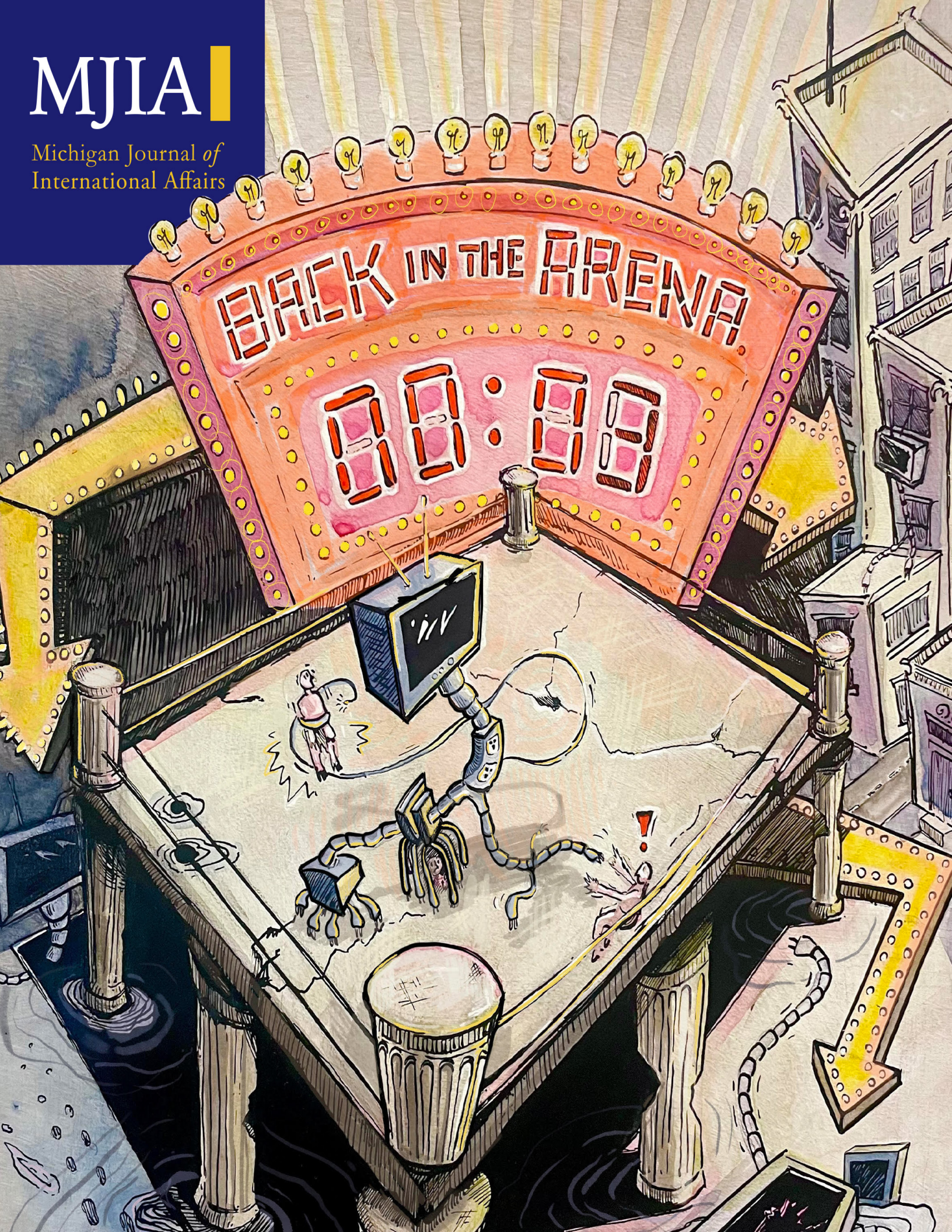


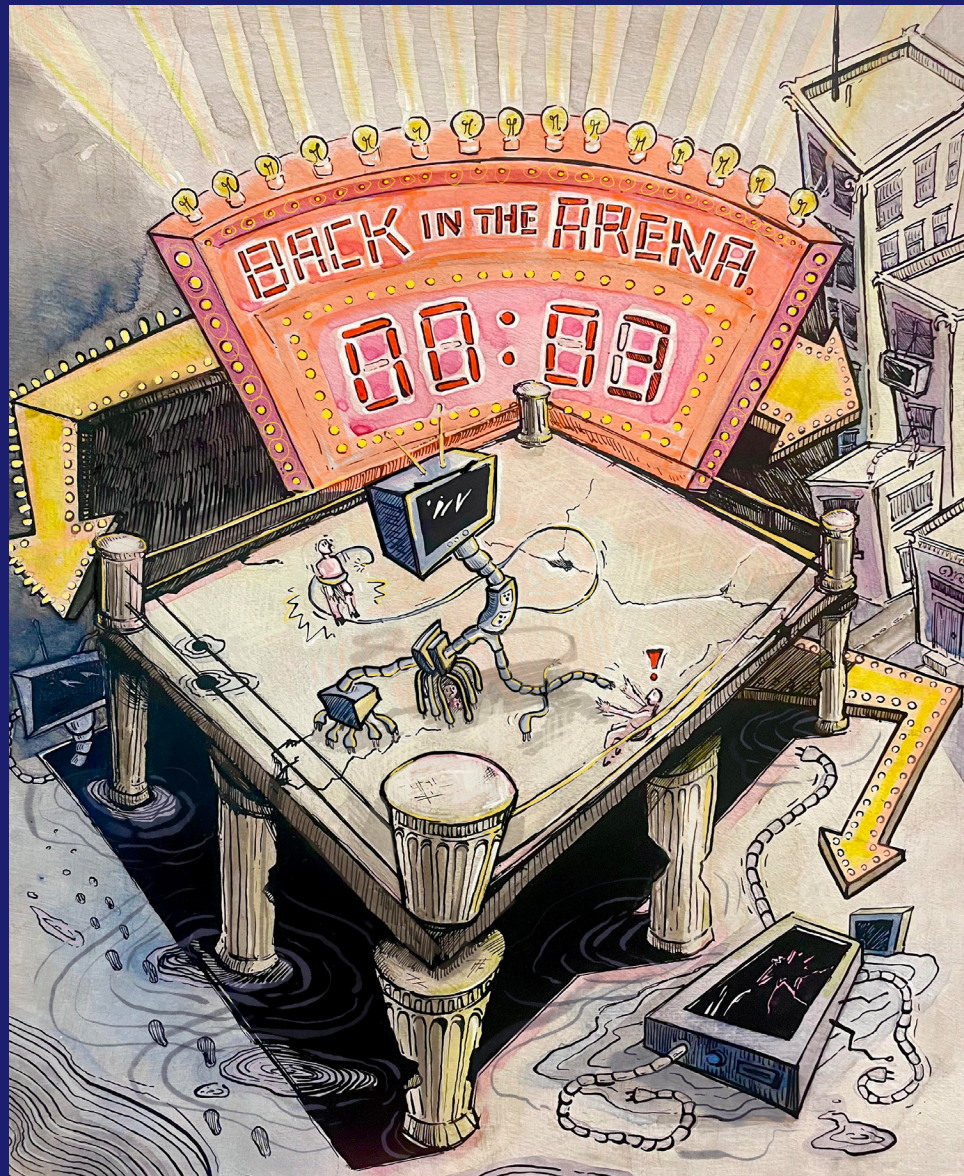
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“Back in the Arena”

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Contact us at MJIA.info@gmail.com

*Cover art by Sarah Gery
Email: slgery@umich.edu
Instagram: [@sarahgery](https://www.instagram.com/sarahgery)*

LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

2023 has been a landmark year for technological development. It has been a year defined by breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and ubiquitous connectivity—and with it, a palpable conflict arises, stemming from the clash between the irresistible allure of modernity and the enduring stronghold of traditional value systems. As we wrote our articles for this semester, we repeatedly grappled with the rapid progress of today’s technological space, along with the industries that support them, across the world. These developments, with their transformative potential and disruptive capacity, challenge the essence of established societal norms and cultural preservation.

Editor-in-Chief Jordan Halpern writes about Guacamaya, an emerging hacking collective in Latin America. Drawing from indigenous American themes, the group is reimagining how to conduct protests in the 21st century, revealing wide networks of local government manipulation, journalist and activist surveillance, and government-sanctioned pollution—yet, at the same time, endangering many aspects of the country’s national security and intelligence apparatus.

