulat-

ed in the Ordenações Filipinas, emphasized a general directive for legal and judicial officials. The attorney general was tasked with promoting justice and handling "all things that relate to justice" with due diligence (Book 1, Title 15), while the solicitor general "should be diligent so that by their laziness and negligence the facts of justice are not expanded" (Book 1, Title 25). Both of these mandates are too broad to attribute any real power to either official. Furthermore, the bureaucratic structure was given vague jurisdiction in secular matters, such as "In those cases that proceed ordinarily that are not suitable to process through [religious] censures" (Book 2, Title 8). This mandate is similarly broad and does not assign responsibility or accountability to those that execute it.

This pattern of broad, nonspecific legal language extended into Brazil's post-colonial era. The Constitution of Brazil from 1824 reflects these ambiguities. Article 151 of this constitution vaguely states that the judicial power will determine civil and criminal cases "in the mode which the [law] determines," continuing the tradition of imprecise legal directives. Similarly, Article 102 of the same constitution gives the executive the role to "provide for everything that concerns the internal and external security of the State," a continuation of the colonial-era vagueness in defining bureaucratic responsibilities.

The persistence of these issues is evident in Brazil's 1988 Constitution. Article 96, while outlining judicial competencies, uses phrases such as "regulating the competence and the operation of the respective jurisdictional and administrative bodies," which continue the legacy of ambiguous legal language. This vagueness extends to the description of modern executive pow-

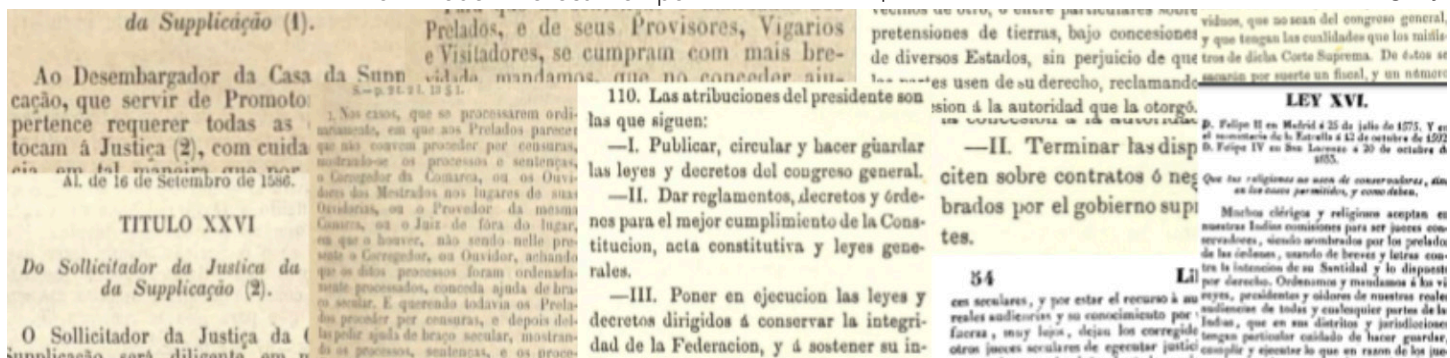
er in Article 87, which states that ministers "can exercise guidance, coordination and supervision of the agencies and entities of the federal administration in the area of his authority", yet fails to offer specific directives, perpetuating a cycle of weakened judicial interpretation and enforcement.

It is now apparent how the current judicial and bureaucratic shortcomings in Brazil originated and what they entail. The imprecise rules and norms established by colonial law led to indistinct, unenforceable judicial powers, hindering the judiciary's potential for impactful reform. The colonial legal texts, with their broad directives in defining judicial roles and responsibilities, sowed the seeds of ambiguity that germinated into a judiciary without decisive authority. Following independence, the newer constitutions continued this trend, displaying similar vagueness by allocating judicial authority to vaguely specified entities with expansive adjectives and mandates. The result was a continuation of the colonial legacy, where the judiciary was enshrined more as a symbol than as an active, reformative force. Thus, it is clear that the legal system in Latin America is marred by an ineffectively formulated judicial code, resulting in a judiciary without real power, a legacy inherited from its legal progenitors. The gravity of this situation cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts the capacity of the judiciary to enforce laws, protect rights, and ensure justice, leaving these crucial aspects of governance perpetually underdeveloped.

Likewise, contemporary Brazil has adopted a derivative secular bureaucratic system, characterized by a failure to clearly define and assign specific responsibilities. This systemic flaw roots back to the colonial era, where the bureaucracy was structured in a way that allowed for broad interpretation of duties and limited accountability. In modern times, this translates to a bureaucratic framework where responsibilities are nebulous, and the scope of authority is often interpreted at the convenience of those in power. This situa-

tion potentially enables those in executive roles to evade their obligations, as they are not held to explicit standards of accountability. The lack of well-defined roles and responsibilities in the bureaucratic system, coupled with the use of broad and generalized legal language, grants bureaucrats a degree of discretion that is often unproductive and ineffective. The problem is intensified by the ongoing use of broad and generalized legal language, which grants bureaucrats the leeway to choose actions that suit their convenience, bypassing the need to adhere to a structured system of accountability or a stringent legal framework. As a result, this lack of enforceable responsibility in the bureaucratic system contributes to the significant issue of corruption prevalent in the region today. The impact of such a system extends beyond mere inefficiency; it erodes public trust, hampers economic development, and undermines the principles of democratic governance, perpetuating a cycle of impotence and corruption that hinders the region's progress.

In tracing the language of legal authority from the Leyes de Indias and Ordenações Filipinas to the post-colonial and modern constitutions of Brazil, a clear pattern emerges. Each subsequent legal text carries forward the imprecision of its predecessors, maintaining a tradition of vague legal language that has contributed to the challenges of establishing a strong judiciary and a clearly defined bureaucracy in the region. Similar comparisons can be made for the constitutions of Mexico and Chile, which went through a similar colonial-independence-modern chronological development. This textual analysis reveals a lineage of legal ambiguity that underscores the enduring struggle for clarity and specificity in the region's legal frameworks, and highlights the root cause of many political disruptions that Latin America has faced since independence. Until the region can commit to a philosophical change in the description of their enforcement mechanisms, they will continue to treat the symptoms of their own ambiguity.



# UNEARTHING INJUSTICE: ANTI-INDIGENEITY COMPROMISES COSTA RICA'S ENVIRONMENTAL GRANDEUR

Abby Green

In recent decades, the small Central American country of Costa Rica has been praised as an environmental leader for the “greening” of its industry, reforestation work, and commitment to combating climate change through progressive policies. Costa Rica is home to nearly six percent of the world’s biodiversity while accounting for only 0.03 percent of the earth’s surface. Costa Rica’s ability to preserve its robust natural biodiversity has made it a prominent tourist destination. Although its main focus has been on protecting the natural, resource-dense environment through national laws, Costa Rica’s dedication to the decarbonization of its economy by 2050 and sustainable development earned it the 2019 Champions of the Earth award, the UN’s highest environmental honor. On the surface, Costa Rica appears to be an environmental paradise. However, the indigenous communities in the region share a different history centered around anti-indigeneity, imperialism, and capitalism.

While around 100,000 Costa Ricans identify as a member of one of the country’s eight indigenous communities, most are living in grim socio-economic circumstances—a legacy of imperialism in the region. For most of the country’s history, the Costa Rican government failed to legally recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to their land, first with the Spanish conquistadors, who colonized Costa Rica and committed systematic genocide against the native peoples, but also in the last 100 years when foreign corporations, like Chiquita and Burger King, exploited indigenous land to assert economic dominance in the beef and banana industries. In 1977, Costa Rica passed the Indigenous Law, ensuring Indigenous territories were “inalienable” and “exclusive for the Indigenous communities that inhabit them.” This meant that under the law, ownership of Indigenous land was formally allocated back to Indigenous communities. However, the land has remained primarily in the hands of families who have appropriated them since the colonial period or used for the production of beef, fueled by U.S. subsidies and soft loans extended to Costa Rican ranchers.

In theory, the law legally protected Indigenous rights to historic land, but political stasis has caused its enforcement to be ineffective. Consequently, the Costa Rican government is threatening the survival of Indigenous communities and overlooking a key component of addressing climate change. Marginalized communities across the globe are experiencing the effects of climate change at a disproportionately high rate as a result of their geographic location, financial status, direct dependence on the land for resources, and lack of political power. For the Indigenous people of

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**THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS LAND IS MORE THAN A TERRITORY DISPUTE; IT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE ERADICATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN COSTA RICA.**

”

Costa Rica, the situation is no different. The cultural integrity of the Bribri People, a native tribe in Costa Rica, is dependent on their connection to heritage, traditions, and land. As a matrilineal tribe, it is the responsibility of the mother to inherit and pass on tribal lands to the next generation. However, without control over their land, the Bribri have no way of continuing this tradition. For Indigenous youth in particular, understanding their customs, language, traditional knowledge, and cultural identity is increasingly difficult. The survival of the tribe is dependent on continuing cultural traditions across generations, yet, without a community and connection to tribal land, it is challenging for Indigenous groups to sustain their way of life as space and time dissipate language and traditional values. The social and legal failure to recognize Indigenous land is more than a territory dispute; it is the root cause of the possible eradication of Indigenous peoples in Costa Rica.

From a humanitarian and environmental perspective, the destruction of Indigenous communities like the Bribri is pernicious. Indigenous peoples of Costa Rica are agents of environmental change. For millennia, many Indigenous groups have sustained the health of the forest and natural resources by resisting the encroachment of industrialization. However, Costa Rica’s negligence has diluted its ability to protect ecological hotspots, areas of high species diversity. Indigenous communities now reside in restricted reserves on a fraction of their original land, as nearly half of the formally recognized Indigenous land is still dominated by cattle ranching and at the mercy of industry. As a result, risks of deforestation, desertification, and wildlife extinction are copious and run contrary to the goals of reforestation, maintaining biodiversity, and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. By not enforcing the Indigenous Law of 1977, the Costa Rican government is failing to recognize the importance of Indigenous knowledge and the injustice rampant in environmental causes.

In October 2022, the Costa Rican Supreme Court voted to uphold the Indigenous Law of 1977, which prohibits non-indigenous peoples from selling or acquiring land inside the Indigenous territories. While

this is a positive step, the Indigenous Law remains unimplemented and the government has not taken serious action to hold violators of the law accountable. In contention with the stalemate, Indigenous groups and leaders began a campaign to reclaim their lost territory, leading to violent disputes in the forests between Indigenous communities and illegal settlers. Within eleven months, two Indigenous leaders and activists, Sergio Rojas Ortiz of the Bribri tribe and Jehry Rivera of the Bröran tribe, were shot dead as a result of the conflict. While Rivera’s killer has been sentenced to 22 years in prison, Rojas’ murderer is still at large. This lack of physical support and inaction by the government perpetuates the cultural suppression of Costa Rican Indigenous communities because it promotes inconsistency between the written law and its practice. By not upholding the Indigenous Law, there are few consequences for committing violence against Indigenous tribes and using Indigenous land illegally, effectively allowing injustice to continue.

After 40 years of non-compliance with Indigenous Law by the state, the violence against Indigenous communities in Costa Rica has recently caught international attention. In 2021, UN human rights expert Francisco Calí Tzay expressed serious concern about the “continued attacks on human rights defenders and indigenous leaders in the south of the country, who suffer intimidation, death threats, attacks in the context of defending their land.” Although the international community has verbally condemned Costa Rica for its human rights violations and failure to protect Indigenous communities, it was not until after 40 years of suppression, the murder of two leaders and land rights activists, and lauding the country as an environmental blueprint. While Costa Rica has successfully integrated environmental protection into its policies, its failure to recognize the importance of Indigenous communities in combating climate change and their overall right to exist is a negligence of both environmental and humanitarian protection. In the future, it is necessary for environmental protection programs, both domestic and international, to consider the health of both humanity and the environment.







# GUSTAVO PETRO'S POLITICAL CIRCUS: TRAGICOMEDY IN COLOMBIA

*Miguel Calle*

Who is Colombian President Gustavo Petro? The answer can vary widely; some say he is a former guerrilla group member, a communist, a Marxist, a socialist, or capable of “destroying” the nation he governs. Others view him as a reformist, a revolutionary, a visionary, and a fervent environmentalist. While both descriptions are partially correct, neither are nuanced enough to characterize President Petro.

Gustavo Petro was born in Ciénaga de Oro, Colombia, on April 19, 1960. When he was ten, Petro moved with his family to Zipaquirá, a town just north of Bogotá. At 17, Petro joined the guerrilla group M-19 (19th of April Movement). M-19 was responsible for the theft of Bolívar’s sword and the Palace of Justice siege, in which half of the 25 Supreme Court Justices were killed. By 21, Petro was both a member of the group and a councilman for Zipaquirá. In 1985, the army arrested Petro, tortured him for ten days, and the courts sentenced him to 18 months for illegal weapon possession. His time in prison altered his ideology by making him lose faith in armed resistance and shaped his political career; he uses his imprisonment as a political tool—to depict himself as the martyr of progressivism—to this day. In 1987, M-19 initiated peace talks with the Colombian government. Petro was not involved. In 1991, a Constituent Assembly reformed the Colom-

bian constitution based on the peace process, and the constitution is still valid today. Petro later left to study in Europe, and eventually, he and other M-19 members formed a party called the M-19 Democratic Alliance. Petro eventually returned and was elected to the Colombian Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. In 2011, he became mayor of Bogotá.

While mayor, Petro’s myriad of weaknesses as an administrator revealed themselves. Despite being an exceptional speaker and analyst of Colombia’s many problems, Petro is not a competent leader. Scandals and infighting plagued his administration, which lasted from 2012 to 2015. Most importantly, Petro had no major accomplishments while in office. Bogotá was marginally worse but not significantly worse when Petro left the mayoralty. Petro was unsuccessful in upgrading Bogotá’s infrastructure, mobility, and safety, but he did improve the city’s education system and helped decrease multidimensional poverty. It is yet to be seen whether Petro will perform similarly as president.

Petro ran for president thrice: in 2010 (finishing fourth), 2018 (finishing second), and 2022, when he won. He scaled his mentions of expropriation and nationalization, somewhat toning down the radicalism of his previous two campaigns for his 2022 run, knowing this was his last chance to win. Colombia’s elites were

always worried about Petro’s intention to expropriate land. Petro was a close advisor to Hugo Chávez in the past and often defended authoritarian leftist regimes in the region—something Petro still does. The phrase most often used against him was “he’s going to turn Colombia into Venezuela” (poor, socialist, and miserable). His opponents were wrong, but not for the reasons they often described.

One year into Petro’s presidency, Colombia is an entirely different mess than expected. President Petro’s “Total Peace” plan to dismantle the country’s main guerrilla and criminal groups through peace talks failed. The rebel group ELN executes a deadly terrorist attack every week. The father of soccer superstar Luis Díaz was kidnapped by the group and held for 12 days. Cocaine became Colombia’s main export, more than in Pablo Escobar’s heyday. The country’s economy contracted by one percent, more than expected, in the third quarter of 2023. The energy transition process from fossil fuels to renewables, initiated by the previous conservative government, is stagnating. Petro’s healthcare, pension, and labor reforms, the centerpiece of his presidential run, were deemed too radical by Congress and were dismissed. His candidates lost most if not all of the country’s crucial governorships—including Antioquia, the most important region—and mayoralties nationwide, including Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. Worst of all, Nicolás Petro, the president’s son, will face trial for alleged illicit enrichment and money laundering crimes. Nicolás recently said his father was aware of narco-trafficking money used in his 2022 campaign, for which Nicolás was a conduit.

In the meantime, Petro is doing what he usually does. He—not the personnel running his account—tweets around 16 times daily. Petro is frequently late to meetings, raising suspicions of heavy drinking. He travels abroad almost twice a month and sermonizes everyone from President Biden to the United Nations (where his press team faked the applause he received) on how humanity is about to go extinct due to fossil fuels. Petro refuses to compromise or work with Congress to enact more moderate reforms. At the beginning of his presidency, Petro’s cabinet included experts such as José Antonio Ocampo,

Colombia’s most distinguished economist, as finance minister and Alejandro Gaviria, one of the country’s eminent scholars, as education minister. It has since lost these accomplished figures, and the president selected dogmatic activists to replace them. Petro has also let go of his men responsible for dealing with Congress: he fired the adroit Ambassador to Venezuela, Armando Benedetti, due to a scandal involving drug money and illegal wiretapping. He reassigned Senator Roy Barreras and Minister of the Interior Alfonso Prada to the Colombian embassies in London and Paris. Petro finds himself navigating a self-created maze, while the average Colombian faces increasing challenges in affording bills and maintaining a sense of security in their communities.

Petro’s detractors are not wrong: fundamentally, Petro is radically leftist. His politics are rooted in the “old left” and inspired by Marxism. He frequently defends the autocratic regimes of Cuba and Venezuela, barrages the Colombian media and free speech, and calls for marches and even rioting when his back is against the wall. His populist impulses and anticapitalist progressivism will impede Colombia’s progress. Fortunately for the country, the judicial and legislative aspects of the government, such as the Constitutional Court and Congress, have constrained Petro. The U.S. and the Biden administration have been patient with the Petro government, withstanding his grandstanding and arrogance. However, that patience is wearing thin. Petro has repeatedly attacked the United States in speeches and blames them for the situation in Cuba and Venezuela.

Still, it is hard to foresee a positive future for Colombia, at least during Petro’s next three years. In the best-case scenario, Petro does not achieve his goals—all his reforms fail to pass—and fades away. The worst-case scenario involves a ravaged Colombian economy, a destroyed energy transition process, crime levels reminiscent of the 1990s to early 2000s levels, and weakened institutions leading to democratic backsliding.

Who is Gustavo Petro, then? He’s the master of ceremonies in a political circus and the main focus of this chapter in the Latin American novela—one that is always amusing until it becomes tragic.

# LEATHER JACKETS, CHAINSAWS, AND THE FUTURE OF LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

Brady Nichols

Nayib Bukele and Javier Milei are two of the most prominent figures in Latin American politics. The former is making waves with his *Mano Dura* ("strong hand") approach to tackling El Salvador's rampant murder problem, and the latter is at the center of a heated presidential election. Bukele's youth, style, and social media savvy have popularized him with young Salvadorians, and Milei's eccentricity has turned the Argentinian election into a worldwide spectacle. Despite their notoriety and influence, both men have a dark side. Their showmanship and capitalization on crises have made them extremely popular, but also dangerous. Through spectacle, anti-institutionalism, and hardline policies, they've managed to distract the masses from pitfalls in their political agendas and conceal possible authoritarian streaks. Their shared playbook has the potential to upend Latin American politics and poses a serious threat to the region.

To understand how Milei and Bukele came to political prominence, we must first understand their backgrounds. In 2017, El Salvador led the world in murders with 61.7 per 100,000 people, a figure that exceeded the world average ten times over. The country was plagued with gang violence perpetrated by MS-13 and Barrio 18, the two predominant rival criminal organizations. On June 1st, 2019, Nayib Bukele, the mayor of San Salvador - the nation's capital - was elected president in a campaign centered on eliminating corruption. In March 2022, Bukele's focus shifted; he declared war on gangs, sending the army into the streets while jailing 70,000 people. This move garnered substantial international criticism, as human rights groups and foreign governments decried the regime's violation of civil rights and constitutional safeguards. Domestically, how-

ever, the *Mano Dura* approach won Bukele massive support and made him the most approved leader worldwide.

Four years after Bukele's election, Argentina's inflation rate hit a staggering 124.4 percent, the nation's highest since 1991. Reckless government spending had weakened the peso substantially, and a debt to the International Monetary Fund loomed. Enormous deficits accumulated by Peronist governments necessitated a \$57 billion bailout, a sum that made Argentina the IMF's largest debtor. Enter Javier Milei, a shaggy-haired 52-year-old libertarian economist and member of the National Congress, who made headlines with promises to dissolve the country's central bank and dollarize its economy if elected president. His slash-and-burn policies have made him a polarizing figure who some see as the hero Argentina needs to lead the country to prosperity after decades of economic strife.

Bukele and Milei's responses to their respective conflicts have much in common. For example, their proposed policies to combat their nations' crises are nothing short of extreme. Bukele's roundups, while they have reduced the murder rate, have also turned El Salvador into the country with the world's highest incarceration rate, with over one percent of the population currently behind bars. These roundups have continued at the expense of constitutional protections like due process and fair defense, suspended under an extended state of exception. Prison conditions have become inhumane, with the number of inmates exceeding three times the capacity of the nation's prisons. In March 2022, the legislature passed a new policy allowing children as young as twelve to be incarcerated in these facilities. In light of these factors, the reduced murder rate

seems much less impressive. Milei, meanwhile, has proposed the most drastic set of measures possible to reduce inflation. Rather than diminish government spending and implement standard monetary policy, Milei plans to dismantle Argentina's entire financial system and severely limit the country's ability to control its economy. Although dollarization has been effective in countries like Ecuador and Panama, it is a short-sighted move that will limit the growth potential of a powerful global economy like Argentina's. In short, solutions like Bukele and Milei's are hardly solutions at all—they are reactionary extremes that capitalize on popular discontent while failing to provide sustainable results.

Both figures also repeatedly disrespect political institutions. Milei's response to the inflation crisis itself demonstrates that he holds Argentina's financial institutions in little esteem. He has additionally expressed contempt for the country's political elites, describing them as "useless parasites." While some of his complaints may be warranted, Milei's constant attack on the political establishment consists of a vendetta more than a simple critique. If elected, it is hard to imagine Milei collaborating effectively with the "parasites" he constantly defames. Meanwhile, Bukele's extension of what should have been a thirty-day state of emergency for well over a year has allowed him to shirk constitutional provisions for due process, prohibit public access to information, and erode protections against misuse of public funds. Moreover, despite El Salvador's constitutional prohibition against immediate reelection, Bukele will seek a second term. This move was made possible by a controversial 2021 ruling by a Supreme Court stacked with Bukele sympathizers. This caprice surrounding constitutional constraints is a deeply concerning trait for a leader to exhibit, as Latin America has seen attitudes like Bukele's turn into tyrannical rule all too often. Concerningly, both men's actions reveal that they view institutions as mere obstacles in the way of pursuing their respective agendas.