Yet, these modern developments also risk expanding upon the disparities that define the past. Aditya Kalahasti writes “India’s 100 Smart Cities Initiative Spells Harm for the Next 100 Years.” In his piece, he explains how the plan—which aims to create clean and modern solutions to India’s persistent poverty in main cities—will serve to reinforce and exacerbate decades-long housing disparities. Kalahasti argues that the new plan, despite the developments in green technology that support it, will impede progress, rather than support it.

This issue also dives into the influence of popular media. In terms of movies and film, Director of External Affairs Josephine Ness writes “The Artistic Freedom in Iran: Jafar Panahi’s Legacy and Iranian New Wave Cinema.” Josephine’s piece puts the renowned filmmaker’s work in conversation with government censorship and harassment and hope for Iranians seeking to challenge the status quo. Writer Fiona Caughey’s “How to (not) save a language: Ireland’s halfhearted deliverance of Gaeilge” outlines the modern representation of Irish language in Irish media and culture, and how this relates to Ireland’s language preservation initiatives. Writer Tiffany Pham highlights abuse in the music industry with “Masked Beneath The Smiles: The Dark Truths of South Korea’s Popular Industry.” These pieces, all exploring how media in their respective regions interact with local laws and conflicts, speak to the spread of cultural knowledge in the media age.

In what feels like a major clash between technology and tradition, we pulled on these themes for the cover of this semester’s issue. Artist Sarah Gery illustrates a boxing ring on a crumbling foundation, surrounded by bright neon signs, as a robot wraps its cords around two people in the ring. “Back in the Arena” speaks to the complexity of the battles between innovation and tradition, requiring a carefully crafted balance between the virtues of innovation and progress and the preservation of heritage, community cohesion, and the intangible fabric of tradition.

- *Michigan Journal of International Affairs Editorial Board*

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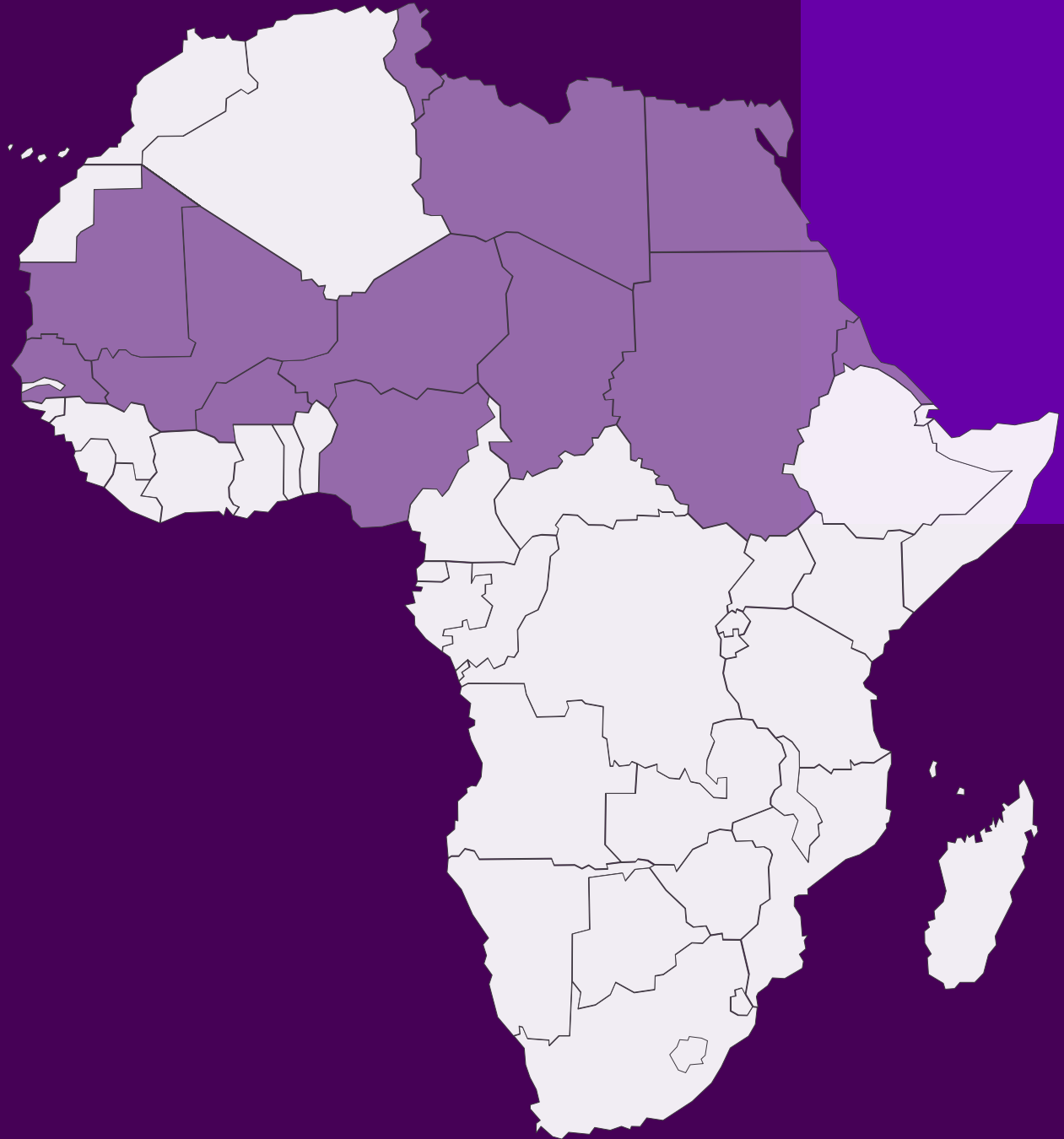
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AFRICA



Fealty in the Sahel

Oscar de Castro

Russian engagement in Africa is not new. In 1960, the Soviet Union backed the UN General Assembly resolution affirming independence for countries and people under colonial rule. Subsequently, the Soviets helped fund liberation movements in South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, and elsewhere on the continent. Over the last decade, Russian foreign policy in Africa has focused on targeting former colonies that have fragile governments, but are often rich in important raw materials, such as gold, diamonds, and uranium.