Another trait that characterizes both is their penchant for spectacle as opposed to substance. From the beginning of his presidency, Bukele has established a carefully cultivated image. His social media accounts are used to disparage other Salvadorian

political figures, past and present, as well as nations that have expressed concerns about his policies. He wears leather jackets and aviator sunglasses in his public appearances to subvert the image of the traditional politician. In his supporters' minds, he is not just tough, but consummately cool. Milei's rockstar haircut also sets him apart from the crowd, capturing a more eccentric image compared to Bukele. In addition, his cloned dogs' prominence in his campaign further emphasizes Milei's eccentricity, and his use of a chainsaw as a prop at a campaign rally to demonstrate his fiscal policy agenda was the culmination of the persona he has created. Both Bukele and Milei are masters of distraction, adept at drawing public attention to themselves and away from their agendas.

The similarities between Milei and Bukele are alarming for the future of politics in Latin America. Many nations experiencing crises similar to those of El Salvador and Argentina may endorse rising stars like these two. For example, as drug crime has spiked massively in Ecuador, some have clamored for the implementation of Bukele's strategy there, despite the civil and human rights concerns it presents. Bukele's regime tends more toward authoritarianism every day as the state of exception continues, and his reelection bid will eliminate the last barrier to perpetual power. El Salvador is headed down a dangerous road; Argentina will head down a different, but still dangerous one if Milei is elected. The rest of the region must refuse to follow these examples.

Rather than accepting complacency and simply reelecting establishment candidates or putting its future in the hands of Bukele-Milei clones, Latin America needs a return to sensibility. It needs passionate leaders who are committed to fighting corruption, crime, and other pressing issues, but who will do so with a deep respect for institutions and a commitment to real, sustainable solutions. Admittedly, this will be difficult, given that many countries are not presented with such options. Even so, the region must not be satisfied with weak substitutes for quality leadership. The people must resist both complacency and rashness, instead supporting balanced candidates who will solve problems through appropriate means. The future of the Americas depends on it.

# GANG VIOLENCE IN HAITI: AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Levi Herron



The scale of gang violence in the small Caribbean nation of Haiti has reached disturbing extremes in the last several years. Eighty percent of the capital of Port au Prince is now under the control of the dozens of criminal organizations that operate there. Residents live under constant threat of murder, rape, and kidnapping, with at least 2,400 people murdered in the first eight months of 2023. Nearly 130,000 people have been forced out of their homes by the widespread violence, a shocking number in a nation of only 11 million. The criminal justice system has proved ineffective in countering the violence, and people in gang-controlled areas have been forced to resort to vigilante efforts to defend themselves. Haiti risks becoming a failed state at the hands of the criminal gangs that are wreaking havoc on the nation. By assisting in the development of an intelligence-focused and professional police force, the restoration of government legitimacy, and the empowerment of the Haitian people to drive out organized crime, the international community can support Haitians in their efforts to build a safe and just state.

The history of Haiti is one of subjugation and isolation. It was established as a French colony in the 1600s, later housing huge sugar plantations where many enslaved people were brought to work under horrific conditions. In 1791, the world's largest slave revolt began, which ended with the Haitian people gaining independence in 1804 and made it the only independent Black-led nation in the Americas. From the start, the international community worked to isolate the nation from the rest of the world, fearing that the success of the Haitian people in casting off their chains would inspire slave revolts in other countries. In 1825, the French demanded crippling reparations from the Haitian state to repay slave owners, a debt that wasn't paid until 1947. Since independence, Haiti has suffered through repressive dictatorships and military coups, with stability and government legitimacy proving elusive to this day. With all of this unrest, the nation has been unable to build effective and trustworthy

institutions, a legacy that has made combatting the current gang crisis exceedingly challenging.

Law enforcement is the most central institution in combating gang violence on the ground. Unfortunately, the Haitian police force is plagued by numerous issues from corruption to abysmal morale and low staffing. Haiti only has about 9,500 police officers tasked with protecting a nation suffering from extreme violence. By contrast, there are about 17,000 police officers in Michigan, protecting a state with about the same population and significantly less crime. Officers are underpaid, outgunned, and poorly led, creating a force that is ripe for corruption and apathy.

It is essential that the Haitian police force develop into a high-quality, modern law enforcement apparatus if the nation hopes to effectively combat the well-armed and organized gangs they are fighting. The international community can provide support to achieve this goal by providing advisors from well-functioning law enforcement agencies with experience in countering organized crime. These advisors can support local police leaders in developing community-focused and intelligence-led policing strategies that are appropriate for addressing the level of violence that the Haitian Police are confronted with. It is also essential that police officers be paid adequately in order to reduce the appeal of corruption and provide them with the necessary equipment to safely do their jobs—goals that can be accomplished with foreign aid. In concert with a focus on quality leadership, these proposals could help improve staffing and morale, while also furthering the overarching crime-fighting mission of the Haitian police force.

While improving the Haitian police is essential to address the country's widespread gang violence, a general restoration of government legitimacy must be achieved as well if the nation hopes to bring its citizenry together in opposition to the predatory criminal organizations that plague its streets. Subject to repeated dictatorships, the Haitian government has always struggled with legitimacy. This issue has only worsened in recent years, with the assassination of President Joivenel Moïse, leaving political chaos. Since the last democratically-elected senators' terms expired in January of 2023 Haiti has not had a single nationally-elected official. In an indication of the collapse of the

judicial system, the Supreme Court, which is supposed to have 12 members, now only has three, and the court system has largely ground to a halt. Political leaders are widely seen as working in concert with the gangs, while trust in government and its system of checks and balances is effectively nonexistent.

For the Haitian government to regain the legitimacy necessary to foster a concerted nationwide effort against gang violence, the people must trust and respect it. Pressure must be placed on leaders to organize national elections, which international organizations with expertise in ensuring free and fair electoral practices can provide support for. Government officials must be held accountable for their actions—and inaction—with monitoring from an independent body. Finally, Haitians must take a hard and unwavering stance against corruption, and systems must be developed to bring real consequences for leaders who betray the trust of their nation. The government must be solidly aligned with its people against the gangs who prey on them and must remain accountable to those it serves. Only through establishing government legitimacy can people begin to join together under a national banner in the fight to protect their communities and work to re-develop the institutions critical to a modern state's success.

The most important element of this strategy to regain control over the nation is the empowerment of the Haitian people themselves. As it stands, the intense violence and ineffectiveness of government and community institutions have divided the population and left people with few places to turn to for help. Through grassroots community organizing, leadership by the people, and the support of the large Haitian diaspora worldwide, the population can be unified in the effort to rebuild their nation. Foreign aid and international support are essential given the stunted economic and governmental infrastructure of the Haitian state, which is a result of a long history of racism and isolation from global markets. In these initiatives, Haitian people must be in leadership positions and ultimately be responsible for all efforts. International support must be aimed at supporting homegrown leadership and empowering Haitians to take back control of their country.

The path to rebuilding the Haitian state and getting out from under the boot of oppressive gang violence will not be an easy one. Many institutions must be built up effectively from scratch and the establishment of government legitimacy must begin from square one. The alternative is the nation falling further into utter chaos, the scale of which Latin America rarely sees. The Haitian people are suffering, and the international community cannot stand idly by as they watch their country slip away. Through modernization and professionalization of the Haitian police force, development of government legitimacy, and empowerment of the nation's population to address the rampant violence plaguing the country, the Haitian people, with the support of foreign nations, can take back their country from organized crime.

# FROM CHANCAY TO SHANGHAI: RECONSIDERING PERU'S MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

Jack Marin

Chancay, on Peru's Pacific coast, was once a little-known fishing and farming city with only occasional press coverage, typically upon the discovery of pre-Columbian artifacts. Today, the town regularly makes international headlines with stories of the ongoing construction of one of Latin America's largest deepwater ports, owned and financed by Chinese capital. Chancay's transformation is emblematic of the larger Peruvian mining sector's shift toward China amidst the global and ongoing great-power competition, threatening to undermine the nation's ability to independently develop its mining industry. Peru must avoid overreliance on Chinese financing in harnessing its vast natural resources, instead taking advantage of its strategic position on the Pacific to deliver material benefits to Peruvians and strengthen its economy.

Sitting President Dina Boluarte has positioned the mining industry as central to her *Con Punche Perú* revitalization program, aiming to reverse the course of the nation's struggling economy. This mining-focus is for good reason—Peru is the world's second-largest copper producer and boasts major gold, silver, and zinc reserves. Mining accounts for nearly 64 percent of exports and a tenth of the nation's GDP. Boluarte has promised to reduce the red tape limiting new mining projects, increase foreign investment, and initiate 46 projects, all together with the potential to unlock \$53 billion in economic activity. Thirteen new laws since her inauguration have contributed to this year's record private-public partnership spending: \$1.8 billion, in stark contrast to 2022's \$98 million.

Following 2022's attempted coup and amid a still-ongoing recession, Boluarte has made substantial progress in improving Peru's business climate and attractiveness to foreign capital. Her polling numbers, however, indicate a deeper challenge to her recovery plan's longevity: a dismal 12 percent of Peruvians approve of the President's leadership. Much of this discontent stems from Boluarte's near-complete reversal of the policies of her predecessor former President Pedro Castillo—the perpetrator of last year's attempted coup and a proponent of mining-nationalization. Despite previously serving as Castillo's Vice President, Boluarte has reoriented Lima's natural resource policy to incentivize new privately-held mining projects and foreign investment in an attempt to address eco-

nomie woes.

Unfortunately for Boluarte, the Peruvian mining corridor stretches along the nation's indigenous-dominated southern regions—provinces that turned out for Castillo massively in the 2021 election in support of his pro-indigenous, pro-nationalization campaign. As Castillo's strongest voting bloc, the former president's ousting and subsequent imprisonment sparked widespread civil unrest in Peru's mining communities, propelled by the belief that development delivers inadequate benefits to locals and contributes to environmental degradation. During the protests, demonstrators in the nation's south blockaded dozens of highways essential to ongoing mining operations. This culminated in military deployment to end blockades, ensuring copper and other key mineral shipments were able to flow to international markets and mining operations received critical supplies.

Inheriting the leftovers of a political crisis on the scale of Castillo's self-coup is a challenge few leaders could overcome through economic policy alone. Boluarte's pursuit of increased foreign investment and decreased bureaucracy has achieved a modest boost in Peru's post-recession recovery. The plan has made up for some of the \$1.3 billion of accrued losses in infrastructural damages and forgone production, and has reattracted some of the \$20 billion lost in capital flight. It is clear, however, that while Boluarte's plan for Peru's economic development is leagues ahead of her predecessor's, it will only further exacerbate unrest in the nation's South and expose new risks from foreign control of infrastructure.

In an attempt to revitalize her nation's economy, Boluarte has embraced Chinese enterprises as a potential source of respite from fleeing capital—much to the ire of Washington. The transformation of Chancay is perhaps the most visible symptom of the administration's ongoing courting of international finance. The project is owned in its majority by Cosco Shipping, a Chinese state-owned multinational conglomerate, with remaining equity, 40 percent, held by Peruvian mining company Volcan. Set to begin operations next year, Chancay's mega-port will cut shipping times between Chile and China from 32 days to just over 20, with similarly stark reductions elsewhere. Just as China's access to Latin American markets is set to expand significantly, Chinese spending on overseas mining projects is

set to reach an all-time high.

Viewing this as coincidence is optimistic, especially considering Beijing's track record in the South American mining industry: where Chinese-financed extractive infrastructure is to be found, transportation infrastructure is to follow, granting Chinese state enterprises a dominant position in controlling resource-flows from extraction to port-of-exit. The U.S. views the unfolding Peruvian version of this story in poor terms: "The Peruvian government is not sufficiently focused on analyzing the benefits and threats to the country," an unnamed American official told the *Financial Times*.

Handing control of Peru's vast natural wealth to Chinese investors is an unwise decision, at best producing modest material benefits in the short term in exchange for the forfeiture of long-term prosperity. While mineral resources can be key to fueling an economy's expansion, they can also be spectacularly squandered; some of the world's poorest nations are paradoxically some of the richest in natural resources. This "resource curse," as academics have dubbed it, is typically a product of foreign financiers' exploitation of weak institutions in mineral (or oil) rich nations. In light of Peru's near institutional collapse less than a year ago, and even more recent mass protests escalating to the point of military intervention, Boluarte's haste to embrace internationally-financed development of the Peruvian mining industry deserves reconsideration.

Boluarte's championing of the mining industry is a victory for Peru's development; however, in the era of the Belt and Road, great-power competition, and the global race for critical minerals, a purely neoliberal approach to the sector's development is a mistake. Peruvians themselves must benefit from their nation's mineral wealth—not capital-rich investors an ocean away. Foreign investors should be embraced in their ability to provide technical know-how, access to broader markets, and the raw capital required for ambitious infrastructure projects. In turn, however, Boluarte and her successors must ensure Peruvians retain majority control over mining development. Embracing public-private partnerships in this way is key to reaping the benefits from Chinese demand for natural resources without the costs—the relinquishing of every Peruvians' natural inheritance and, by extension, the degradation of Peruvian sovereignty itself.

# LITHIUM MINING IN ARGENTINA: AN ETHICAL QUANDRY

Charlotte Cardel

As the world moves toward clean technology, rechargeable batteries, prevalent in innovations such as electric cars, are becoming the norm. Minerals like lithium—the lightest metal in the world—are essential to producing these batteries for the clean technology movement. While Chile has historically been the hot spot for this mining, Argentina reveals itself as a new major reserve. Jujuy Argentina, a province in the Andes Mountains, houses 21 percent of the world's lithium reserves. There are a few mines already in place and dozens more are being planned and considered, making Argentina the largest forthcoming lithium project. It has only been a few years since lithium was considered an obscure product, but recently countries such as Chile and Argentina reflect the global shift in the lithium market. Argentina is predicted to provide an outstanding amount of the mineral which will facilitate the worldwide production of lithium batteries. However, while lithium presents a promising opportunity for the green climate transformation, current policies in Argentina pursue lithium mining at the expense of indigenous communities.

Since Argentina is keen on foreign investment, the country has decided to keep government royalties on lithium mining at only three percent to ease some of its economic hardships. With this pro-market approach, there is an abundance of eager corporate investors and operators from across the globe desperately trying to get involved in its emerging opportunities. The major contributors to these investments are coming from China. Tsingshan Mining Development S.A. will invest \$120 million to install a hydrogen chloride and sodium hydroxide manufacturing plant in Jujuy to produce lithium carbonate. Olaroz-Cauchari lithium mine, owned by Exar, will be operational soon and will generate 40,000 tons of lithium per year. The automotive industry has also shown interest in the investments. For example, Toyota will invest \$150 million in

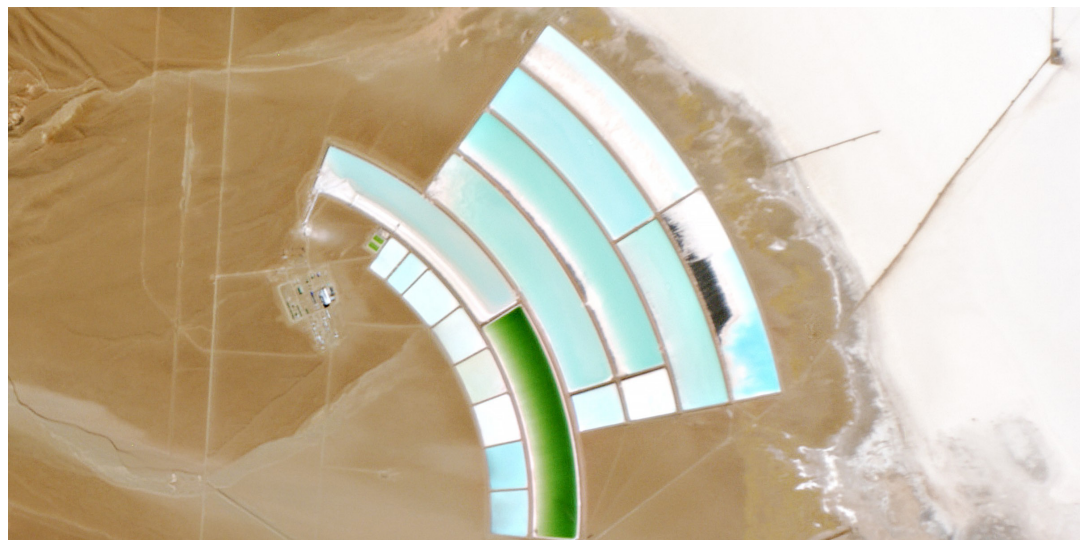
a large mining company that has control over Oro Cobre's lithium mining project located in Salar de Olaroz, Argentina. This site alone is estimated to have initial investments of up to \$272 million in 2023. Due to the surge of investors, Argentina is predicted to surpass its neighbor Chile as Latin America's leading lithium producer in the next seven years. With this promising future, it does not look like Argentina will halt mining operations anytime soon. Despite this promising fortune, local indigenous groups are suffering. Jujuy is home to hundreds of indigenous tribes, including the Kolla and Guaraní peoples. The mining in the region has presented many tribal justice issues, including the devastating impact on water quality. Los Patos River, which runs by a village neighboring Jujuy, has been the main source of drinking water for centuries, at least until Argentina's first lithium mine set up camp in 1997. Since then, Jujuy citizens have been protesting the dangers that emerge as a result of extractions. Overwhelming amounts of water are needed to get to the lithium; over 528,000 gallons of water are used to produce just one ton of the mineral. This process uses harmful chemicals, such as sulfuric acid, ultimately drying up soil and poisoning drinking water. The

river is slowly disappearing as segments are used in more and more mining operations. Since this production started in the area, the community has only been able to consume bottled water. In the race for foreign investment, provincial governments overseeing the lithium industry may choose to ignore the potential consequences of multiple new mines tapping into the same water sources simultaneously.

One way in which the government has overlooked devastating mining impacts was by enacting a recent change in the Jujuy constitution. On June 20th 2023, Gerardo Morales, Governor of the province and part of the conservative Radical Civic Union (UCR), enacted a constitutional reform that criminalizes the act of protesting. He did so without a vote from the indigenous people. This not only hampers the right to protest but also fuels the increased concentration of power in the governor's hands. This illegitimate reform goes against the indigenous peoples' rights and has restricted their right to speak out. The reform also makes changes to the right to privacy, creating an easy process for the government to evict indigenous land owners and disenfranchise them. This led to the greatest dispute brought forth by the amendment: it changes the right to private property in Article 36. The article states that private landowners now have "rapid and expedited mechanisms and routes that protect private property and reestablish any alteration in the possession, use, and enjoyment of the assets in favor of the title holder." However, almost all indigenous groups lack property titles, even though they are ancestral inhabitants. With the introduction of this law, they are vulnerable to eviction by landowners with government ties.

Because of this, there needs to be agreements made to aid the suffering local communities. One opportunity for reform involves enforcing federal legislation that requires the extraction projects to consult indigenous communities before they start their projects. This legislation needs to be enforced to ensure that indigenous communities are consulted. In addition to this, companies, regulated by the Argentine government, could offer manufacturing and construction jobs to the indigenous people while paying them a large salary to compensate for the land sacrifices the tribes made. Lastly, there is a method called "direct lithium extraction" that recycles a portion of the wastewater. This approach is not widely used but it is imperative that it be enforced by provincial officials.

This discussion raises many moral questions revolving around the ethical concerns and conflicts that arise when the pursuit of profit clashes with the rights and lives of indigenous communities. The issue in this situation is connected, on the whole, with indigenous rights. Disregarding the needs of indigenous communities has unfortunately been a pervasive reality across various nations. These groups often experience repression and violence at the hands of government authorities. Jujuy is no exception. However, it is impossible to overlook the promising fortune of lithium. In this boom, there is enough revenue to go around. There is plenty of lithium to benefit the government, private companies, and indigenous communities. With substantial mining revenues, the Argentine government can secure a prosperous future for all, ensuring an improved quality of life for everyone, including indigenous communities.





**ASIA**

# WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY?

## THE BJP'S MULTILATERAL ATTACK ON INDIAN JOURNALISM

Dishita Mansukhani

In February 2023, Indian tax authorities raided BBC offices in Mumbai and New Delhi following accusations of tax evasion. A spokesperson for the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the majority party in India's parliament, called the BBC "the most corrupt organization which has little regard for India's constitution while it works from here." The raid occurred weeks after BBC aired a documentary in the United Kingdom assessing Prime Minister (then Chief Minister of Gujarat) Narendra Modi's role in the 2002 anti-Muslim riots, which resulted in over a thousand casualties. The Indian government banned the airing of this documentary in India, using emergency laws to force Twitter and YouTube to remove clips. The Indian public knows tax raids are often used against media organizations critical of the government, but this is the first time the government has targeted a foreign media organization, particularly one with such a credible reputation among the Indian public. This event is part of a nationwide systematic suppression of dissent that seeks to cement the BJP's stronghold on public opinion.

Some Indian journalists argue that media freedom was never absolute. India is currently ranked 161st out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index, having fallen 20 places since the BJP gained power in 2014. Through censorship, legal challenges, and indirect ties with corporate owners, the Indian government has created a hostile environment for the Indian press, especially criticism of the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda. Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian constitution implies freedom of the press under constitutional protections for freedom of speech. Exceptions to freedom of speech, as stated in clause (2) of the same Article, include libel, defamation, slander, contempt of court, matters that offend decency or morality, and threats to national security—none of which are defined. This ambiguity allows the Indian government to place legal restrictions on speech in alignment with its agenda. For example, in 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed "The Emergency," during which most civil liberties—including the rights to protest, free press, and free expression—were suspended for 21 months. Even on the private side, corporate owners can exercise their influence on publications, adapting their news coverage to serve the political patronage they seek. Indian media companies depend on political advertisement as a revenue source, making media more susceptible to

government influence.

The Indian press has never been fully independent from government influence, but the Modi government has exacerbated the restrictions. The Modi government has unleashed an unprecedented crackdown on freedom of expression, especially on social media. In 2020, the Indian government asked Twitter to remove nearly 10,000 tweets, the majority of which expressed dissent toward BJP policies. The Information Technology Rules, passed in February 2021, allows the government to remove online content without judicial review. The Rules also pose a threat to encryption, which is essential in protecting the safety and anonymity of journalists and their sources. Moreover, BJP authorities have been implicated in the use of Pegasus, an Israeli-operated spyware, to target journalists critical of the government. Over 40 Indian journalists appeared on a leaked list of potential targets for surveillance.

The BJP has also been influencing the journalistic integrity of the Indian press more covertly. In August 2022, New Delhi Television (NDTV) was acquired by billionaire Gautam Adani, chairman of India's largest port operator and coal trader, the Adani Group. From its formation in 1988 to its acquisition in 2022, NDTV was a pioneer among the independent Indian press, known as one of the most reputable news sources in India. Adani is closely associated with PM Modi, and critics argue that much of his wealth has been secured as a result. Adani claimed that NDTV would remain unbiased, but the public is unconvinced. In 2014, Network 18, NDTV's biggest competitor, was acquired by telecommunications billionaire Mukesh Ambani, who also maintains a close relationship with PM Modi. As of 2023, Ambani owns over 70 media outlets throughout the country, reaching a combined weekly audience of 800 million viewers. The owners' ties to Modi have led journalists within these organizations to self-censor by intentionally omitting headlines that vilify the BJP. Thus, even without the Indian government's explicit censorship, the media consumed by the public remains skewed in favor of the BJP.

Journalists have faced increased threats, hate speech, physical violence, and online harassment for criticizing the BJP or Hindu nationalism. Since 2017, government officials in the BJP-led state of Uttar Pradesh have filed criminal cases against 66 journalists. Another 48 journalists had been physically attacked within that time frame. In 2021, four journalists were killed

across the country, making India the third-deadliest country for journalists in the world. Journalists who belong to minority groups, especially Muslim journalists, have been disproportionately targeted, both by the BJP and its supporters. In June 2023, when The Wall Street Journal correspondent for the White House, Sabrina Siddiqui, asked PM Modi about allegations of religious discrimination, internet users attacked Siddiqui over her Muslim identity. Amit Malviya, head of the BJP's information department, described her question as "motivated." The online vitriol had reached a point that the White House released an official statement condemning the hate as "antithetical to the principles of democracy."

The censorship, oligopolization, and harassment of the Indian media are part of the BJP's calculated attempts to limit civil society. The right to freedom of expression in India is eroding, particularly for religious and ethnic minorities who have, historically, been failed by the BJP's Hindu nationalist policies. Mukul Kesavan, a New Delhi-based historian, argues that increasing censorship is "part of a much larger battering down on basic, fundamental, democratic rights—the right to organize, the right to protest, the right to march, the right to speak and the right to publish." With only months until the next national elections, the BJP is hard at work molding India's electorate into a homogenous group of right-wing Hindu nationalists. In fact, much of the Indian public has been unconcerned about the BJP's attacks on press freedom. For the past nine years, PM Modi has fostered a populist cult of personality that has allowed him to withstand controversies and policy failures with little effect on public opinion. The suppression of dissent is used as a means to maintain this delicate cult of personality. India is commonly known as the world's largest democracy. But the democratic principles that the Prime Minister claims to hold so dearly are under attack by none other than the Prime Minister himself. The BJP's attempts to erase the voices of religious and ethnic minorities, the free press, and dissenters will not go unnoticed, both within India and beyond.



# DEMOCRACY IN DISTRESS

## THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Alex Jansen

Democracy is a difficult venture. Like walking on a tightrope, sustaining democracy is a never-ending balancing act that even the world's oldest republics struggle to perform. In 1975, Papua New Guinea (PNG) became one of the first Oceanic countries to try its hand at mounting the wire. Newly released from the grip of Australian colonialism, PNG quickly adopted a constitution that outlined a parliamentary democracy and enshrined fundamental human rights like universal suffrage, justice, and freedom of expression. In almost 50 years of self-governance, PNG has never experienced the rule of an authoritarian regime. However, an emerging pattern of corruption, political violence, and repression suggests that day could be fast approaching. If PNG continues on its current course, democracy may soon give way to despotism.

While many challenges plaguing PNG are new, some are older than others. Corruption gained a systemic quality only shortly after the country achieved independence. In 1995, parliament passed the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local Level Governments, the first in a series of legislation designed to decentralize the nature of government authority. Although decentralization was always a component of governance in PNG, these reforms provided provincial, district, and local-level governments with an unprecedented amount of political and fiscal autonomy. At the time, lawmakers believed that this freedom would allow subnational governments to better respond to the unique needs of their constituents and boost civic participation. As an extensively rural society with thousands of distinct tribes, more than 800 language groupings, and a limited amount of infrastructure, this rationale largely made sense. However, inadequate protections against fiscal mismanagement and corruption soon presented a major threat to the quality of local governance. Financial resources intended to promote public goods became excessively politicized or disappeared altogether. By 2006, the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PPAC) estimated that as much as 25 percent of PNG's

national GDP was being siphoned off or misappropriated due to corruption. Evolving fears over the impact of corruption generated several national efforts to contain its spread, including the National Anti-Corruption Agency. However, dwindling conviction rates and inadequate government support left most of these initiatives dead in the water. Taskforce "Sweep," the most extensive anti-corruption campaign, lost funding after only three years in operation when the former Prime Minister (PM), Peter O'Neill, became the target of an investigation. O'Neill himself was responsible for creating the task force in 2011.

Despite its intentions, decentralization traded accountability for efficiency and lost both in the process. Decades of insufficient stopgaps against corruption have cultivated what the PPAC describes as a "culture of impunity," which has only worsened over time. Today, authoritarian practices are intrinsic to PNG's electoral process. Clientelism, vote-buying, and other forms of political patronage are endemic issues that persistently undermine the integrity of PNG's democracy. A 2021 survey conducted by Transparency International indicates that as many as 56 percent of PNG's voters were offered a bribe for their vote between 2016 and 2021. Poor economic conditions have expedited the rise of vote-buying as a means of political contention. With nearly 40 percent of PNG's population falling below the poverty line, many voters reasonably cast their ballots for candidates who can provide the most to them and their community. PNG's electoral commissioner, Simon Sinai, admits that vote buying and other forms of political patronage are now expected components of local and national elections.

The detriment of these practices has escalated in recent years. According to Dr. Terence Wood, a research fellow at the Crawford School for Public Policy, the patron-client dynamic of voting compels government officials to prioritize patronage over planning, leaving national issues with a severe lack

of attention. This has led to several unresolved governance problems, including a steep decline in electoral security. Understaffed and under-prepared local governments are growing more vulnerable to acts of voter suppression and political violence. In 2017, there were an estimated 200 deaths attributed to various forms of political violence in the weeks leading to, during, and after the national elections. Although this number dropped to 50 deaths during the 2022 campaign season, the U.N. estimates that approximately 15,000 people were internally displaced throughout the conflicts. Fueled by tribal frictions, gender biases, and political rivalries, election-related violence is a potent democratic disruptor that severely restricts universal participation. Already compromised by rampant financial patronage, physical coercion adds another layer of suspicion to the validity of electoral outcomes. But not all people are equally impacted.

Marginalized groups are suffering the brunt of the democratic decline in PNG. Women, in particular, are finding it increasingly difficult to vote without influence and run for public office. A comparison of post-polling survey data from the Pacific Affairs Department at the Australian National University reveals the Highlands-PNG's most populated region-observed a 39 percent increase in the number of women who reported experiencing voter intimidation from 2012 to 2017. Responses from the same region indicate the uptick in intimidation caused nearly twice as many women not to vote in 2017 as compared to 2012. Beyond further compromising electoral integrity, female voter suppression is impacting the prospects of female participation in government. Already, PNG's parliament has one of the lowest female participation rates of any national legislature, with only nine female MPs serving since independence. Discussions with former candidates and gender equality advocates in PNG attribute the low participation to a deterioration in electoral conditions for women. Money politics, violence, and inefficient election administration were among the most commonly identified inhibitors to a successful candidacy.

A growing contingent of voices are expressing their dissatisfaction and raising concerns about the legitimacy of PNG's politicians. Following the 2022 national elections, outcomes for 74 of parliament's 118 seats were disputed in national court with widespread allegations of corruption, bribery, and undue influence. But despite the growing discontent, efforts to bring accountability to politics in PNG face considerable pushback. This February, Prime Minister James Marape proposed the National Media Development Policy amidst mounting criticism of his party and the government. This legislation aims to counter what Marape describes as an influx of fake and misleading news in the country's mainstream media circuit. The legislation, if passed, would require journalists and news organizations to receive government accreditation and create a regulatory body to enforce professional and ethical standards in journalism. While this may not seem inherently destructive, there are suspicions that this legislation will promote discriminatory practices against dissenting voices in the media. Similar restrictions were passed after Fiji's military coup in 2006, making it impossible for local news outlets to publish articles critical of the government.

PNG's democracy faces tremendous challenges firmly ingrained in the country's history and culture. Although there is no clear-cut solution to the country's issues, adopting a holistic and transparent approach is paramount to restoring faith in its democracy. By working with regional allies, international organizations, and local advocacy groups, lawmakers can make meaningful strides toward developing democratic resilience. Leveraging existing partnerships with the U.S. and U.N. offers a promising avenue for leaders in PNG to craft new legislation, secure financial assistance, and promote civic engagement. But with the national elections slated for 2027, it is only a matter of time before the nation's institutions are tested again. If PNG does not embark on the road to recovery soon, its democracy will likely falter for years to come.



# A HEART THAT ONLY BEATS FOR ITSELF

## A DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE CCP AND ITS YOUTH IS CREATING A DEMOGRAPHIC DISASTER

Rafe Silver



Though the Chinese government will deny it, the nation is plagued by a massive youth unemployment problem; in 2022, nearly twenty percent of 16 to 24-year-olds were unemployed, and this trend has shown no signs of stopping. The most recent estimate in August 2023 revealed that youth unemployment had increased to 21.3 percent, up 1.3 percent from the previous year. In September, the Chinese government stopped publishing its monthly report altogether, ostensibly citing a need to reassess data collection procedures.

This is no trivial matter. 360 million Chinese citizens are between the ages of 16 and 35 - approximately equivalent to the entire population of the U.S. - and a growth in unemployment of this scale could potentially cripple an entire generation's economic and social prospects. This growth in unemployment is intermixed with a slowing economy and record-high university attendance, meaning that highly qualified students now compete for even fewer high-skilled jobs. A graduated Chinese medical student struggling to find work sums up the situation best: "Our generation has no expectations." Such pessimism is not isolated to one city, district, or walk of life. It has pervaded

from the bustling cities of Shenzhen and Shanghai, from university graduates hoping to secure a job in the dynamic tech industries, to the rural communities of Jiangxi sending ambitious rural students to university with the hope of securing a more prosperous future.

The government's response has been lackluster. They have been downplaying the importance of unemployment, instead opting to call it "slow employment," while scolding those brave enough to speak out about it. China may prefer to project images of stability, though their citizens will not remain complicit while their economic future erodes. The Chinese government must continue to deliver on its robust economic promises, in order for citizens to remain complicit in autocratic rule. If nothing else, the Chinese government has an obligation to its citizens and its youth. Only through deliberate action can China remedy the economic woes of its young population.

Not long ago, the Chinese government pushed young Chinese students toward higher education. The benefits were clear: an undergraduate degree at an accredited institution was a sure path to material well-being and the ability to support one's parents. This thinking made

sense; since 1978, annual GDP growth had averaged 9 percent each year -triple the average annual growth rate for a developed economy-, and nearly 800 million Chinese lifted themselves out of poverty. Both the tech and real estate industries were booming, and such a demographic miracle had scarcely occurred prior. What could end this meteoric rise? While economic growth began to slow before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zero-COVID Policy enacted to combat the virus's spread effectively ended the country's record-long boom. Consumer confidence was crippled, savings increased while spending waned, demand for credit shrank, and government approval of major tech companies faltered. Real estate, the major driver of the Chinese economy over the last 20 years and responsible for over 30 percent of GDP, has become a desolate industry.

By the time President Xi Jinping and his regime brought back the curtain on a closed-off China in early 2023, the damage was already done. Youth unemployment was at record-high levels, and rather than offer a solution, Xi only scolded the youth. In response, a social movement known as "Tang Ping", Mandarin for "lying flat", took over the minds of young Chinese. While no formal definition exists, it is best described as a rejection of the societal expectations and pressures of the current Chinese government. It grew out of a disillusionment with contemporary China, the one defined by skyrocketing real estate prices, a non-existent job market, and pressure to raise a family. Chinese youth describe it as a way to look inward and escape the architect of their misery, Xi and his selfish national ambition. This escapism though is not entirely motivated by their own volition, but often in response to government ineptitude when dealing with its youth. This movement is a protest against Xi's new manufacturing demands and emphasis on hard sciences, an initiative that could be a stepping stone for a war-ready economy, something in direct opposition to the preferences of Chinese youth. They tend to be more relaxed, preferring video game development to the production line. This movement is a rebellion against the will of the nation that trumps the individual and a rejection of the hardship that Xi has championed in his new directives. In 2021, a lab technician known only as Wang summarized his feelings: "You're beaten up by society and just want a more relaxed life... 'lying flat' is not waiting

to die. I still work, but just don't overstretch". In a position as helpless as his, perhaps it is the only logical course of action.

Unsurprisingly, the movement was met with a swift crackdown, censorship, and a nationwide condemnation of Tang Ping. Online forums that were a hotbed of Tang Ping rhetoric were taken down, while any merchandise that glorified the movement was barred from sale. State news has been quoted calling Tang Ping "shameful", just as many other newspaper publications have as well. Chinese billionaires, who to the CCP are economic role models, have also been quoted offering their disapproval.

Rather than soothing the wounded youth and recognizing their inherent importance to the nation, Xi tells them to "embrace struggle," "abandon arrogance and pampering," and "eat bitterness." Rather than bolstering the industries that attract young college graduates, Xi has shaved off \$1 trillion worth of market value in private industries such as tech, education, and real estate due largely to his bureaucratic disputes. The future for China's youth grows ever dimmer.

Xi has lived up to his name as "the chairman of everything" and his obsession with control has finally severed relations with what made China's economy so dynamic: its commitment to advancement, prosperity, and the growth of the individual that would translate to the nation. It is this occupation with "common prosperity," a code word for national ascendance at the expense of the individual, that has allowed for one of the greatest demographic issues in China to go decidedly unchecked.

The newest information provides more questions than answers. 2023 Real GDP has increased faster than Nominal GDP, indicating a deflationary spell, the worst since 2009. If this were to continue much into the future, unemployment is likely to increase. Perhaps more telling is the International Monetary Fund's prediction for China's GDP growth between 2023-2028. In the space of six months, between April and October, their prediction was decreased by \$15 trillion.

Xi once said, "[The party's] history is a history in which the party and the people are linked by shared destiny, heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul." For the Chinese youth, it seems evident that destiny does not include them, severed from the heart that only bleeds for itself.

# TANGLED WEBS

## FOREIGN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS ON KAZAKHSTAN'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Anna Heiss

If you opened Facebook or any social media app, it would not be long before you scrolled past a post with a political or social message. Some of these statements don't come from who you would think—individuals, media outlets, and even governments have taken to social media to sow division by spreading inflammatory content within certain online communities, often doing so from fake accounts. They are engaged in information warfare, which the University of Washington defines as “a struggle to control or deny the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information in all its forms, ranging from raw data to complex concepts and ideas.” Information warfare is used to gain an advantage over one's adversaries, preventing the free distribution of factual content and elevating narratives more favorable to their own interests.

Recently, Kazakhstan has become a target for disinformation and foreign influence operations. The Central Asian country maintains relationships with Russia and the United States, and both countries are taking steps to tip the geopolitical scales in their favor. For instance, the U.S. has promoted anti-Russia rhetoric in the region, while Russia has circulated fake news stories about NATO's involvement in Kazakhstan and Ukraine. These narratives often go viral, circulating on platforms like Telegram and Facebook and reaching a large proportion of the population. A Cambridge study found that 96 percent of internet users in Kazakhstan use social media and that a majority of Kazakhs use social media to read the news and access or engage with political content. The number of social media users in Kazakhstan is quite high compared to other countries in the region—the total share of social media users drops to 41.1 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 15.3 percent in

Uzbekistan, 10.9 percent in Tajikistan, and 2.8 percent in Turkmenistan.

Kazakhstan is in a tricky situation: it has a historical bilateral relationship with Russia, but maintains close economic and security ties with the United States. Western sanctions against Russia make the country's relationship with Kazakhstan particularly important. Kazakh leadership assured the West that they would adhere to the sanctions, but their commitments for deeper cooperation with Russia and recent spike in economic growth suggest that they are using parallel imports—legally produced goods being sold without the consent of the intellectual property owner—to circumvent the sanctions. The Russian government wants to ensure that its partners, including Kazakhstan, maintain a certain level of loyalty, and information warfare is one method used to reinforce messages that are favorable towards the Kremlin. Russia believes that there is a conflict between their ideological principles and those of the rest of the world, dubbed the “information confrontation.” Russia infamously uses information warfare and bots to influence public opinion. Among the most well-known of these instances was its Internet Research Agency's (IRA) disinformation and voter suppression operations during the 2016 and 2020 U.S. election cycles. Russian influence operations have been confirmed in the U.S. and throughout Europe, primarily in post-Soviet states. The country sees cyber warfare as a means of reinforcing a dichotomy between itself and the West, and a crucial aspect of Russia's agenda is to have sway over public opinion in post-Soviet states like Kazakhstan.

Reports of influence operations by U.S. adversaries

surface fairly often, but the West escaped this scrutiny until late 2022. Various social media platforms, including Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), removed pro-U.S. content because it was posted by accounts posing as news outlets or fake people. These accounts were tied to firms in the United States and Great Britain. Their posts varied from idealizing life in the United States and its operations abroad, to disparaging Russia and Iran. The message and language of content were modified for each region—posts targeting Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan were in Russian, with some applauding U.S. humanitarian missions and U.S.-Central Asia economic relations, and others blaming food shortages on Russia's war in Ukraine. The United States seeks to bolster its relationship with Central Asian countries and took a page from Russia's playbook to achieve that.

Former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, a controversial authoritarian leader who resigned following violent economic and social protests, stifled political commentary and analysis on the internet. In 2014, the dissemination of “deliberately false information” was criminalized, but this policy was often used to remove content that criticized the government. Recently elected President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is more liberal and has shifted to allow what has been described as “controlled criticism.” He has not opened the floodgates to unfettered commentary, but advocates for “different opinions—a unified nation.” Although the easing of censorship is a step in the right direction, Kazakhstan lacks policies that promote the spread of factual information and a safe digital space. Tokayev's move to loosen political speech restrictions provides an opportunity for malicious actors to spread false, and potentially inflammatory, content, making it imperative that the government imposes measures to facilitate the discernment between factual and orchestrated posts. The Kazakh government must fund public digital safety programs and cooperate with social media companies operating in Kazakhstan to establish robust disinformation policies to shield against foreign influence operations,

mitigating the efforts to make the country a proxy for information warfare.

With the ubiquity of social media, information warfare is here to stay. However, actions can be taken to mitigate the effects of disinformation. Kazakhstan's government needs to develop a clear strategy that is specific to combating influence operations in the digital age. A strong, mutual partnership with social media companies is absolutely essential for the effective implementation of a counter-influence cybersecurity policy. Their participation in developing and enforcing counter-influence operations would give the government valuable insight regarding the nature of the content being spread and the best strategies to combat disinformation. Allowing these companies to adopt an advisory role while developing this policy could also incentivize the cooperation of those that may be reluctant to work with the government. Additionally, the government could subsidize the hiring of fact-checkers and disinformation researchers for social media companies. Without the compliance of social media companies, it will be impossible for the government to understand the scope and nature of potential threats on their platforms.

Secondly, Kazakhstan should finance digital safety initiatives for the public. In partnership with the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public, Finland has implemented misinformation, disinformation, and media literacy programs in schools. As early as preschool, children are taught good online practices and how to spot posts from fake accounts. Kazakhstan could carry out a similar program, and could even expand to offer workshops for professionals.

Foreign efforts to disrupt public perceptions of global affairs in Kazakhstan are a threat to regional stability, the Kazakh public's access to factual information, and a safe digital space. Regardless of the message or ideology of what they post, governments have no right to spread propaganda and disinformation to sway public opinion, especially in another country.

# COULD INDIA FIND AN ASTRAL PARTNER IN AMERICA?

Rick Walker

Throughout the past decade, a cascade of seemingly unrelated events has brought the international space community to where it is today. In 2011, the United States passed the Wolf Amendment, effectively barring China from joining the International Space Station (ISS). On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, and on February 25, 2022, the United States passed sweeping economic sanctions against the nation for its role as the aggressor in the conflict. On July 26, 2022, Russia announced it would be withdrawing from the ISS, citing the United States' sanctions as well as its desire to create the "Russian Orbital Service Station." Finally, on August 23rd, the Indian-made Chandrayaan-3 landed on the Moon. This observable instance of the butterfly effect finds the world in its current state: the United States existing astronomically at odds with the Russian space agency, Roscosmos, and the China National Space Administration (CNSA) while the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) searches for its place in the midst of tensions.

Independent of their astral ties, the United States and India find themselves in an amicable international relationship. Beginning in 2005 with the striking of a civil-nuclear cooperation agreement, and now unified under a mutual disdain for China and economic opportunity that collaboration affords, the two countries find themselves increasingly intertwined. However, despite this improved relationship, India and the United States also find themselves on a precarious footing with their contemporaries, particularly Russia. While the United States and India can both agree on their stances towards China, their opinion towards the Eurasian bear is where disagreements arise. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the United States levied robust sanctions while halting all oil purchases from the nation. On the other hand, India, already with an established arms trade relationship, offset these blows by increasing oil imports elevenfold and catapulting Russia to the top spot in its lineup of crude oil suppliers, up from tenth a year earlier. With China and Russia signaling their clear intent to venture into the next decade of lunar exploration together with the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS)—a planned competitor to the ISS led by Roscosmos and CNSA and joined by Azerbaijan, Belarus, Pakistan, South Africa, the UAE, and Venezuela—it's imperative the United States solidifies its partnership with India.

Contrary to what many would assume, cooperation between NASA and ISRO wouldn't be a completely one-sided

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**Whether it be industrial, commercial, militaristic, or scientific, one thing is for certain: India needs the United States, and the United States needs India.**

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endeavor burdening the United States. As the fourth nation to land on the Moon—the third if you exclude the defunct Soviet Union—India is far from a lame duck. The marked success of their Chandrayaan-3 lander this past August is especially apparent when compared to the catastrophic loss of Russia's Luna 25 lander days prior. Not only was Chandrayaan-3's successful landing significant but so too was the specific spot in which it came to rest. At the 70°S mark, it sits at a higher latitude than any mission previous, which, more than being a unique bragging point, carries considerable scientific implications. Due to the perilously cold temperatures closer to the Moon's north pole, scientists predict large stores of frozen ice lie beneath the lunar regolith. These bountiful stores of frozen water can be used for coolant, rocket fuel, scientific inquiry, and—importantly for future habitation—drinking. If the United States and India hope to provide a counterweight to China and Russia's ILRS, successful scientific preparation is imperative. But what explicitly would this partnership provide?

The first result is a bolstering of the U.S.-led Artemis Accords. During his visit to the White House in June, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed on to the three-year-old accords, which detail future procedures for planetary exploration and research. The core tenets of the accords are a dedication to peaceful purposes, release of scientific data, preservation of space heritage, and the division of space resources. While not explicitly, India's joining of the accords is a bit of a quid pro quo scenario. India gets a seat at the table of international interstellar discussions, as well as a potential seat on Gateway, the upcoming NASA-led international lunar orbital station for Artemis-participating astronauts. The United States gets a vote of confidence from a much-needed eastern power, given China's continuous refusal to sign, which could potentially coerce other South Asian countries to join. Additionally, NASA could benefit from the considerable resources India

contributes to its space program—were they to allow ISRO onto the gateway project. According to the official NASA Gateway project site, the Gateway Program is in active discussions with a fourth party—beyond the Canadian Space Agency, the European Space Agency, and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency—to provide Gateway's Crew and Science Airlock. This fourth party could quite possibly be India.

Beyond India's bolstering of the Accords and NASA's Gateway Project, a fruitful India-U.S. collaboration could lead to the creation of a long-anticipated lunar base. Chandrayaan-3's landing site is a clear indication that ISRO is already fantasizing about such opportunities, and with a bolstering of funding, this fantasy could become a reality. As previously mentioned, this base could become the 'regional' contender to Russia and China's International Lunar Research Station. Currently, no one lays any claim to the surface of the Moon, but given unchecked dominion over the surface, China and Russia could easily claim large swaths of land quickly without resistance. By creating a competing base, ISRO and NASA not only further their personal commercial and scientific interests but also instill a balance of power on the orbital body.

The future of lunar colonization is tumultuous, to say the least, and can be viewed through a multitude of lenses. Whether it be industrial, commercial, militaristic, or scientific, one thing is for certain: India needs the United States, and the United States needs India. The nature of the United States, and India's relationship has gone by a variety of names throughout the decades: "Estranged Democracies" in 1994, "Engaged Democracies" in 2000 and "natural allies" later that same year, "defining partnership of the 21st century" in 2010, and finally "indispensable partnership" in 2016. As we approach 2024, it might be time that this relationship be referred to as "astral partners"?



# IS CHINA LOSING THE A.I. RACE?

Ben Antonow

Over the last 50 years, the U.S. and China have fought tooth and nail for dominance over important domains on the world stage. In the 70s, ideological influence was paramount. In the 2000s, the two nations were more focused on economic supremacy, battling for trade domination and superior technological advances. However, the most recent and relevant battlefield taking the world by storm is generative artificial intelligence (A.I.). Its implications are beyond comprehension, and the impact it will have on the world is expected to rival that of the wheel. Yet for a number of reasons, China has managed to fall behind in the implementation of this critical technology.

China is by no means any less capable than the U.S. of developing this technology at a higher rate, but the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still chooses to put harsh regulations on public access to A.I. technology. In July, China became one of the first countries in the world to release rules governing the use of generative A.I. These regulations have become a major obstacle for the nation's A.I. industry. They include A.I.-specific intellectual property laws, restrictions on synthetic image and video generation, and most importantly, strict compliance with the CCP's censorship standards. But why is China allowing itself to fall behind?

The answer lies primarily in the differing cultural philosophies between China and the U.S. in regards to innovation. Generally speaking, the US has embraced the "move fast and break things" mantra of Silicon Valley,

where disrupting existing technology is permissible, and almost encouraged, to make room for innovation. The caveat of this is what's driving China's philosophy—the future implications and uses of A.I. are both infinite and incomprehensible, and without serious regulation, the consequences could be dire. So, the CCP has stuck with the general policy of halting the rollout of the technology to ensure that it can, and will, be regulated.

In addition to concerns surrounding the slippery slope of A.I. development, a primary factor determining the CCP's actions is the government's censorship policy. For decades, China has limited what information is available to its citizens, most famously through the "Great Firewall of China," a filter that blocks any websites or internet content that could challenge the influence of the Party. The party feels that their censorship policies and monitoring tactics are imperative to maintaining both social stability and national security, and they apply the same justification for regulating the use of A.I. Because chatbots like ChatGPT are not made to adhere to Chinese censorship standards, they could allow people to obtain otherwise restricted information. So, until China is able to release a censored alternative to the American products, A.I. chatbots will likely remain unavailable to the broader public.

Another factor driving the CCP's A.I. policy is the potential impact on a sagging white-collar job market. An increasing number of recent college graduates are having trouble

finding a job after graduation due to a worker surplus, and instead are returning to their rural hometowns at unprecedented rates. Many of those who choose to stay in cities are forced to join the growing service economy, working as delivery or rideshare drivers, and the CCP is likely concerned with growing career dissatisfaction among young people after working hard for a college degree. People speculate that a factor in the CCP's decision to limit access to generative A.I. is the concern that it may further disrupt an already stagnant job market, especially in sectors like finance, engineering, or human resources. Since the widespread introduction of A.I. has the potential to at least partially automate many white-collar jobs, China may be restricting access to A.I. simply out of fear of the negative impact on the job market.

The most obvious implication of this disparity in progress between the U.S. and China is the way it may impact the strength of the two economies. In the U.S., A.I. is increasing the day-to-day efficiency of white collar workers, whether it be programmers, customer service agents, or marketing professionals. A.I. tools have the potential to be incorporated into the jobs of an estimated 75 percent of 4-year college degree holders because of its ability to reduce human error and busywork. Since China has had an extremely limited rollout of AI, very few technology professionals have taught themselves how to make the technology useful, compared to U.S. workers who have spent months figuring out how to optimize the impact of the tech to improve the efficiency of their jobs. A study from Capital Economics generated the A.I. Economic Impact Index, a composite rating out of 100 garnered from 40 sub-indicators intended to quantify a nation's projected benefit from A.I. over the coming decades. The US led the world with a score of 70, whereas China was

far behind, weighing in at 40. This heuristic weighs the impact of the diffusion of the technology heavily, highlighting the substantial economic impact of a "trained" workforce.

All this being said, China still does have a leg up on the U.S. in terms of research. In 2022, Chinese institutions applied for 29,853 patents related to AI, compared to the U.S.'s 16,805. Even if their technology isn't at a stage where it's ready to be released, this implies that China's research may be extensive enough to warrant more patents. Additionally, according to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, China has significant leads over the U.S. in both total publications and "quality" research (publications in the top 10 percent most cited) in a majority of subfields of AI development.

Although it's worth noting that not all patents will lead to an invention and not all research will be groundbreaking, the impact of this lead will probably matter more in the long term than the current diffusion advantage held by the United States. China could start lifting their firewall restrictions any time now, and if their technology is more powerful than what the U.S. has to offer, the Chinese workforce could catch up reasonably quickly. In order for China to reach the point where A.I. can have a comparable positive impact on its economy, the CCP must become comfortable with every information worker using it in a form that is both useful and safe by party standards.

The specific ways that A.I. advancements will shift the power dynamic between the U.S. and China are to be determined, but one must not underestimate the scale at which the technology may make or break a country's global influence. Currently, China is making that mistake. Just like the nation has regulated what information can be gathered from the internet, they must also harness the power of A.I.

# VIETNAM'S RARE-EARTH MINERALS

## NAVIGATING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN GLOBAL MINERAL PRODUCTION

Joey Do

According to the U.S Geological Survey, Vietnam currently holds the second-highest global reserves of rare earth minerals. These minerals are crucial components for semiconductor and microchip manufacturing with applications ranging from digital clocks to advanced weaponry, including ICBMs. Microchips are also increasingly relevant to recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), underlining the necessity of securing a stable supply of rare earth minerals. As the world races to accumulate these minerals, Vietnam is presented with a distinctive opportunity for both export and manufacturing.

Historically, the Vietnamese government under the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has largely refrained from tapping into rare earth minerals. Despite Vietnam's first discovery of this valuable resource in the northwestern provinces in the 1960-70s, the government placed a restriction on mineral extraction due to the lack of smelting and processing technologies. The CPV's rationale was that simply extracting these minerals for bulk exports would result in below-market prices, whereas higher values could be achieved by selling processed/manufactured minerals.

Furthermore, the CPV is also wary of the "resource curse," an ideological theory that refers to the adverse effects experienced by countries who possess abundant natural resources yet fall victim to exploitation by more developed nations. Without a developed manufacturing sector and strong regulations, Vietnam and many others in the global South are prone to economic dependency and rent-seeking activities from short-term, large-scale resource exporting to more developed countries. However, as the world's demand for these minerals increases, Vietnam needs to begin developing its smelting and processing technologies. This approach would enable Vietnam to maximize the advantages of its natural resources.

Since the 1990s, Vietnam has experienced robust economic growth with an impressive annual GDP increase of six-eight percent, about double the global average rate. This growth has been primarily driven by the export of agricultural products, a booming real estate sector, and the development of the light manufacturing industry, including garments, footwear, and household goods. However, that growth has been feasible due to several key factors, such as a predominantly young and low-skilled labor force, cheap electricity, and minimal operational expenses. In the coming decades, this growth rate will become unsustainable; the Vietnamese population is aging, and the nation will have an entirely different labor demographic. Without further economic diversification and a domestic high-tech industry, Vietnam will grow old before it fully develops. Consequently, the development of mineral extraction technologies serves as a crucial initial step towards diversifying the country's economic portfolio.

Vietnam also benefits from ideal conditions to expand its mineral processing industry. As recently as September 2023, the



*Terraced Fields in Yen Bai, Vietnam*

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Vietnam and the U.S piqued the interest of American technology and semiconductor companies. According to a White House brief, technology giants Intel, NVIDIA, and AMD have expressed their commitment to investing in Vietnam's rare earth minerals. Such investments could make it more financially feasible for Vietnam to focus on the research and development (R&D) of mineral processing for semiconductors. Additionally, Vietnam's proximity to other key semiconductor manufacturers in the region such as Taiwan (chip-making) as well as Singapore and Malaysia (chip-testing) make it an ideal exporter of rare-earth minerals. This greatly reduced shipping costs and undercut time constraints in manufacturing.

Vietnam's rare earth minerals competitors—including China, Brazil, and Russia—are also facing significant challenges. Russia's controversial actions in Ukraine have led to international repercussions, making trade with Russia a politically costly action. Brazil, located in South America, is geographically distant from the Indo-Pacific's R&D hubs, thus increasing shipping and logistics costs. Furthermore, China, which possesses the largest reserves of rare earth minerals, maintains a strained relationship with the United States. As a result, Vietnam can emerge as an attractive alternative for nations seeking to secure a stable supply chain in this critical resource.

Despite these advantages, Vietnam needs to be cautious with its mineral extraction plan. In many countries rich in resources in the Global South—such as Chile and the Congo—mineral extractions have resulted in environmental degradation and negative impacts on local communities. In Chile, mining for lithium—a crucial component in electric vehicles—has used up 65 percent of the region's water. Mineral extraction has caused great water depletion in the Atacama desert and drastically impacted the lives of local farmers, whose income relies on growing quinoa and herding llamas in the terrain. In Congo, mining

for Cobalt, another crucial component in electric vehicles, has raised staggering human rights concerns over the usage of child labor in artisanal mines. Learning from these country's experiences, the Vietnamese government needs to be cautious in calculating environmental and social costs when drafting the mineral extraction policy.

In Vietnam's case, one of the main obstacles of the proposed extraction plan is resistance from ethnic minorities whose economic livelihoods and land ownership would be affected. The largest reserves of rare earth minerals are in Vietnam's northwest and highland regions, which are in close proximity to the Tày, Mường, and Ê-đê people. A rapid increase in the extraction of minerals would require many of these people to rescind their land ownership and/or relocate to nearby localities within these provinces. To address the ethnic groups' economic concerns, the local government could assure them that extraction activities will bring new and sustainable job opportunities to improve the local economy. In addition, the government could also ensure adequate land compensation and relocation subsidies to address ethnic minorities' concerns over land. According to the framework of the "Luật đất đai 2013 số 43/QH13" (Land compensation law 2013), citizens residing in areas with development projects can receive monetary compensation of equivalent market value. These two options could help mitigate the concerns and livelihood losses of ethnic communities in regards to extraction of minerals.

Despite these difficulties, Vietnam has a unique window of opportunity to increase its role in the world's semiconductor race. Taking advantage of its growing population, international partnerships, and strategic location, Vietnam can not only sustain its current economic development but also play a crucial role in the future of high-tech industries in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

# CHINA'S ENVIRONMENTAL PARADOX

Violet Boyd

Currently, China is in the midst of a balancing act between coal and renewable energy, making it difficult to predict the country's environmental future. Recently, the nation's coal emissions have been at an all-time high, increasing 3.3 percent in the past five years and demanding a total of 4.04 billion tonnes last year. However, China is also leading globally in renewable energy initiatives. Although many citizens are concerned about the economic implications, transitioning smoothly to renewable energy is feasible and will bolster the nation's economy in the long run. The Chinese Communist Party's next moves regarding its energy sector will dictate the country's future and define its global reputation as a major environmental influence. China must realize its responsibility in global environmental stewardship and capitalize on its leadership in renewables to promptly utilize clean energy in replacement of coal.

China has significantly increased its coal use at an alarming rate in the past couple of years. The government approved 86 gigawatts of coal plants for 2022 and 50 additional gigawatts for the first six months of 2023, averaging about two new approved plants per week. The country uses coal for more than half of its energy needs, and its consumption has increased 3.3 percent in the past 5 years. Historically, the country has complex reasons for relying on coal, ranging from grid instability to renewable energy challenges to economic concerns. The CCP claims that it is only relying on coal for the short term to meet peak demand, maintain grid stability, and manage extreme weather and political events. However, the recent rapid installation of new plants makes this claim questionable.

Comparing China's emissions from fossil fuels and industry to the emissions from the United States can help contextualize the country's fuel narrative and predict potential environmental outcomes. When the U.S. was developing, industries burned massive amounts of coal, peaking at 23.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide per capita in 1973. Meanwhile, China's emissions peaked in 2021 at 8.0 tonnes of carbon dioxide per capita. Although the nation is currently emitting at an all-time high, it is possible to decrease emissions while still developing the economy. Considering different units of measurement and historical context is essential to gain a deeper understanding of environmental issues and realize China's ability to move away from coal.

Despite China's coal use, it remains an important global leader in sustainability initiatives. The CCP has pledged to address climate change as part of The Paris Agreement, a worldwide initiative created to address climate change by aiming to limit global temperature increase this century to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Other countries within the agreement include France, Canada, India, and Brazil. In 2015, China initially committed to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2060. On October 28, 2021, President Xi Jinping announced even more ambitious climate goals in a document titled "China's Achievements, New Goals and New Measures for Nationally Determined Contributions." Some goals within the document include doubling solar and wind power, fueling 40 percent of new cars in 2030 with green energy, and by 2025, implementing green building standards on all new public buildings. China is also proving to be a leader in the renewable energy field. Currently, the country has 3.5 times as much solar power and 2.6 times as much wind power as the United States. In 2022, China topped the list of global investors in clean energy, spending around 4 trillion yuan (546

billion USD) and making up half of the total global investments.

Although many citizens are concerned about renewable energy negatively affecting the economy and energy stability, this transition would actually benefit both sectors. China has vast resources available to generate renewable energy and could stand to benefit enormously by exporting clean power. As renewable energy becomes cheaper than fossil fuels, quickly adopting a clean grid would reduce energy costs for consumers and industries and generate economic growth and employment opportunities in China's clean energy sector. In 2023 alone, the renewable energy sector employed 2.6 million people in China. Additionally, a recent study found that investment in clean energy and additional innovation benefits could boost China's GDP by as much as 7.5 percent by 2030. New research shows that China could reach 80 percent carbon-free electricity as early as 2035 without increasing costs, adding new coal, or sacrificing reliability. These figures provide reassurance that China's economy can prosper under a transition to renewable energy. According to a simulation created by Jiang Lin, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, and an expert on China's clean energy, even when solar and wind are at their lowest, renewable energy will still be able to provide for the grid's needs. This reinforces the potential of renewable energy and the fact that clean energy can be a reliable power source.

Beyond economic benefits, turning to renewable energy will also have a tremendous tangible impact. Coal emissions are responsible for a slew of pollution-related health issues and environmental disasters. Under the aforementioned 80 percent carbon-free system, premature deaths will be reduced by 50 percent. By using renewables in favor of public health and reducing pollution, China is estimated to save a net total of up to 228 billion USD. Leading the way with renewables would also likely inspire other countries to join the clean energy race, creating positive environmental change beyond China's own actions.

In order to take charge of its environmental future and reputation, China needs to completely transition from coal to renewable energy. This swift switch will have significant economic as well as social benefits and take the country's development to a new level. China must act soon, though, and fully commit to clean energy if it is to undo the effects of its coal binge.

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***China has vast resources available to generate renewable energy and could stand to benefit enormously by exporting clean power.***

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# TRADITION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING PATTERNS IN INDIA

*Minche Kim*

At the age of fourteen, an Indian schoolgirl named Samira traded her education for extra income for her family, only to be handed over to sex traffickers in the brothels of Mumbai by her brother-in-law. Constantly beaten with belts and burnt by cigarette butts, she was forced to work under harsh conditions while her earnings went directly to the brothel owners. Near Samira's hometown, a family pushed another fourteen-year-old girl named Mahira into an auction for cash, selling their daughter to a 45-year-old man as his bride. Eighteen years later, Mahira was a mother of three, working in the fields for a pay rate that barely made up 0.025 percent of what she was sold for.

Human trafficking is akin to modern-day slavery and is a major issue impacting much of the global population, especially targeting those in poverty and of unequal socioeconomic status. In India, a global trafficking hotspot, the U.S. Department of State identified eight million trafficking victims in 2023–60 percent of which were female. The stories of Samira and Mahira are only two of millions, as patriarchal traditions construct a cycle of vulnerability for women in highly trafficked regions of India. Traditional ideologies that incorporate gender discrimination rob women of opportunities in education and the workforce that are essential to building their socioeconomic status, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

Forced marriages, different from arranged marriages, are a form of human trafficking and defined as a "marriage with 1 or more elements of force, fraud, or coercion, and where one or both parties do not or cannot consent to the marriage" by the U.S. Citizenship and

Immigration Services. This practice of exploitation is not uncommon in India, as 5.4 million Indian women and girls were found to be in forced marriages in 2021.

These high volumes of female victims trafficked through forced marriages, especially in North India, are directly affiliated with the imbalanced child sex ratio in India derived from the unequal status among genders. As a result of the excessive use of sex-selective abortions, 63 million fewer women have been born since when sex determination tests were made available in the 1970s, while an estimated 6.8 million fewer female births were projected to be recorded by 2030. The gender discriminatory preference of sons over daughters prevalent in patriarchal Indian households skewed the sex ratio in the Indian population. In North India, this low ratio of females caused a "male marriage squeeze"—an overabundance of men that were unable to marry due to the imbalanced sex ratio—which exacerbated the trafficking of brides in India. A 2014 survey counted 1,352 trafficked wives in 85 North Indian villages, while a 2013 study of 10,000 households in 92 Indian villages counted 9,000 purchased brides in forced marriages. Through the discriminatory practice of female foeticide, the demand for marriageable women increased, leading to an increase in trafficking activity to address the limited number of available women.

The low women's labor force participation rate in India also contributes to human trafficking activity. India recorded a female labor force participation rate of 21 percent in 2022, a portion much lower than the global average of 53 percent. The Pew

Research Center recorded that four in ten Indians prefer the traditional family dynamic, where the husband economically provides for the family and the wife works in the house, nearly double the global median of 23 percent. Patriarchal values in some families place women in households, deem education less profitable, or in extreme cases, encourage forced marriages. These expectations hinder the progress of women in the workforce and make it difficult for them to decrease their risk of being trafficked by building up their socioeconomic status. Forms of gender discrimination in the workforce, such as unequal pay, restrict socioeconomic mobility for Indian women as well. According to the U.N. National Sample Survey Office, although much progress has been made since 1993, a considerable pay gap of 28 percent was shown to exist between genders in 2018. In fact, the Multidimensional Poverty Index Score of Indian states reported by the United Nations Development Programme showed that poverty is most extreme in North and West India, the regions in which human trafficking of women is most common. Most recently, in 2023, NPR reported that female proportions in India's workforce are continuing to decline, going further to strongly suggest patriarchal and conservative ideologies continue to serve as a factor that may hinder a majority of Indian women from working outside the home.

The patriarchal ideologies that limit a woman's ability to participate in the workforce also impact her education, further increasing her vulnerability to human trafficking. A New York Times article states that poor, rural Indian families often decide not to invest in their daughters' education, as it is deemed "the riskier option" that may only delay marriage. Patriarchal households in rural India consider it non-profitable to educate women, as they often think that their workforce potential will be lost when they marry. This sentiment is demonstrated by the country's female literacy rate. While the female literacy rate in India has significantly improved from 9 percent to 71.5 percent since India's independence,

it still lags behind the male literacy rate of 84.4 percent and the global average of 79.7 percent. A lack of education makes the exploitation of women much easier for traffickers. Education is critical for economic mobility, and it is more difficult for people without formal education to achieve economic security. The likelihood of exploitation is increased for women from poor families, who could benefit from the funds provided by a forced marriage.

Although the Indian government is making significant efforts against human trafficking, its current protections are just not strong enough. According to UNICEF, while eighteen has been the legal age for women to marry in India since 1978, nearly one in four women still marry before they are eighteen, and older women are seen as less desirable. As reported in 2022 by the U.S. Department of State, there is a persistent lack of investigations into alleged trafficking cases, with the acquittal rate for traffickers at 89 percent. Additionally, the Indian government did not report efforts to investigate a number of government-run shelters that abused trafficking victims. The report continues to mention that the accountability of law enforcement officials was adulterated by misconduct and corruption at various levels of government, as local law enforcement and prosecutors working on criminal cases accepted bribes.

As female voices look to defy the long-held tradition of patriarchy in parts of India, the Indian government needs to respond to these calls to action with a greater effort to protect its citizens. As recommended by the 2022 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, the Indian government must compose a plan that enables the courts to hold speedy human trafficking case trials, increasing the number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of all types of trafficking. The government must also update its national action plan to fight human trafficking, bolstering its existing guidelines and implementing enforcement mechanisms to ensure that action is taken.

# EUROPE



# STEFANOS KASSELAKIS, HOPE VERSUS DESPAIR IN THE BATTERED GREEK LEFT.

Alex Triandafillidis

Greece has a long history of political extremism. Prior to the conclusion of the Second World War, Greece found itself in the first Cold War proxy conflict. As the Germans withdrew, the Communist guerillas, EAM-ELAS (National Liberation Front-National Liberation Army), came down from the mountains and asserted its claim in the cities. The exiled Greek government, headquartered in Cairo and led by the king, contested this move with the support of the British. The civil war concluded in the mountains of Epirus in 1949, with American napalm drowning Communism in a wall of fire. What followed was the extreme persecution of the Greek left, concentration camps in Makronisos, and intense surveillance. Greece found itself under a dictatorship between 1967 and 1974, which ramped up repression. Against this backdrop, the prospect of a leftist government seemed laughable, until the rise of SYRIZA.

SYRIZA (Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras), the Coalition of the Radical Left, began as a fringe political party garnering 3-5 percent of the vote and representing the Eurocommunist wing of the Greek left, which broke from the Greek Communist Party (KKE). SYRIZA was birthed out of the coalition of many leftist parties formally united under one banner and one charismatic leader, Alexis Tsipras. The young Tsipras gained the leadership of the party in 2007 and has since enjoyed a meteoric rise to power. The collapse of the Greek economy in 2009 and the disillusionment of the electorate with the two main political parties—the center-right New Democracy and center-left PASOKs—catapulted Tsipras to power in 2015, with the slogan “Proti fora Aristera” (The left for the first time). However, in 2019, New Democracy defeated SYRIZA by a margin of 7 points, leaving SYRIZA beaten but still standing. In May and June of 2023, New Democracy demolished SYRIZA with double the votes of SYRIZA. The battered and exhausted Tsipras resigned, leaving SYRIZA defeated and without its emblematic leader.

Stefanos Kasselakis; or Stefanos, as he insists on being called, is a new phenomenon in Greek politics: he is openly gay and touring the country with his American husband Tyler McBeth. His father was actively involved in the shipping industry, painting tankers, which afforded Stefanos a comfortable life. He later received a scholarship to Andover, and then to the Wharton School of Economics at the University of Pennsylvania. He worked at Goldman Sachs after which he founded his own shipping company, with great success. He boldly announced his candidacy with a video on Twitter, announcing his intention to run for the presidency of SYRIZA two weeks prior to the election. He was personally selected by Tsipras to be on the ballot for the second round of elections in June of 2023 but was not elected. Despite this, he rejuvenated the race for Tsipras's replacement,



which had failed to garner public interest.

“A shipping magnate leading SYRIZA?” was the title that adorned the media, and the minds of all Greeks, especially those within SYRIZA. Stefanos managed to take the media scene by storm, mostly through Twitter and Instagram. He avoided press conferences, which his political opponents attribute to his lack of political experience. However, the 35-year-old has emphasized his attempts to resonate with the common Greeks inhabiting the disaffected regions of the country, juxtaposed with rigid party bureaucracy. However, most analysts did not see him as a threat, projecting him to finish second behind the favorite, Efthymiou Axtsioglou.

On the evening of September 17th, Stefanos won 44.91 percent of the vote in the first round, shy of just 5.09 points needed to win outright. This is when Stefanos as a media phenomenon took off: the coffee he drank, the clothes he wore to the gym, and the pizza he ordered became media headlines. Political critique started coming in. Nikos Filis, the ex-minister of Education, accused him of being the “Trump of the Left”—a

media personality lacking substance. His opponent Axtsioglou accused him of being sexist for referring to her only by first name. Most importantly, however, the silence of Alexis Tsipras was interpreted by Kasselaki's supporters as an indication that the old president was turning his back on the established members of the party. This especially resonated with those who represented the left within the party, who had always opposed the “opening to the center” that Tsipras had envisioned.

In the second round of the elections, Stefanos secured 56 percent of the vote and Axtsioglou secured 43 percent of the vote. What is in store for the biggest leftist party in Greece and one of the biggest in Europe?

Many Greek and foreign analysts have been trying to answer that question. Some more critical on the Left see this as the death of the historic party, the victory of image over substance, and the pivot of the party to an American Democratic model. After all, Stefanos volunteered for Joe Biden's 2008 campaign and explicitly stated that SYRIZA ought to copy the Democratic Party. The Greek left stood defeated; it needed a breath of fresh air, away from the rigid party bureaucracy. The atmosphere in the party headquarters on Koumoundourou all summer long was dense, full of defeatism. Being constantly flanked by posters of Tsipras, whose aura hangs heavily over SYRIZA, one could ascend the stairs of the building while being flanked by gloomy and skeptical party cadres

The brightly painted red building of the party offices was juxtaposed with the dark image of political demise within its interior. Furthermore, it was even more antithetical to videos and pictures of a young and charismatic man touring Greece, speaking to people and inspiring many to see in him what they had seen in the young and similarly inexperienced Tsipras: hope. Hope is a word that adorned all of SYRIZA's posters in the early 2010s, and a word seemingly forgotten in 2023. SYRIZA forgot what brought them to power: the hope of the people in something new, the hope of an equitable social system,—far from the kleptocratic nature of the public sector. Stefanos reminded SYRIZA of the word hope, of the ability to once more be in government, and not to hug the “safe harbor of a left of 5-10%,” as he said in his speeches. What Stefanos lacks in political experience he more than makes up in his ability to empathize, to communicate with the simple Greek. For it is the simple Greek who once made SYRIZA the governing party; the simple Greek chose stability which it associated with the center-right New Democracy, in the absence of a hopeful message from the Greek left.

# GANG VIOLENCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW RIGHT IN SWEDEN

Emilio Biagioli

Sweden, the ancestral homeland of the plundering Vikings, has long since embodied an image that starkly contrasts its violent roots. Picturesque coastlines and endless acres of tranquil forest hint at the Nordic paradise it has become. Built upon principles of social democracy, modern Sweden touts benefits like free education, universal healthcare, loose immigration policies, high GDP, and greater life expectancy. Indeed, the Swedish Model stands before the rest of the world as a blueprint for successfully pairing effective governance with liberal tenets. Enjoying an enviable stature in the world order, these eccentric Swedes, lounging in ivory towers made out of their social safety nets, have been thought of as hard-pressed to adopt more of their allies' capitalist sensibilities. However, recent developments have demonstrated the surprising viability of a Swedish rightward shift, none more indicative than reactionary responses to crime.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of the center-right Moderate Party announced plans this September to broker a deal between the Swedish armed forces and national police to deploy troops with law enforcement in response to increasing levels of gang violence sweeping the nation. Since 2016, the number of fatal shootings in the country has steadily risen, reaching an all-time high of 62 in 2022. In September 2023 alone, a record 11 fatal shootings occurred, most of which were attributed to members of organized crime. This coincides with an uptick in other violent incidents, such as a record 90 explosions in 2022—a number which has already been surpassed in 2023. Having spent their lives in a country ubiquitous with peace, Swedes are alarmed by such unprecedented figures, which are made even more puzzling by previous success with gun control. However, the relentless nature of the current violence has caught officials by surprise and challenged preconceived notions of security, prompting the conservative-controlled government to pounce on alternative solutions.

In order to comprehend how the Swedish

government has arrived at a place where deploying troops on the street is even a possibility, one must look back at the 2022 elections. This cycle was a towering victory for the conservative members of the Riksdag, Sweden's parliament. In particular, the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats (SD) turned in an unexpectedly strong performance, landing enough seats to become the Riksdag's second-largest party (after the left-wing Social Democrats). Recognizing an opportunity to hold a conservative majority, the right-wing bloc banded together in a coalition government. This newfound alliance partnered the SD and other right-of-center parties—the Moderates, Christian Democrats, and Liberals—with the Moderates' Kristersson serving as PM. There was no mistaking, however, that this new administration's actions would be highly contingent on the approval of SD. Given that SD came to national notoriety for radical stances and criticism of the conservative establishment's complacency towards EU initiatives, the party had already laid the foundation for pushing the conservative bloc to the right so they could later capitalize on rising gang violence and xenophobia in advocating for elements of a police state.

The remarkable ascendancy of the SD mirrors the recent momentum of far-right movements in Europe, such as Giorgia Meloni in Italy and Viktor Orbán in Hungary, as well as Donald Trump's presidency in America. In fact, right-wing establishment parties were initially hesitant to associate with SD and leader Jimmie Åkesson because of their professed radical beliefs and ties to neo-Nazism. Of their beliefs, some of the most concerning were support for aspects of a militarized police state, fostering anti-Muslim attitudes, scapegoating the welfare state for socioeconomic issues, and attempting to discredit the media. As to the extremist ties: founded in 1988, the first SD chairman, Anders Klarström, was associated with the neo-Nazi Nordic Realm Party, which is enforced by photographs of early members wearing Nazi uniforms. While leaders have since made efforts to distance themselves

from this past, many argue that their current rhetoric echoes those old sentiments. Alas, despite all of these red flags, the allure of securing the first conservative majority in eight years was too enticing for the other parties. The deal was then successfully reached, ushering in a new era of Swedish politics that paved the way for plans like deploying the troops, as well as other radical policies. Over the new government's first year in power, the influence of the Sweden Democrats has been demonstrated in myriad ways: increase in severity for punishments of gang members, the proliferation of "stop-and-search" zones, especially in areas determined by the government as at higher risk of violence, and the implementation of stringent refugee quotas. Political opinion polls have been generally unfavorable, but it is undeniable that a license has been awarded to a certain kind of politics grounded in a nationalist ethos. It is through this whirlwind of political transformation that Kristersson's proposal of police militarization has gained a place of feasibility. So far, restrictive policies have been largely unsuccessful in hampering the escalation of gang violence—a fact that has drawn many criticisms about the prospective efficacy of bolstering police presence. Kristersson on the other hand, claims that lax immigration statutes which insufficiently adapt people into Swedish society are to blame. To that end, Kristersson's adoption of SD talking points illustrates how the party's ideas have been mainstreamed.

The juncture at which Sweden now finds itself, itching to embed armed forces with domestic police to counter gang violence, is a sojourn into uncharted territory. Taking this step, in conjunction with a continued push to limit immigration, has the potential to alter the image of Sweden before the entire world. The notion of Sweden as a socialist safe haven boasting open borders is more and more distant as its current government delves deeper into a repertoire of right-wing policy. It is no exaggeration to say that these opposing forces are competing for the soul of Sweden. Ultimately, the Swedish people are witnessing a trial run of government indicative of the current trend of European politics. When they vote in the next election cycle, will they approve of what has been done by those in power? Will a Swedish Meloni or Orbán rise to power? If so, we will look back at Kristersson's proposal as a monumental turning point in the evolution of Sweden into a nation wholly divorced from the principles for which it once stood.





# BEYOND KYIV: THE INVISIBLE WAR

*Elizabeth Sieger*

Withering support among allies who had once promised their steadfast and unwavering loyalty to Ukraine has caused panic in Kyiv, and for good reason. Neither Kyiv nor the European continent can afford a Russian victory despite building resentment among allies at the stalling war effort. As Central European nations flock to the Kremlin and the United States becomes increasingly fickle in its policy toward Ukraine, Europe must take swift action to bolster its support for the Ukrainian war effort—or prepare itself for the fight of its life.

The victory of Robert Fico, a pro-Russian politician, in the recent Slovakian parliamentary election has underscored the frustration of EU members regarding a stagnant front line and the grueling and protracted nature of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Composing the basis of Fico's campaign were promises to stop military aid to Ukraine, place equal blame on Kyiv and the West for Russia's invasion, and oppose Ukraine's accession to NATO. The €68 billion spent on military and economic aid to Ukraine has prompted EU citizens to push for the reallocation of funding to domestic priorities. Memories of surging energy prices and inflation rates from the first few months of the war remain fresh. As Fico attempts to build a coalition government, Slovakia has halted sending further military support, representing a significant turning point in the nation that was among the first to send fighter jets to Ukraine.

Fico is not the only pro-Kremlin politician on the map. Hungary's outspoken, populist leader, Viktor Orbán, has consistently been out of step with fellow EU members on the issue of Ukraine. He has refused to break ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, insisting on exceptions to EU sanctions on Russian energy and delaying financial and military aid to Kyiv. The long-standing popularity of Moscow in Serbia has remained untarnished by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with as many as 63 percent of polled Serbs perceiving the West as being responsible for the in-

curtion. As the tides turn towards Moscow in Central Europe, even Poland has barred tariff-free Ukrainian grain from being sold within its borders, joining Slovakia and Hungary.

The United States, ranked as the most significant contributor to Ukraine in military, humanitarian, and financial support, was plunged into political turmoil in September 2023 over Congressional budgetary disagreements. The US Congress passed an eleventh-hour deal to avoid a government shutdown at the expense of \$6 billion in aid to Ukraine. The far-right minority in the House of Representatives opposed this aid, perceiving Europe as free-riding on American financial contributions to the war effort. "We feel hostage to the internal political struggle in the United States," said Ukrainian National Security Committee member Yehor Cherniev. While most of those in Congress on both sides of the aisle support continued aid to Ukraine, the 2024 presidential election represents an inflection point for American policy towards Kyiv. The prospect of former president Donald Trump reclaiming the White House has incited anxiety in Europe—Trump has called Putin a 'genius' for the invasion of Ukraine.

A Russian victory in Ukraine would have grim consequences not just for Kyiv but for the entire European continent. If Russia takes control of Ukraine or even significantly curtails its sovereignty, Europe must establish an entirely new security order. It would bring two nuclear powers, the United States and Russia, back into the confrontation of the Cold War era.

Western governments have soothed fears of a war between the EU, NATO, and Russia with assurances that, right now, Russia is only at war with Ukraine. This mindset is dangerous and has deadly consequences: the EU and NATO are already at war with Russia. A Russian victory in Ukraine will be the first battle in a larger war. Emboldened in its success against the United States and Europe, the West would need to balance protecting peace in Europe and avoiding military engagement with Moscow—two objectives that may become irreconcilable.

Traditionally, the perception is that the EU and NATO are Europe and the West's 'peace-keeping forces', but the reality is that a Russian military success in Ukraine will negate any credible assurance that the EU and NATO can preserve peace on the continent. Historically, Europe has turned to the United States to guarantee European security and stability when its organizations lack the necessary capacity. Threatened nations on the eastern front, like Estonia, Poland, and Germany, will likely rely heavily on the United States for support—but as the United States' relationship with China continues to deteriorate, it is unlikely that America will be able to devote its full attention to Europe. "The alliance with the United States is the absolute foundation of our security," said Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in April 2023. Without the United States, the Russians would likely control Ukraine from Kherson to Lviv.

But Europe has been comfortable with the United States taking the lead when it comes to support for Ukraine, and this has ignited the fury and resentment of American policymakers who are steadfast in their intention to back down if Europe does not step up. While providing military support has been contentious for European governments who do not wish to be directly involved in a conflict with Russia, an appropriate start would be for the EU to pledge that it will match every dollar in US contributions. The US could provide primarily military aid, while the EU takes the lead in economic assistance for restructuring. In that same vein, the EU could provide Ukraine access to the EU single market now that Ukraine is a member candidate, bolstering its economy even before a vote on accession. Europeans should get ahead of the free-riding debate that will likely burst onto the scene with grandeur as the American 2024 presidential elections approach by pursuing a publicity campaign emphasizing their commitment to devoting more resources to Ukraine on an expedited timeline. The waiting game has no place in this match of geopolitical chess. The EU must make its move—or face a catastrophic Russian checkmate.

# ART AS A PATH FORWARD

## IN GERMANY'S CULTURAL SPHERE FOR THE FUTURE OF REFUGEES

Zeynep Koseoglu

The cities of Berlin and Munich were influential to the developing Modern Art scene in Europe during the early to mid 20th century. Young and promising artists settled in these regions and advanced movements such as German Expressionism, New Realism, and Bauhaus, ushering in a new age of Modern Art. This age was born from the early influence of Impressionism—which had previously been strongly linked to visual culture in France. From the early work of artists such as the Blue Rider Group—active before the on-set of World War I—to later artists such as Max Beckmann and George Grosz, who worked within the context of the Weimar Republic, Germany became a cultural center for Europe. Artists worked within these cities to create a culture that was able to reflect upon and highlight the social experiences, struggles, and feelings of its people. While this art scene lost its momentum with the rise of fascism and the propaganda machine forcing innovative artists into exile during and after World War II, Germany has not yet lost its relevance as a site capable of producing interesting, incredible, and groundbreaking works of art. Indeed, the art scene in Germany has been revitalized by the transformations of the cultural scene with the arrival of a great number of refugees. These shifts explore how the country understands itself as it undergoes significant political, demographic, and cultural changes, but can also reflect on the future of Europe as a whole.

One of the biggest contemporary concerns of

Europe and the European Union is the question of migration and the arrival of refugees from many countries under duress. Germany harbors the largest number of refugees out of all the countries in the European Union. Its open-door policy, implemented during the 2015 refugee crisis, has long been applauded by international organizations such as the United Nations. Earlier this year, Germany's former chancellor, Angela Merkel, was awarded a UNESCO peace prize for her welcoming attitude towards refugees and her insistence on Germany's capacity to provide sanctuary to as many refugees as possible, as highlighted by her infamous 'Wir schaffen das' (We will get it done) slogan. However, the policy has come to a halt in recent years, and is unlikely to return to its original form anytime soon. The current German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has advocated for the extensive deportation of asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected, claiming that "too many are coming" and that Germany needs to "deport more people and faster."

There is no denying that Germany's public sphere has been altered by the arrival of so many refugees, many of whom come from cultures which bear little resemblance to that of traditional Germans. Most of the refugees in Germany hail from Syria, Iraq, and Eritrea, fleeing war, human rights abuses, and economic hardship in their home countries to seek protection in Europe. The rise of the far-right in the country is an additional consideration. The

Alternative for Deutschland Party—whose platform is anti-immigration, anti-Islam, highly nationalist, and is critical toward the EU—has done exceedingly well in recent polls. This raises interesting questions about how refugees are becoming incorporated into the fabric of German society. It seems the dominant attitude toward immigrants of all kinds in Germany is that of hasty integration, reflected in chancellor Olaf Scholz testimony that "they [immigrants] should not only work here but also live here, and integrate well, so that it becomes their urgent desire to become German citizens." These pressures, exacerbated by the traumatic (and often life-threatening) experience of leaving a homeland, prove to be an immense psychological challenge to refugees.

This is where art is able to function as a powerful tool of self-expression and activism for refugees who are not able to conventionally participate in the discourse about themselves. Indeed, for those stuck between the asylum and citizen phases of becoming a refugee, there are barricades such as ineligibility to vote. This leaves refugees unable to decide on the policies which affect one's livelihood and odds of healthy survival in the new environment. Fascinating commentaries, criticisms, celebrations, and sorrows are born from the work of artists who arrive as refugees, and seek asylum, in Germany. One artist who works within this framework is Sara Nabil, who came to Germany as a refugee from Afghanistan after witnessing a suicide bombing at her home country. Her work engages mostly with performance art and portrays strong feminist themes. She questions the political actions of the Taliban in Afghanistan and dissects a fierce battle ground for power through an exploration of the female body as political ground.

The website for the work she exhibited in the Kunsthalle Mannheim museum states that "artistic work gives her back the voice that was taken

from her in her home country." Similarly, Anis Hamdoun, who fled Syria for Germany following the onset of the civil war, currently works in theater through acting, directing, and conducting workshops for adolescents. His plays take inspiration from his relationship with his homeland. The Trip highlights the experience of escaping from the chaos of war to the boring, and strange environment of a mid-sized German town through the perspective of Hamdoun's alter ego, Ramie. Hamdoun has the belief that tales of war must be told and heard. Through this, he engages with the question of how refugees can authentically narrate their experiences of hardship, and integration, and express their unique relationships with their past, present, and future.

Artist collectives and project groups for refugees to engage with the arts create a community for them and bring about different means for self-expression. One such group is Project Multaqa which trains refugees to work as museum guides. Through the training program, the project aims to enable refugees to reflect on artifacts from their home regions, bridge together German and various other national experiences of war, and establish museums as a space for dialogue between different cultures and across time.

Art, with its multitude of forms, and the agency refugees are able to inflict upon it is an incredibly important tool towards healthy integration of refugees into the German public sphere.

Considering the cultural challenges of migration and the contrasting perspectives toward it which present themselves in the contemporary German discourse, the ability to engage in powerful storytelling and self-expression will be integral to the progress Germany will make towards a more prosperous and peaceful future as a country, and continue on its legacy as a cultural capital for the rest of Europe.



# MORIA REFUGEE CAMP: UNVEILING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TRAVESTY

*Taryn Ingalls*

The Greek island of Lesbos is nestled at a crossroads between continents, boasting elegant Aegean beaches and a rich cultural history. Tourists explore the medieval castles and enjoy the delectable cuisine that is courtesy of the prominent fishing industry of the island. They end their night enjoying the warmth of a drink from a local bar as they overlook the beauty of the Aegean sea. Europeans idealize Greece but then abandon the nation to address their problems on their own.

On the East side of the island, thousands of refugees are facing dire conditions. The island of Lesbos holds the most notorious refugee resettlement camp in all of Europe: Moria. The definition of the latin word translates to "excess frivolity," but this could not be farther from the reality of the dreadful conditions of the camp. The words "welcome to prison" are spray-painted at the entrance and barbed wire surrounds the barren containers that serve as shelter from the cold. Tarps held up by pipes shield sleeping families from the danger of night in the camp. The temporary set-up was originally created to serve as a checkpoint for up to 3,100 people from Syria on their journey to find safe resettlement from the civil war. At its peak in 2020, over 20,000 men, women, and children resided in the camp, with nowhere to go as they awaited asylum in the EU.

Conditions within the camp are intolerable. The showers in the camp lack hot water and there are no locks. Sexual harassment and assaults are so common that women have stopped using the public amenities and must wear diapers to bed in order to avoid leaving their shelters after dark. Without adequate access to shelter, electricity, or water, refugees have fallen victim to ailments of the body and mind. Greece has provided little

medical support, and the police do not intervene in matters of security. The trauma of these refugees' past is built upon by the uncertainty of the present. Pressure on Greece and the European Union has intensified as a fire in 2020 tarnished the camp and left refugees with even fewer resources. The fire, paradoxically, provided a small amount of promise, as refugees stranded in the camp hoped this would be an opportunity for relocation. However, Greek and EU leaders decided to institute "closed controlled access centers" to replace the shoddy tent cities that had burned to the ground. These enhanced safety procedures did little to improve the conditions of the camp. The humanitarian crisis surged on, with the lack of basic necessities concealed under the guise of "enhancement."

The continent continues to grapple with a migration crisis that has strained its resources and tested its resilience. In an attempt to slow the arrival of refugees, the European Union

and Greece made a deal with Turkey, the nation most refugees cross during their journey to Europe. The deal stated that irregular migrants attempting to enter Greece would be returned to Turkey, and that Ankara would take steps to prevent new migratory routes from opening. In exchange, the European Union agreed to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey on a one-to-one basis, reduce visa restrictions for Turkish citizens, pay six billion euros in aid to Turkey for Syrian migrant communities, update the customs union, and re-energize stalled talks regarding Turkey's accession to the European Union.

With the last of the six billion euros in aid committed in December, there has been resurgent interest in renewing the arrangement. The EU-Turkey statement has become a blueprint for Europe's strategy of externalizing migration management to its neighbors. However, the absence of a unified, compassionate, and practical approach has not only deepened the strain on Greece's economy but has also exposed the EU's collective failure to uphold its values of solidarity and humanitarianism. Unloading the responsibility onto other nations is a pathetic attempt to maintain Europe's image as a beacon of human rights and just democracy. Unfortunately, the refugee crisis is here to stay, and if the EU does not create a comprehensive strategy to mitigate these challenges, the crisis will become much worse.

The rise of anti-immigrant

sentiments and populist rhetoric across Europe has exacerbated the crisis, particularly in Greece. Refugees who are financially and socially capable of searching for work in neighboring regions on the island are rejected and verbally attacked by xenophobic sentiments. Refugees describe being called dirty Muslims or being told to go home while seeking jobs in Mytilini. The refugee population is not the only target of local indignation. Several volunteer healthcare worker cars have been battered and windows smashed through by local Greek vigilantes who claim the presence of NGO workers on the island "encourage" migrants to come.

To address this crisis, immediate action must be taken. The EU must implement a burden-sharing mechanism, ensuring that all member states share the responsibility of accommodating and integrating refugees and migrants. Moreover, efforts should be directed towards tackling the root causes of migration and creating preventative solutions. Simultaneously, the EU must prioritize establishing a more humane and efficient asylum process, thereby guaranteeing the protection of migrants' rights and access to fair and transparent asylum procedures. The conditions refugees face in the Moria refugee camp are inhumane. It is crucial to provide a safe environment for those awaiting asylum and ensure that the fundamental rights and dignity of all migrants are upheld.





# POLITICAL HEATWAVES: SPAIN'S CONTROVERSIAL PATH FROM AN INCONCLUSIVE ELECTION TO A COALITION GOVERNMENT

Erin Petrov

As the hottest month of the summer ushered in sweltering heat for the rest of Europe, Spain was dealing with a political heat wave: intensifying polarization during a 'snap' general election that would decide whether socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez stayed in power. In July 2023, twenty-five million Spanish voters flocked to the polls to choose between Sanchez, conservative People's Party (PP) leader Alberto Nuñez, and far-right Vox leader Santiago Abascal. The election yielded inconclusive results, reflecting a divided population. The PP beat the socialist party, but only by a narrow margin, winning about 33% and 31% of votes respectively—not enough to secure the absolute majority needed for the Prime Minister to be elected. Following the election, Sanchez had a second chance to stabilize the political situation and win the support he needed to stay in office. The Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) leader was appointed to form a new government by the King of Spain, Felipe VI and succeeded, securing another term as Prime Minister on November 16, 2023. Although Sanchez ultimately emerged victorious, his road to success was marked by questionable political deals and decisions that have left many Spaniards uncertain about Spain's political future.

At the end of October, Sanchez made a move to create a coalition government with the far-left Sumar party led by Yolanda Diaz. Together, they proposed a deal composed of a wide range of social policies including pledges to reduce the work week from 40 hours to 37.5, extend parental leave by four weeks, and raise the minimum wage. Furthermore, given the extreme weather afflicting Spain this summer and in recent years, as a direct consequence of the climate crisis, environmental policy has become a more central issue in left-wing politics. This summer, Spain and the rest of Europe witnessed extreme heat, with many countries suffering from unrelenting heat waves, record high temperatures, dry storms, and even devastating wildfires. To combat these effects, the coalition also expressed commitment to a "green revolution," in their proposal, hoping to enact more policies with a focus on renewable energy and reducing emissions.

The agreement's auspicious promises may seem to be too good to be true—and they just might be. Unlike the United States, Spain's government uses a proportional system of representation, so a simple majority is not enough to win an election. In order to constitute the required majority, the PSOE must also secure the backing of smaller independent parties in parliament. This includes backing from Catalan separatist parties such as the Junts party, which has stipulated that the government must grant them blanket amnesty for Catalonia's failed and unlawful independence referendum in 2017, through which they dissolved their parliament and called for new elections. This condition, which the separatists have declared non-negotiable in their agreement to back Sanchez's government, has sparked great controversy across Spain and prompted tens of thousands of protesters to take to the streets nationwide this November. Many Spaniards lament Sanchez's decision to accept this amnesty deal, viewing it as a desperate and undemocratic attempt to hold onto power.

Right-wing leaders leveraged this controversy in their campaigns as an opportunity to discredit Sanchez's coalition-building efforts, labeling him as a traitor. PP leader Alberto Nuñez charged Sanchez with violating constitutional norms by agreeing to grant amnesty to the Catalan nationalists. Nuñez claims that by accepting these terms, the prime minister is tacitly endorsing the actions of a group that attempted to undermine the Spanish government and Spain's national identity with their desires for secession and ignoring the general consensus that they should be held accountable. Moreover, this amnesty would allow Catalan separatists to set the foundations for future negotiations of a legal independence referendum, which conservatives find unacceptable. Catalonia is one of the biggest contributors to Spain's economy generating about 215 billion Euros this year and accounting for 20% of the nation's overall GDP. If the region became independent, Spain's economy would take a massive hit. However, the consequences for Catalonia would be far greater, as they would be expelled from the European Union and lose the safety net provided by the Euro currency and free trade, especially the supplies from Spain itself that Catalonia uses to generate

revenue. More notably, Catalonia breaking away from Spain could threaten the already fragmented Spanish national identity, as it would set a dangerous precedent for other autonomous regions, like Andalusia and the Basque country, implying that they can be independent as well.

In the face of massive backlash, Sanchez insisted on the constitutionality of the agreement, and that this compromise was in the common interest of the public as he needed Catalanian support to form the government that will pass the progressive policies he's proposing. In politics, everything comes at a cost, and the Spanish people do not seem to have pockets deep enough to support Sanchez's political gambles. Although this coalition intended to resolve the issue of establishing a majority government in the aftermath of an inconclusive election, it seems to have only further muddled the situation. As tensions rose between left- and right-wing parties, the pressure built on the prime minister to successfully build an administration that hinged on a deeply controversial concession. Sanchez's bold and risky negotiations might have been necessary to secure his place in politics, but they also gave a voice to right-wing extremist groups who sought to undermine his reputation and sway the wavering public opinion. As seen in other recent elections around the world, most notably the United States and Brazil, it is becoming increasingly frequent that losing parties (often far-right), contest election results, destabilizing the democratic process.

Despite disappointment with Sanchez's leadership because of his alliances with unpopular far-left parties, voters are wary of the right-wing PP and Vox parties, alarmed by their nationalist rhetoric, anti-LGBTQ policies, and climate change denial. With this added controversy, the conflict between two radically different parties continues to heat up, long after the summer heat waves have passed. While Sanchez has another chance to prove himself as a politician and a leader in this new term, Spain's future is plagued by uncertainty. With the looming threat of Catalan independence and further political fragmentation, these next few months will be crucial in setting the trajectory for Spanish politics.



# FUGITIVE FISH: ICELAND'S FISHING INDUSTRY POSES A MOUNTING ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT

Reagan Aylor



August 20th of 2023 brought great success for the aspiring wild salmon of the Kvigindisdalur fish farm in Patreksfjörður, Iceland, but an unfortunate defeat for environmentalists in the region.

The salmon escaped their pen via two holes in the net, each measuring 20 by 30 centimeters, that allowed for the passage of roughly 3,500 of the pen's original 70,000 fish. The escapees dispersed throughout the nearby environment, making their way into Iceland's various rivers and lakes to mingle with local wildlife. Come mating season, they will reproduce with the wild salmon—a process called hybridization. The consequences of this could be catastrophic.

Following the escape, some of the farmed salmon discovered in Iceland's rivers were found with sea lice—a parasite that can be deadly to wild fish. Furthermore, researchers at the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research at Trondheim found that farmed fish mature much faster than their wild counterparts. Therefore, the offspring of these fish will grow, mature, and die faster than others. This makes it difficult for them to procreate in the wild.

The last few years have seen multiple significant escapes from fish farms around the country—a fact that continues to raise alarm among environmentalists. The company Arnalax, for instance, admitted to losing a staggering 80,000 salmon from a pen in Arnafjörður in 2021, and had to pay a fine of 120 million ISK as a penalty. For comparison, the wild salmon population of Iceland was only about 50,000 in 2021.

These escapes will inevitably cause long-term consequences on wild populations, but perhaps more immediately, consequences for the other wildlife in the area. Various aquatic and land animals depend on salmon for food, and if the salmon population declines,

so do the populations of dependent species.

This decline in wildlife populations will be worsened by pollution. Salmon farms often use pesticides to prevent the spread of sea lice among the farmed fish, but when used in large quantities, they pose a further environmental threat to the wildlife nearby like eagles and sea birds. A study conducted on a Norwegian marine environment found that two chemicals used in Norwegian salmon farms, azamethiphos and deltamethrin, posed a significant threat to crustaceans that came into contact with the chemical; in particular, deltamethrin can be toxic to lobster during their larval stages.

While the consequences of this type of fish farming are extensive, the importance of Iceland's fishing industry should not be understated. Historically, fishing has played a critical role in the Icelandic economy. It accounts for 40 percent of export earnings in the country, 12 percent of its GDP, and employs nearly 5 percent of the workforce. The country was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis, but one of the few major economic sectors that remained relatively unbothered was the fishing industry. Employment in areas that depended on fishing declined, but less severely than in other places.

This was due in part to the general structure of Iceland's economy. The population of Iceland is relatively small—about 372,000 in 2021—and concentrated in a few urban centers. Iceland's economy has three major sectors: aluminum smelting, tourism, and fishing. The aluminum smelting industry is spread between urban and rural areas. The tourism industry is predominantly dependent on Iceland's nature, thus, tourist centers are scattered across rural areas of the country, making these areas crucial to the economy as a whole. The fishing industry is also primarily rural; fisheries are distributed around the coast among

rural villages whose economies depend almost entirely on the fishing companies to survive.

This distribution of industry across the country has created some interesting political and economic divides between the regions, particularly on the issue of the environment. In regard to the fish farms, it is the urban environmentalists who tend to be the most ardent opposition, arguing that the farms pose an unjustifiable risk to the environment. A Gallup poll from February of 2023 found that 61 percent of Icelanders opposed the open net pens. It is important to note that 99 percent of Icelanders live in the cities. This means that a vast majority of the population is concentrated in areas that do not directly depend on the fishing industry to bring revenue to their businesses and workers, therefore, they tend to oppose it due to its natural risks.

The supporters of the fish farms are most commonly the occupants of the rural fishing villages. The company presence in these towns provides employment to the inhabitants, and customers for the other businesses there. Elís Björk Jónsdóttir, a petrol station owner in the small fishing village of Þingeyri, Westfjords, told *The Guardian* that if it wasn't for the local salmon company, her store wouldn't exist. This sentiment—that stores, restaurants, and communities wouldn't survive without the fishing companies—is common among these villages.

It is also important to consider the novelty of Iceland's commercial fishing industry relative to other countries in the region. Iceland first began experimenting with aquaculture around the 1950s, with the first "fish farms" not being built until around the 1980s. The open-net pen structure didn't truly take off until the 1990s and early 2000s.

Norway, by comparison, has been using aquaculture since the 1970s, and has had more time to address the problem from a governance standpoint. It is necessary to have a license to conduct salmon aquaculture in Norway, and in many cases, a special purpose license is required for specific types of aquaculture. The extent of Norway's licensing system has increased greatly over the course of its development, but it is still flawed. The development category of special license, for instance, is wide enough in scope in its description of development that it could be used by companies as an open-net pen license, which could end up exacerbating the environmental problem instead of curtailing it.

While Iceland does have a licensing system—administered by the Directorate of Fisheries under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries—it is not nearly as complex, and it lacks components that would make it more effective. The Arnalax escape of 80,000 salmon, for instance, was punished with a fine, not because of the escape itself, but because of the failure to report it. The implementation of a uniform system of more severe penalties for escapes would encourage fishing companies to take the necessary measures to prevent escapes, or face more costly consequences.

Still, the threat grows by the day as escapes will continue to occur in Icelandic fish farms. For a country whose economy depends so heavily on fishing, there is no question that the efforts to improve regulations are worth the time and money. Fish is a critical export, but furthermore, the environmental effects of escapes have the potential to negatively impact the tourism industry, which accounts for 12 percent of the country's GDP. Ultimately, the issue is more far-reaching than it seems at first glance, and it would be in the best interests of the Directorate of Fisheries to ramp up regulations before it's too late.

# THE END OF FASHION AS WE KNOW IT?

Ella Frances Scott

Despite widespread criticism of the detrimental impact of the fashion industry on climate change and pollution, many of this year's Fashion Week articles reiterated how it is the year of shows representing small designers who are "not to be missed." These articles and media representations outshine the media's portrayal of the fashion industry's irreversible impact on the current global climate disaster. As influential fashion conglomerates become even more dominant in the industry and the EU pushes new sustainability regulations, this opportunity for small designers may be one of their last.

The global fashion industry makes up eight to ten percent of our carbon emissions and could jump up to 26 percent by 2050. According to the Geneva Environment Network, enough clothes to fill a garbage truck are dumped or burned in a landfill every second. It is indisputable that the fashion industry is fueling a large part of the global climate crisis. As a result, the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, created in 2019, has pushed for stricter regulations to hold the fashion industry accountable. The Alliance states that its goal is to make preventing further climate change a top priority for the fashion industry and to reduce the industry's carbon emissions to zero by 2050.

Throughout its four years of action, the Alliance has released recommendations for discussing the issue. It prioritizes stronger governance, collaboration, financing, and change in the consumption habits of buyers. These are important ideas to prioritize when tackling the fashion industry's environmental impact, but they are not enough. The fashion industry needs to work harder and faster to find sustainable solutions. Strict policy implementation is needed, and corporations—especially fast fashion corporations—must be directly held accountable. For too long, the burden of reducing one's fashion purchasing has been placed too heavily on consumers and not heavily enough on the companies that market overconsumption.

Fashion marketing in the last 20 years has successfully encouraged consumers to buy more. People are expected to buy new clothes for every season and wear whatever is trendy. The result of this is poor quality clothes with a much shorter lifespan, creating an endless pipeline of textile waste.



***The only way that the fashion industry can be sustainable is if companies find alternative business strategies that don't revolve around selling and making more things.***



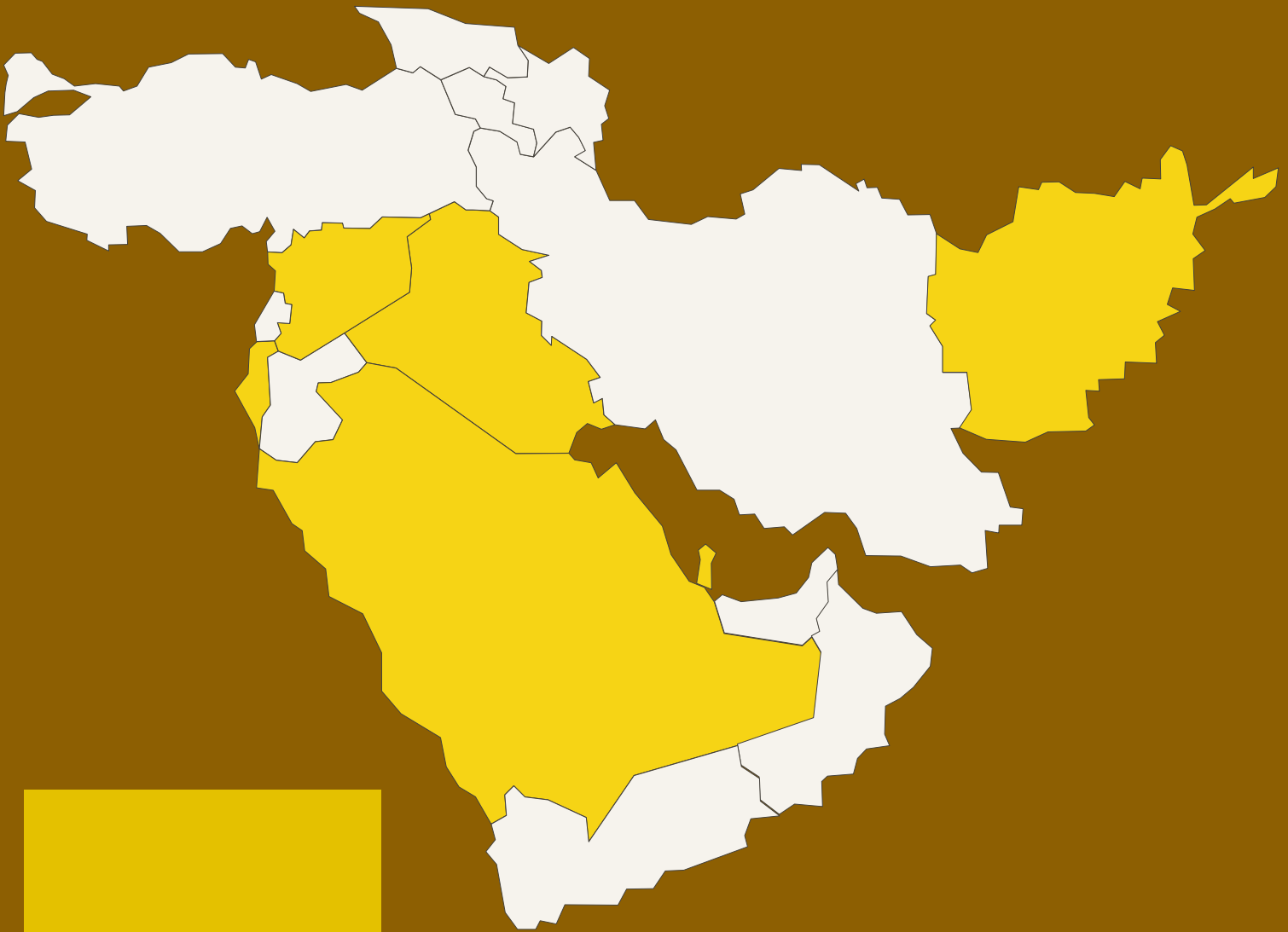
According to the Changing Markets Foundation, three quarters of clothing items created are either destroyed, left in warehouses, or exported to Africa, where up to half of used clothing are quickly shredded for other uses or dumped. The truth is that people just need to buy less, but that won't happen without a new mindset around buying clothes. In the same way that people have been convinced to buy more for less, people can be educated about the importance of sustainability when shopping. Our society was taught to promote fast fashion and can be taught to lessen their consumption and prioritize social and environmental factors in their purchases. Marketing must normalize sustainable behaviors.

Changing the way clothes are marketed is a good start, but there's still a major problem. The detrimental environmental impacts may decrease, but production continues. The only way that the fashion industry can be sustainable is if companies find alternative business strategies that don't revolve around selling and making more new things. The most powerful fashion corporations, such as Zara and H&M, which release up to 24 collections of clothing per year, recognize that, if they continue with their current business model, they eventually won't be profitable because they are so reliant on raw materials and non-renewable resources. H&M Group's engagement sustainability manager, Hendrik Alpen, explains that they are trying to find a new business model revolving around "how many times we can make a revenue stream out of one product."

A model for this type of sustainable business is Vestiaire Collective, a fashion resale platform out of

Paris. Its entire mission is to act as an alternative to overconsumption and be seen as an example of implementing circular fashion, which involves production with no new materials, reusing these materials until there is no further way for them to be recycled or biodegraded. Vestiaire Collective is practicing the type of marketing that promotes sustainability and investment in long-lasting pieces rather than fast fashion. With its philosophy, "Long Live Fashion," Vestiaire is an example of a sustainable business model that can decrease the industry's overall environmental impact.

If the climate impact of the fashion industry is going to change, there is a lot of work to be done. The EU must require corporations to disclose their total environmental impact, which is currently hidden, by utilizing the lifecycle assessment (LCA)—a method of measuring the carbon emissions or environmental impact of a product from raw material to end of use—so it can work with the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion to create more objective goals rather than vague recommendations. Marketing regulations need to be put into place to stop promoting overconsumption and start promoting sustainability by changing perceptions about purchasing what is trendy. The EU also needs to require circular fashion for all fashion producers. Corporations must take inspiration from companies like Vestiaire to realize that, if they want to have a successful business in the future, they have no choice but to prioritize sustainability. If climate change will truly be tackled by the world's leaders, we need an end to fashion as we know it and begin a new fashion industry without overconsumption.



# MIDDLE EAST



# BEYOND RHETORIC: GENDER APARTHEID IN AFGHANISTAN MET WITH GLOBAL INDIFFERENCE

Charlotte Dubin

"We are being erased," says Kubra Balooch, director of a civil society forum in Balkh, Afghanistan. Since the Taliban re-took Kabul in August of 2021, women's rights in Afghanistan have faced 20 years of retrogression. The response from members of the international community who have repeatedly claimed Afghan women's rights as a top priority has not, on balance, amounted to much more than disjointed lip service.

Since 2021, women and girls in Afghanistan have once again been banned from attending school after grade six, traveling certain distances without a male guardian, and working in NGOs. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has become the Ministry of Vice and Virtue; female participation in civil society has dropped dramatically due to safety concerns; and female suicide rates have risen such that more women than men die by suicide in Afghanistan in a world where more than twice as many men die by suicide than women globally. The Taliban's oppressive gender policies are so well publicized that outsiders have easily been desensitized, allowing for the unconditional legitimization of Taliban governance. Compounding the issue, Afghan women bear the burden of conditions and penalties placed on foreign aid aimed at improving gender equity as the Taliban refuses to comply with various commitments and recommendations.

On the one hand, Western

diplomats maintain a sense of detachment from the realities faced by Afghan women. On the other hand, countries like China and Pakistan promote the idea that the Taliban is rightfully allowed autonomy to rule over women as they see fit. Instead, foreign diplomats—who it is worth noting are overwhelmingly male—prioritize engaging with the Taliban on issues like counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics commitments. Action to assist Afghan women is largely limited to scattered statements. Representatives from an array of countries make their statements in United Nations briefings, whether they are calling on the Taliban to reverse its policies, calling for sustained support for aid and engagement, or sparring between the Russian and American representatives over who left Afghanistan in a better state. The UN, in particular, has released a multitude of statements from its various bodies and officials. For example, the deputy chief of UN Women has called on the Taliban to reverse policies confining women to their homes, the Security Council has passed a resolution condemning the ban on women working for the UN, Secretary-General António Guterres has referred to the situation as "gender-based apartheid," and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan has recommended that states mandate a report on gender apartheid, "galvanizing international legal condemnation and action to end it and ensure its non-repetition." However,

statements and meetings have come and gone, and the situation remains the same. It is clear that the Taliban will not change, and we must instead realize that the existing response is not nearly enough.

One of the most hopeful suggestions to consolidate international pressure on the Taliban's oppression of women has come from a global movement to codify "gender apartheid" as a crime under international law. An open letter from Afghan and Iranian women, international lawyers, and global female leaders points out that the South African system of racial apartheid "eventually came to an end, in part because of decades of pressure and isolation from international actors through shaming and severing diplomatic and economic relations" and demands that governments "interpret and/or expand the legal definition of apartheid under international and national laws to include severe forms of institutionalized gender-based discrimination." University of Michigan law professor Karima Bennouna's detailed outline of the legal case and necessity for this expansion provides a clear model of what must be done. Bennouna argues that existing international legal provisions are insufficient to bring about real change in a government led by a group as obstinate as the Taliban, and that without this expansion, international law inequitably "addresses discrimination on the bases of sex and race." The situation in Afghanistan is best represented as apartheid because rather than a simple unequal separation on the basis of sex, this discrimination grounds the Taliban's governance itself. Because the bulk of human rights treaties treat the state as the actor responsible for implementing changes, these provisions are insufficient when the discrimination at hand is a stated purpose of governance.

The apartheid framework is characterized by cumulative and concerted action, which is why it is useful in the presence of an obstinate perpetrator. In the event that a state is committing apartheid, the Apartheid Convention holds second-state parties responsible for adopting legislative and judicial measures to suppress and prevent apartheid and similar segregationist policies, as well as to prosecute those responsible. Furthermore, the apartheid framework offers a unique opportunity to all countries, beyond the permanent Security Council members and their peers, to effect real

change, as demonstrated by the leadership role that newly decolonized states played in ending apartheid in South Africa.

Recognizing the ongoing situation of gender apartheid in Afghanistan, aid donor countries must better coordinate with Afghan civil society on aid delivery and work to strengthen Afghan civil society. Conditioning aid based on ideas of the Taliban abiding by gender parity standards by which they will likely never abide is not the solution. Cuts in aid only continue to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Rather, donors should maintain a sustained effort to deliver sufficient aid, working through the channels of Afghan civil society and partnering with UN organizations to implement aid projects. Working to both coordinate with and strengthen Afghan civil society is the most effective way to apply pressure on the Taliban so as not to harm the general population, as women human rights defenders (WHRDs) from Afghanistan have repeatedly asked. Further, donors and non-governmental organizations outside of Afghanistan must recognize the 21st-century opportunity to support Afghan women virtually. Namely, they should provide increased support to initiatives that provide remote education and career opportunities to Afghan girls and young women, facilitate enrollment in foreign universities for those Afghan women who desire such a thing, and commit to a sustained effort to translate and disseminate materials created by Afghan WHRDs around the world.

Whether it is a fantasy that the Taliban will respond to polite requests or an unwillingness to expend real political capital, international actors continue to demonstrate the inadequacy of their approach. If the international community is going to engage with and legitimate Taliban governance, they cannot be allowed to do so without sincerely addressing the harm that the Taliban causes to half of their subject population. A wide swath of international actors, including governments and nongovernmental organizations, must adopt a forceful, multi-pronged approach rooted in concerted action to legally name the Taliban as perpetrators of illegal gender apartheid, take all associated legislative and judicial action, place more women in diplomatic delegations dealing with Afghanistan, ramp up aid administration, and bolster Afghan civil society. Anything less is unconscionable.

# FROM THE SHADOWS OF WAR: IRAQ'S SHI'A MILITIAS IN THE WAKE OF THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

*Sophie Clark*

Forged in the crucible of resistance against Saddam Hussein, Iraq's Shi'ite militias quickly rose from a fractured insurgency to a paramilitary enterprise entrenched in the Iraqi state and backed by the Iranian regime. With allegiances now extending far beyond Iraq's borders, these militias have come to symbolize a confluence of regional and sectarian interests that profoundly impact the stability, sovereignty, and future of Iraq. Now, as the militias have become embroiled in a conflict more than 600 miles away, a volatile new dimension has been added to the already intricate web of regional dynamics. The involvement of Iraq's Shi'ite militias in the Israel-Hamas war has cast a dark shadow over Iraqi stability, ushering in potentially dire consequences for the fragile nation.

Iraq's Shi'ite militias rose to prominence in the wake of Saddam's oust in 2003 as the country spiraled into a vortex of violence and instability. The toppling of the Sunni regime and the power vacuum left in its place created the perfect window of opportunity for the impassioned militants. In the absence of a robust state apparatus, the militias stepped into the void, not only combating ISIS during its height but also exerting considerable influence over Iraqi governance and security. Often imbued with deep religious convictions, these militias quickly found themselves torn between their nationalistic aspirations and their affiliations with Iran, a neighboring Shi'ite powerhouse. Iran, perceiving Iraq as a strategic counterbalance, seized this opportunity to cultivate close relationships with the militant factions, with support extending beyond ideological alignment to include the provision of arms, training, and financial resources. These transactions were underpinned by a strategic game plan: by nurturing these paramilitary groups, Iran could extend its influence into Iraq, cultivating a network of loyal proxies that would counter rival Sunni-majority states and safeguard Iranian interests—all while posing minimal risk to Iranian troops and affording the regime a degree of plausible deniability.

Over 60 of these militias form Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a state-sanctioned umbrella organization recognized as an auxiliary of the national security forces since 2014. The October 2022 appointment of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani significantly bolstered the domestic power of the PMF militias, allowing the groups to become deeply entrenched in the Iraqi state through economic expansion and a broadened patronage network. Yet, al-Sudani seems to oppose the influence of

the militias to some extent, as they do him. The prime minister has maintained a working relationship with the United States, supporting a continued U.S. military presence and moving to reduce Iraq's energy dependence on Iran—both direct counters to the PMF's interests. Militia leaders have expressed dissatisfaction with this "appeasement" of the United States, urging followers to prepare for the eventual overthrow of al-Sudani's government.

However, the prime minister has done little—if anything—to counter the militias' influence, as evidenced by the nearly two-fold increase in PMF troops since 2021. The further entrenchment of the PMF in the Iraqi state, compounded with the group's dissatisfaction with state leadership and its continued association with Iran, could allow the group to consolidate its dominance over Iraq, paralleling the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. Teetering on the verge of an insurgency, it may only take one spark to propel the PMF into a complete consolidation of power.

On October 7, 2023, one such incendiary force took root when the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas launched a series of coordinated attacks on Israel. The attacks, called Operation al-Aqsa Flood, included a barrage of over 3,000 rockets, vehicle-powered incursions into Israeli territory, and brutal massacres along the southern Israel-Gaza border. The initial wave of attacks resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 Israelis and the capture of nearly 250 hostages who were taken into—and largely remain in—Gaza. Within six hours, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared war on Hamas—a conflict that has since claimed an estimated 15,000 Palestinians.

In the shadows of this war, the conflict-ridden enterprise of Shi'ite militias has reprised the unity once employed against the ISIS caliphate, this time facing a very different enemy. This coalition—the Islamic Resistance of Iraq (IRI)—is not a group itself but rather a collective attribution mechanism used by Iran-backed PMF militias, many of which are U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations. When the war first erupted, multiple soon-to-be IRI militias vowed retaliation against U.S. troops in Iraq, should the United States become involved in the conflict—a promise that mirrors the PMF's years-long strategy of striking U.S. positions to counter and reprimand Western involvement in regional affairs. Within one month of al-Aqsa Flood, IRI rocket and drone attacks against U.S. positions skyrocketed, reaching over 50 in just 21 days of live fire. The United States responded in kind, launching three sets of narrowly tailored airstrikes against Iran-linked facilities in Syria.

This escalation marked the expansion of a conflict brewing for decades. A war once confined to the borders of a contested state now extended hundreds of miles, fueled by the rage of the financier of the IRI and Hamas. Since the start of the war, U.S. leaders have advocated for containment; beyond destabilization, an expanded regional conflict would disrupt critical oil markets, fuel Islamist extremism, and draw attention away from the already politicized war in Ukraine. But, the logical arguments in favor of containment became less intuitive after October 17th, when Iran-backed militias launched their first attack on U.S. bases in the Middle East since the start of the war.

Despite the three sets of U.S. airstrikes, the barrage of attacks against American assets has remained steady—and neither the militias nor the United States show any signs of backing down. As was the case in World War I, the danger now lies in the growing possibility that one actor's attempt at deterrence is interpreted as an act of aggression by the other—or that one rogue rocket lands on a civilian target and causes a rapid spiral into armed conflict. As Iran's proxies continue their attacks in Iraq and Syria, there is a substantial risk that the clashes steadily escalate, leading to yet another intractable and unnecessary war in the Middle East. This risk is compounded by internal divisions. While the Iraqi government vehemently condemns Israel's actions and supports the Palestinian cause, al-Sudani refuses to cut ties with the Americans, even condemning the IRI's attacks on U.S. assets. Even more hazardous are the intensifying rivalries among the militia factions, whose race to "out-radical" one another could further escalate tensions with the West.

With the Israel-Hamas war in full force, al-Sudani must navigate a delicate balance between the interests of the United States and those of his militias. Inaction by the prime minister to meet the diverse demands within Iraq is not an option—it could lead to his removal from office. If violence resurfaces and al-Sudani is removed from power, the PMF is likely to gain increased domestic influence, challenging conventional state-building practices and leading to broader violence—and possibly another civil war—with infighting among the organization's factions escalating in the struggle for power. Increased tensions with the United States may exacerbate these internal divisions, risking a power vacuum that extremist groups could exploit. Between political strife and the potential for military escalation, the Israel-Hamas war has placed Iraq in an extremely volatile position. Absent a formal de-escalation, Iraq may lose its young government to a military coalition.



# SAUDI ARABIA'S EDUCATIONAL PIVOT TOWARD CHINA

Josephine Ness

With the introduction of Mandarin classes, Saudi Arabia's schools are not just teaching a language—they are opening doors to a new global era.

The status quo of language education in the Middle East has been, in most cases, the study of Modern Standard Arabic in addition to another Western language—usually French or English. Saudi Arabia has been teaching English in schools for several decades. However, in recent years, the Saudi government has been promoting Mandarin education in schools as part of a broader initiative to strengthen ties with China and prepare Saudi youth for the country's new political and economic agenda.

As Saudi Arabia embraces Mandarin, it not only equips its youth with the linguistic tools to engage with the world's second-largest economy, but also signals a potential realignment away from Saudi Arabia's strong alliance with the United States. This shift in language policy is an indication of Riyadh's recognition of the shifting global power dynamics—and its intention to position itself advantageously within them.

According to a report by the Saudi Gazette news portal, Saudi Arabia mandated the inclusion of Mandarin classes for students in both public and private secondary schools. This new requirement will be effective from the beginning of the new academic session in August of 2024, requiring all incoming students to study Mandarin in school. This decision follows the Crown Prince's announcement of preliminary plans to include Mandarin Chinese language in the curriculum of Saudi public schools in a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2019.

The growing relationship between Saudi Arabia and China is crucial for both countries as they pursue their respective economic visions: Saudi Vision 2030 and China's Belt and Road Initiative. Expressing China and Saudi Arabia's shared interests, the Crown Prince stated that "the Silk Road Initiative converges, and China's strategic orientations, in a very large way, with the Kingdom's Vision 2030." Saudi Vision 2030 is a strategic initiative created in hopes of fostering "a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation" through economic diversification, public sector development, and the reduction of dependency on oil revenues. By aligning with China's Silk Road Initiative, Saudi Arabia aims to leverage mutual interests in trade, investment, and development. In essence, this educational shift is a strategic investment in building linguistic and cultural bridges that can facilitate enhanced Sino-Saudi cooperation in alignment with both countries' strategic goals.

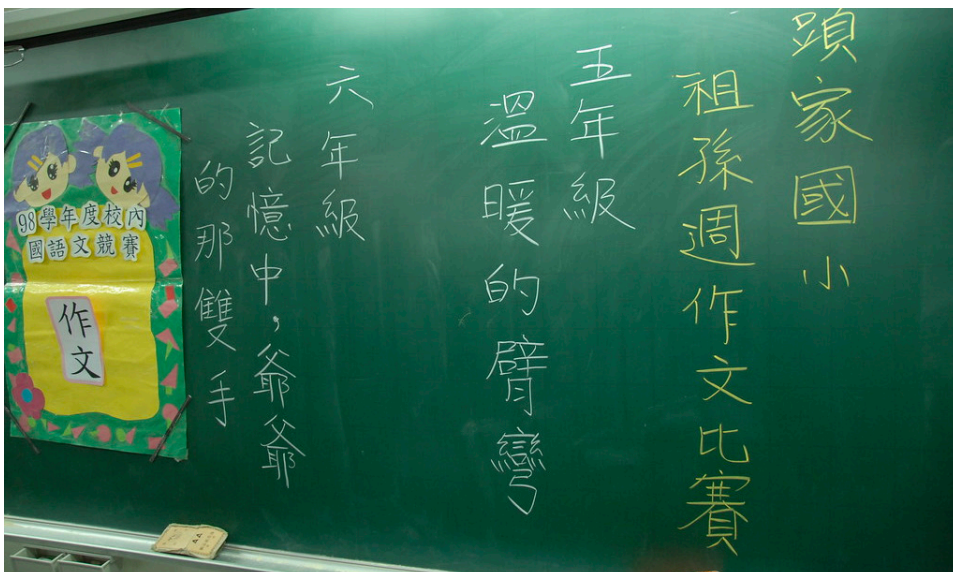
The Saudi government also hopes that promoting Mandarin will make Saudi Arabia a hot spot for Chinese tourists. While Saudi Arabia is the second biggest tourist destination in the Middle East, with almost 8 million tourists in the first quarter of 2023, the majority of visits are still religious pilgrimages. Saudi Arabia hopes to make a name for itself as a tourist destination with more to offer than Mecca, and a key Saudi Vision 2030 goal is to welcome four million Chinese tourists by 2030. To facilitate this, Saudi Arabia has launched direct flights between Jeddah-Beijing and Riyadh-Beijing and included China in its 3-minute e-visa program. Additional incentives like the 96-hour stopover visa program offer convenient travel options for Chinese visitors, including services like Mandarin signage at airports

and Chinese customer care hotlines. Tourism serves as an important avenue for culture exchange, and increased interaction between the Saudi Arabians and the Chinese provides an environment for fostering further connectivity and understanding.

China has a lot to gain from improved cultural and linguistic ties with Saudi Arabia. The introduction of Mandarin language classes in Saudi Arabian schools aligns with China's broader strategy to secure Gulf energy resources and counterbalance U.S. influence. China's increasing dependence on Middle Eastern energy, particularly petroleum, and the long-term projections of this reliance highlight the strategic importance of the Gulf region for China. By incorporating Mandarin in Saudi education, China strengthens cultural ties and positions itself as a key player in the region.

Although both countries are heavily invested in the success of this initiative, it already faces significant challenges. Including cultural instruction in language classes proves difficult for instructors, who often feel the need to shape their curriculum to avoid discussing aspects of Chinese culture that conflict with Saudi Arabia's conservative religious and cultural values. This obstacle is further compounded by the fact that most of the Mandarin teachers are Saudi nationals who have undergone intensive Mandarin courses without having spent time in a Mandarin-speaking country, limiting their understanding of the language's ties to culture. Critics of Mandarin education in Saudi schools also argue that the existing flaws in the educational system need to be fixed before introducing a new language curriculum. Teaching quality varies significantly, as numerous teachers are without the necessary training or experience. Additionally, a lack of motivation to learn a target language and outdated passive teaching methods inhibit students' abilities to successfully acquire proficiency in new languages.

Other Arab countries are beginning to offer Mandarin in their national education systems as well. The UAE, Egypt, and Tunisia have begun teaching Mandarin in public schools, and sixteen Arab countries have launched Chinese language majors at their universities. In the UAE, the introduction of Mandarin courses began in 2006, and since then, the number of students learning Chinese has surged to over 45,000. These developments across various Arab nations highlight a significant shift in language education and cultural exchange, pointing towards a deeper engagement and collaboration between the Arab world and China.





# SYRIA'S ETHNIC & GEOPOLITICAL QUAGMIRE IN THE NORTH

Ammar Ahmad

On September 22, 2014, the United States formally entered the Syrian civil war with the declared objective of combating ISIL as a component of Operation Inherent Resolve. The discourse circulating around American intervention in Syria today, however, focuses largely on counterterrorism, and it tends to neglect the Kurds' historical struggle for sovereignty and self-determination. It is no surprise that the West is uninterested in the implications of the struggle, with its interests lying mainly in the extraction of Syrian oil, the advancement of Israeli interests, and the delimitation of Russian intervention in the region. But, to properly address the question of American intervention in northern Syria, we must first understand the political history of the Kurds.

In late 1960s Iraq, at the initiation of the Ba'ath Arabization campaign, which preached Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, Kurds found themselves under an Arab cultural hegemony that resulted in persecution and ethnic cleansing. From village burnings to settlerism, the Kurdish identity was violently targeted by the Ba'ath ideology. Concurrently, Syria pursued a similar line of oppression under the leadership of Ba'ath leaders such as the late Hafiz al-Assad and his son, current president Bashar al-Assad, committing violations of international law against Kurds, including denial of Syrian citizenship. This creates a dilemma in which Kurds—who have no claim to a nationality other than Syrian—are trapped in Syria, where they face continuous persecution, meaning that not only will they continue to be discriminated against in the land of their birth but also that, without passports and legal documents, they will lack the legal means to relocate to another country. With this historical background, it is easy to see how the concept of a Kurdish state—Kurdistan—was initiated in Iraq. It is also not difficult to see how an organization such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was able to garner various alliances across northern and eastern Syria, which has a large proportion of minority non-Arabs such as Armenians and Turkmen.

Whenever a minority or an oppressed people in a country experience such a bloody history, there is a familiar historical motif: Western intervention and the exploitation of the subsequent struggle for material and global imperialist gains. This is precisely the case with the Kurds in Syria. The SDF is armed and funded by the United States and works closely with American troops in establishing oil extraction sites. This symbiotic relationship allows the Kurds to fight against their oppressors and the United States to profit from the rich oil fields in the north.

The situation, however, isn't so elegantly profitable for both sides, with the main obstacle being Turkey. The Kurds, having faced a similar ethnic persecution in Turkey, formed dissenting political organizations such as the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1978, which aims to gain control of Kurdish areas of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Given that the PKK's sole goal of establishing a confederation of semi-autonomous Kurdish regions 'threatens' the national security of Turkey, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has continuously worked to push the PKK out of Turkey and into Syria and Iraq since 2015, justified by a fear of Kurdish nationalism that functions as a political scapegoat for Erdoğan's poor economic management.

The United States maintains Turkey's support as a top priority, leaving the Kurds in a parlous situation: they are actively fighting against groups that are backed by the very same country that backs them. In 2019, for example, former United States Vice President Mike Pence was sent to negotiate with Turkey resulting in the creation of a 130-kilometer buffer zone along the northeastern Turkish border some 30 kilometers into Syria that forced the SDF to withdraw from the area. What makes all of this more ironic is that the SDF maintains close ties with the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by the United States. In fact, the People's Defense Units (YPG) was renamed to "Syrian Democratic Forces" by the United States in a superficial effort to dampen the group's PKK links given the latter's status as a United States-designated terrorist organization.

In August 2012, the Obama administration released a statement indicating that the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government would cross a "red line" and could lead to American intervention. However, Obama quickly backpedaled and, two years later, he entered Syria under completely different premises—ones that should theoretically unite him with Assad against the common enemy of ISIL. His administration understood that there was no incentive for the United States to directly challenge the Assad regime if there was a steady profit to be made in this pocket of instability, indicating the current intervention that relies on Kurdish militias is simply a part of the United States' hegemony in the region and resource exploitation.

Some political analysts have even argued that American support for the Syrian Kurds is a benefit to Erdoğan. This means that Erdoğan

can leverage the terrorism and fear of the Kurds for political gains. The narrative around the American support of the Kurds fixates on the paradoxical concept of regulating the Kurds and advocating for their right to self-determination, never thoroughly addressing the fact that Turkey and the United States are much more politically aligned than the SDF and the United States are. This creates a fragile political environment in which the SDF is serving a very limited role that will likely not allow for Kurdistan to manifest itself in Syria.

Tensions continue rising to this day. On September 18th, the SDF clashed with Turkish groups, leaving some 13 soldiers from the Syrian opposition dead. On August 28, 2023, US-allied Arab and Kurdish soldiers clashed, leaving three dead in Deir el-Zour, Syria. Then, on September 18, the SDF clashed with Turkish groups, leaving some 13 soldiers from the Syrian opposition dead. With factors such as Russian military drills, Iranian support, and the Israeli bombing of Damascus, it's difficult to predict the future of the Kurds.

The question of nationhood for the Kurds is multiplex: they are facing active persecution from the North by Turkey and from the South by the Syrian regime, all while being militarized by the United States, which holds Turkey to be an ally. The central question becomes: is establishing a Kurdish region in northern Syria possible? Given that the United States has at least 17 bases in Syria—and given that a top American general urged for the continuous occupation just last year—it is possible that Kurdistan could converge with American priorities in the region. But, considering Turkey's interests, it's much more likely that they will be loosely managed in the chaos of the instability.



# ISIS, LOOTERS, & RESTORATION: MODERN ARCHAEOLOGY IN IRAQ

Sean Durbin

The glowing bastion of history known as the Cradle of Civilization is considered to be the world's largest treasure trove of early civilization's archaeology—it is a place mentioned in a multitude of history classes across the world. After all, it is the region where the first systems of writing and justice were introduced—where the very idea of civilization emerged and where the insights into the development of what it means to be human have hailed from. However, the Cradle is far removed from the powers that once ruled over it; gone are the Sumerians and Babylonians, whose cultures provide these pictures of the ancient world as new countries developed with new governments. In its current form, the majority of these artifacts and sites lay in modern-day Iraq; as a result, these precious parts of history have been subjected to the same strife that the country that houses them has—from the destructive violence of ISIS militants to the impacts of the U.S.-led war. This is why, today, it has become essential to fund, support, and create programs to protect the rich history of the Cradle, or else risk losing many of the most critical archaeological finds in human history.

The humanitarian crises, violent upset, and increase in the terrorist actions of ISIS are well-known and are the subject of numerous articles from Western media outlets; however, the impact of these events on the field of archaeology in Iraq is far less recognized. The extremist ideology of the Islamic State led the group to turn to acts of iconoclasm (purposeful destruction of cultural heritage) in an attempt to destroy cultural heritage not in direct support of their beliefs—this caused militants to wage a full-on attack on Iraq's rich history. In public statements, ISIS called for members to “destroy and obliterate...landmark[s] of polytheism” as buildings of the ancient Assyrian capitals Nimrud and Nineveh were ransacked

and all pre-Islamic relics were destroyed due to their “idolatry” despite the fact that there is no widespread belief among Sunni Muslims that such artifacts are sacrilegious. In addition to attacks on historical sites by ISIS, Iraqi museums were also subject to this type of heritage scrubbing: famously, the Mosul Museum had thousands of pieces smashed and broken in performative acts of destruction when ISIS took control of the city in 2014. Any artifacts that ISIS chose not to obliterate were often sold on the black market as a way to fund their operations, scattering Iraq's heritage all over the world to unscrupulous buyers and collectors. Therefore, the rise of the Islamic State resulted in a devastating loss to the archaeological community and a blow to efforts to preserve the region's rich history.

On March 20, 2003, the United States and its allies began an eight-year war on Iraq; during this time, Iraq's artifacts first started to become widely pillaged and plundered, both by soldiers and fortune-seekers who used the chaos of the war as a backdrop for their robbery. For instance, the Iraq National Museum was infamously looted during the war as more than 15,000 artifacts were stolen and distributed through the black market—two-thirds of these artifacts remain missing to this day. The U.S. military was also far from innocent in these endeavors; accounts from citizens and archaeologists detail how the U.S. surrounded the Iraq National Museum with tanks while mafias stole relics from inside. Additionally, the U.S. turned the ancient city of Babylon into a military base, destroying clay coneiform figures to make mounds of soil—and similar actions occurred in other cities, such as Nimrud. This was compounded upon sporadic attacks by organized crime groups that exploited the violence and confusion in war-torn cities across the country to steal relics from

historical sites and museums. These groups also carried out illegal excavation campaigns, excavating, and then delivering, countless never-before-cataloged artifacts to collectors. Horrifyingly, though dealers in Israel and the United Arab Emirates made up the majority of illegal trading in the aftermath of the war, many artifacts ended up in U.S. citizens' private collections (such as that of Hobby Lobby founder David Green) and even made their way to American museums like Washington's Museum of the Bible.

While the activities of ISIS and the ramifications of the Iraq war have had devastating effects on the archaeological history of the country, it is slowly being restored by the government. The Iraqi government has facilitated the transfer of more than 17,000 stolen artifacts from the U.S. back to its museums, such as the Mosul Museum, Iraq National Museum, and Iraq embassies. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry—the entity facilitating these transfers—has been largely praised for its positive actions by scholars within the country; however, experts warn that far more work must be done to return lost and stolen relics, and most of these artifact transfers have only occurred under the Biden Administration, long after the end of the war. Museums within the country have also just started to reopen—the Iraq National Museum opened its doors to the public for the first time in years in 2022, but did so with only a fraction of the collection it once boasted. Artifacts from the Mosul Museum are in the beginning of the restoration process with the help of the Louvre and Smithsonian despite predictions that it will remain closed for the foreseeable future. Restoration efforts have also benefited from the increase of European archaeologists returning to work in Iraq after years of war and insurgency discouraged them from excavating important sites there; in addition, archaeologists have already reported incredible finds within the country that have helped add to the vast understanding of the Cradle's history and help re-populate the country's museums to make up for lost collections. While this work is unable to replace all artifacts lost due to conflict in the region, the work of modern archaeologists remains promising in restoring the lost cultural heritage of the region.

Despite the easing of tensions in Iraq and the end of the Islamic State's rule over the nation, the country's archaeological history is far from safe. The scars of war remain highly present in the region, with minefields posing a threat to archaeological excavation sites and preventing operations, and the Iran-Iraq war damaging certain sites along the countries' border. Even after the widespread efforts of the Iraqi government to reclaim artifacts from other nations, there are still an estimated tens of thousands of relics stashed in private collections throughout the world. While the U.S. has been more amenable to returning looted artifacts, countries such as Italy, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel have all been involved in widespread black markets for looted artifacts. Israel, in particular, has been unwilling to return stolen items to Iraq despite international pressure to do so, with a “treasure trove” of Iraqi relics held in Tel Aviv since 2014 despite a promise from the U.S. to facilitate their transfer. Even as the U.S. turns over thousands of stolen artifacts to the Iraqi government, they also still hold onto thousands of scrolls, claiming the need for “restoration”—another significant challenge for efforts to revitalize archaeology in Iraq.

It is undoubtedly a positive step that archaeology has started to become viable in Iraq once again, as the government of Iraq and the U.S. seem willing to help with restoration efforts. While millennia of information have been lost forever at the hands of ISIS, the situation is far from hopeless; in fact, the loss of this knowledge only underscores the importance for the nations of the world to continue locating and returning stolen artifacts especially considering the role other countries have had in the decimation of Iraq's archaeological history. Additionally, current revitalization efforts seem to be progressing at a slower pace than can be afforded—with the fact that every year increases the likelihood that stolen relics will be destroyed or lost forever, it is clear that Iraq cannot be expected to bear the sole responsibility for preserving the rich history of the Cradle. In the end, the history of the Cradle is the history of humanity, and it is all of humanity's responsibility to preserve it.



الله  
فدا من المرحوم  
عبد المرحوم

Cemetery destroyed by ISIS in Al Qayyarah, Iraq (2016)

# WHY REMITTANCES ARE SURPRISINGLY BENEFICIAL TO THE QATARI ECONOMY

Dana Dughbaj

Tight living quarters, a low minimum wage, and long tiresome workdays are workplace deal breakers for many, but for the migrant workers of Qatar, they are a needed sacrifice. These workers are able to turn a blind eye to such conditions due to Qatar's nonexistent income tax and ability to export salaries. Almost all expats in Qatar engage in the export of a portion of their wages, called remittances; the portion of wages or goods sent to a worker's home country. In 2017, the IMF estimated that the influx of remittances to countries amounted to 596 billion USD globally. In addition to remittances aiding the economic development of developing countries where it is difficult to find a decent-paying job, they are also creating a more diversified work pool in economically developed countries, especially Qatar. The availability of remittances has significantly increased job creation in Qatar, led to worker diversification, and positively impacted the balance of payments. Although this is less argued amongst economists, remittances have had an increasingly positive impact on the Qatar economy. To ensure that the economy continues to reap these benefits, Qatar must prioritize the treatment of their migrant workers.

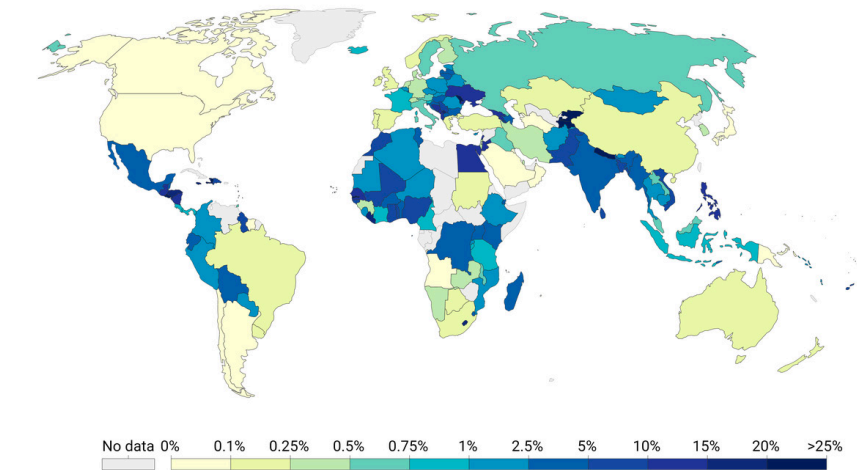
Qatar's economy is built on migrant workers and expats. Whether it be hands-on construction or their world-class education, the number of employed expats in Qatar substantially outnumber nationals. As of October 2022, Qatar's population was estimated to be 2.9 million people, with only 380,000 of them being Qatari nationals. Because foreigners in Qatar can only reside there if they are employed, as stated under the "kafala" system, it is clearly evident the productivity of the Qatari economy can be significantly attributed to expats. Most of those who work in Qatar only choose to do so because of the advantageous job opportunities and the high income they are able to attain.

For Qatar, one major benefit to remittances lies in its balance of payments. A country's balance of payments can be defined as the difference between payments flowing into and out of a country over a given period of time. Qatar is a country widely known for its year-after-year surplus in its balance of payments, meaning they constantly take in more money than they lose. According to a statement released by the Central Bank of Qatar, the balance of payments in the second quarter of 2023 amounted to a surplus value of 7.9 billion Qatari Riyals (2.1 billion USD). Qatar is one of the few economies in the world with a large balance of payments surplus, and this value can be attributed to Qatari exports, specifically oil, given the country's status as one of the top 20 highest oil-exporting countries in the world and the recent diversification of the Qatari economy. While there are undoubtedly benefits to a surplus, such as an appreciating currency on the foreign exchange market, certain

## Personal remittances as a share of GDP, 2017

Personal remittances comprise personal transfers and compensation of employees. Personal transfers consist of all current transfers in cash or in kind made or received by resident households to or from nonresident households. Compensation of employees refers to the income of border, seasonal, and other short-term workers who are employed in an economy where they are not resident and of residents employed by nonresident entities.

Our World in Data



Source: World Bank

CC BY

drawbacks make a current account surplus less appealing to a nation's central bank. Namely, appreciation leads to reduced export competitiveness as exports become less appealing to foreign countries due to the higher prices. Therefore, remittances that flow out of Qatar and are counted as a leakage to the economy create a more even balance of payments without the risk of a decreasing net export amount.

Qatar has seen an increasing number of migrant workers over the years, mostly due to the harsher working conditions of less economically developed countries such as Nepal where it has become increasingly difficult to find work. Many men in Nepal resort to seeking employment in foreign countries such as Qatar to provide for their families. So much so, that about one quarter of Nepali annual income is an influx from their citizens working abroad. Most of the countries in blue on the map depicted above are where expat workers in Qatar come from, illustrating just how critical remittances are to their economies. Nepali workers share anecdotes of their lives before and after working abroad, where one would have a house made of mud, and in four to five years, they are able to build a proper house for their family at home. Nepalis and Bangladeshis are tied for having a population of 400,000 in Qatar, and Indians surpassing them at 700,000 expats. Therefore, it is likely that if migrant workers' wages did not allow for remittances, then the migrant worker population would significantly decrease in Qatar, and thus a halt in productivity in the economy would be prevalent. So, while the argument of remittances being a "leakage"

to the economy will present itself, it seems to be a minor loss in the scope of the more considerable gain of expat labor. As a consequence of the World Cup of 2022, areas of concern and voices of disapproval are beginning to unfold as the families of migrant workers demand compensation for illnesses and death of their loved ones who worked tirelessly to build the eight stadiums and infrastructure utilized in the World Cup. Many workers who leave the GCC after their time working abroad are claimed to have been affected by "occupational asthma," which follows them for the remainder of their lives. A handful of workers passed away during the construction process, the reason usually attributed to weather or a work accident. And while there is no doubt that these are valid reasons, Qatar should ensure that worker safety is at their utmost priority. If this is not prioritized, there is definitely the concern of the expat population plummeting in the country.

Economists will typically assert unequivocally that remittances are certainly not a goal for a nation, nor do they desire them because they take money out of the circulation of the domestic economy. However, for Qatar, remittances continue to aid the leveling out of their balance of payments, as it simultaneously attracts a diverse workforce to the country. The ability to export salaries without an income tax has brought in over one million migrant workers. They have undoubtedly helped grow the Qatari economy, and to continue to reach their full potential, Qatar should prioritize their treatment.

# FROM THE WRETCHED TO THE RESISTANT: DECIPHERING THE INEVITABILITY OF PALESTINIAN ARMED UPRISING

*Mauricio Duran Kaddatz*

The Palestinian territories serve as a vivid illustration of the enduring legacies of colonial politics and their ramifications. The startling events of October 7th took the global community by surprise, revealing complexities in moral and political landscapes that many found difficult to navigate. In this context, a number of postcolonial theorists swiftly contextualized Hamas' actions within the broader narrative of decolonization, sparking debate and condemnation within mainstream discourse. However, these theoretical perspectives offer crucial insights. Adopting a postcolonial lens is essential for a nuanced understanding of the conflict. This approach underscores the genesis of Palestinian armed resistance as rooted in the protracted and thwarted efforts at decolonization by the Palestinian people. Such efforts have, over generations, escalated into cycles of violence, making the actions of groups like Hamas an anticipated outcome within a postcolonial framework. This discourse aims not to justify the events of October 7th but to situate them within a theoretical context that acknowledges the complex legacy of colonialism. By examining these events through the principles of postcolonial theory, we can better appreciate the historical and systemic forces at play, highlighting the significance of decolonization as a critical lens for understanding the dynamics of resistance and the quest for autonomy within the limited agency of Palestinians.

Armed violence was characteristic of the Palestinian conflict even before it took its current form; both Zionist and Palestinian armed groups carried out guerrilla warfare against the British during the Mandate period. But the Palestinians were facing a twofold struggle for decolonisation: not only were they contending with British colonialism, but they also grappled with a growing settler colonialist entity that was to replace the British. With the Western-backed partition in the 1940s, Israel was able to set the frontiers of its colonial project. This division displaced over 800,000 Palestinians, forever etched in Palestinian memory as the Nakba—"grand catastrophe" that gave birth to the first generation of Palestinians suffering under the new colonialism. Unlike in traditional imperial colonies, however, there was no exploitative relationship between coloniser and the colonised. Instead, two zones started emerging: colonial and to-be-colonised. These were not complimentary—they were opposed. Those Palestinians remaining in Israel lived under military law; those in the Jordanian and Egyptian parts of

Palestine were refugees, hindering any form of organic political agency building. Fanon would call both "Manichean"—marked by a rigid, binary opposition between coloniser and colonised.

Post-1967, with the Six-Day War and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian resistance intensified and shifted towards militarisation, highlighted by the rise of groups like Fatah and Hamas. This marked a transition from nationalist struggle to armed resistance, aligning with Fanon's views on colonised peoples resorting to violence as a last stand for liberation. The rise of radical Islamist factions like Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas represented a strategic shift to utilise Islam not primarily for religious fundamentalism but as a unifying force against the perceived failures of secular movements. Israel's reaction to the ascent of Hamas played a pivotal role. Viewing the rise of an Islamist group in Gaza as a potential counterbalance to secular Palestinian factions, Israel perceived Hamas as a divisive force that could hinder a unified Palestinian front in peace negotiations and thus gave it financial support, mirroring the colonial tactic of 'divide and rule' that Frantz Fanon critiqued. However, the international and Israeli response to this emergence of decolonising prowess was not decolonisation. Instead, the failure of the Oslo Accords of 1992 fragmented the West Bank: establishing zones out of Palestinian control and compartmentalising the Palestinian people, intensifying psychological and economic wounds. The second manifestation of public outrage was the Intifada of 2002, which again was met with physical barriers, as in the construction of the separation wall, and systemic, exemplified by the apartheid classification by Amnesty International in 2022. This creation of patches of wretched earth was met with an increase of violent resistance in response.

And these dynamics are only accelerating in increasingly shrinking social and political development spaces. Many perceive the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a puppet of Israel, and it is now contending with challenges from both the public and emerging armed factions. While it has managed to maintain some degree of domestic stability, the sociopsychological health of Palestine is deteriorating: 40 percent of Palestinians are clinically depressed, and 69 percent of Gazans experience PTSD. Seeing no other option, support for armed resistance is on the rise. In 2021, when asked about their preferred approach to the current situation, only 39 percent supported "an armed struggle against the Israeli occupation", while 10 percent opted for "non-violent resistance." Fast forward to September 2023, and the sentiment has shifted: 58 percent now support confrontations and

an armed intifada, 52 percent advocate for dissolving the Palestinian Authority, and 71 percent believe that the continued expansion of settlements renders the two-state solution unfeasible.

This shift has also reached the Palestinian resistance, moving away from traditional factionalism that once characterised its structure. The emergence of new groups illustrates this shift, reflecting a deeper, more nuanced form of resistance.

The Lion's Den, originating in Nablus, and the Jenin Battalion, from the Jenin Refugee Camp, represent a departure from the long-standing practice of armed groups functioning as extensions of political factions like Hamas and Fatah. These new entities embody a more decentralised resistance model, a response not just to Israeli occupation but also to the perceived inadequacies of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Their formation is rooted in a generation of Palestinians who have grown up under the shadow of occupation, witnessing the expansion of Israeli settlements and recurring violence in Gaza. These groups consist primarily of young, disillusioned men who operate independently of established political parties. They are known for their grassroots initiatives, which range from armed confrontations against Israeli forces to advocating for commercial closures in Palestinian cities. This approach has led to blurring traditional lines within Palestinian politics. For instance, the Lion's Den includes members affiliated with Hamas, Fatah, and even Palestinian Islamic Jihad, showcasing a newfound unity that transcends old factional divides. This shift in the landscape of Palestinian resistance has significant implications. It challenges the existing narrative of Palestinian militant activity being solely an extension of political objectives set by parties like Hamas and Fatah. The decentralised nature of these new groups makes it more difficult for Israeli forces to preemptively target them, as they lack a clear political platform or centralised leadership. This fluidity directly challenges Israeli military strategy and complicates their efforts to address the rising tide of resistance.

The increasing prevalence of armed groups, transcending traditional political affiliations and ideologies, reflects a shift in military strategy and a profound ideological transformation. The attack by Hamas on October 7th was not an isolated incident but rather a continuation of a 75-year-old battle for national identity and autonomy. We need to incorporate a nuanced, postcolonial lens into our understanding of these issues before any judgment we pass will be complete. Only by peeling away superficial narratives and delving into the complex interplay of history, power, and psychology can we hope to grasp the intricate realities shaping the current wave of Palestinian armed resistance.

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