Capitalizing on the Soviet legacy of activism in Africa, President Vladimir Putin seeks to create dependencies on Moscow's military assets and on paramilitary organisations such as the Wagner Group in order to access African resources and to disrupt American foreign policy objectives. Russia's arms trade and military cooperation with some of the poorest countries in the world is not prefaced by the promotion of democratic norms or the condemnation of human rights violations.

Since 2010, Africa has experienced more than forty successful and failed coups with half occurring in the Sahel – the vast semi-arid region south of the Sahara Desert and including countries in conflict such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Sudan. Governance deficits, non-delivery of the rights of citizenship, frustrated masses, and growing insecurity are chief among the causes leading to coups, rebellions, and communal strife. It is in these fragile societies that Russia seeks to cultivate military, political and security ties to expand its influence in Africa. environmentally-damaging hydrogen made from the methane in natural gas.

The most successful pillar of Russia's unconventional diplomacy is its trade of arms and the deployment of paramilitary organizations. Russian private security companies, such as the Wagner Group, purport to address complex local military and terrorism conflicts with which African governments have struggled. They also offer governments the ability to conduct counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations unconstrained by brutality that would not be tolerated by the United States. In turn, Russia seeks payment in concessions for natural resources, substantial commercial contracts, or access to strategic locations, such as air

bases or seaports.

In recent years, Wagner Group contractors have been deployed across the Middle East and Africa, including Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, and Madagascar, focusing primarily on protecting the ruling or emerging governing elites and critical infrastructure. This is none more apparent than in the Central African Republic (CAR) which has been engulfed in conflict for over twenty years. While the government wields authority in the capital Bangui, it is largely absent from the provinces, where an array of rebels and other armed groups from the provinces exercise their own form of predatory rule. Disappointed by the inability of UN Peacekeepers to restore order, President Faustin Archange Touadéra turned to Russia in 2017. Since being contracted by Touadéra's regime, the Wagner Group has propped up the weak government of President Touadéra by fighting rebel groups, building domestic security capacity, and carrying out development aid. Russian advisers have the government's ear in not just military, but also political and economic matters, causing French diplomats to call the CAR a "virtual client state" of Russia. The relationship is a striking example of how effective Russia has been in the Sahel with a low-cost strategy that mixes disinformation, arms sales, mining activity, and mercenaries.

The Wagner Group is run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a confidant of President Putin. In effect, Prigozhin's quasi-private personal military have become a de facto extension of the Russian state. Despite the expansion of their presence across the Sahel, the fact that mercenarism is outlawed in Russia's own criminal code provides plausible deniability for the Kremlin. In addition to avoiding official Russian military casualties and a public outcry against deployment abroad, the smokescreen of mercenary activities absolves Moscow of taking responsibility for problematic behavior such as egregious human rights violations and abuse of civilians. In the CAR, it is believed that outside of the capital, mercenaries conflate all Muslims with jihadist insurgents, leading to indiscriminate slayings of a religious minority. There is also evidence of mass graves near the informal artisanal mines that the Wagner Group has been accused of plundering in

their efforts to control the flow of gold and diamonds. Wagner has been documented harassing peacekeepers, journalists, aid workers, and minorities.

This low-cost proxy tool for Russian military confrontations in Africa, and for thwarting United States foreign policy without directly implicating Russian troops, is also a smokescreen for their political manoeuvres. CAR's former head of the Constitutional Court, Danièle Darlan dubbed 'the Woman of Iron,' was removed in late October after blocking an attempt to amend the constitution so President Touadéra could run for a third term. She has little doubt that Moscow was behind her dismissal stating that the Russians are making President Touadéra "more dictatorial every day." The international community agrees and a Western diplomat stated, "It's worse than mere propaganda right now - they're shaping Central African domestic politics."

Wagner's presence puts the CAR government at odds with the United Nations and Western governments, who increasingly demand that the CAR end its dealing with the Russian company or risk losing their economic aid. CAR is now in the tricky position of having to balance the benefits of Russia's military and political support with the prerogative of securing the Western financial aid on which it has come to depend - financial support which Russia cannot replicate. Wagner's fighters have shielded President Touadéra from an attempted coup and reset the balance of power on the ground in the government's favor for the first time in decades. "For a couple of million dollars worth of weapons they've essentially acquired a government," said a former US envoy.

In the Sahel, a region that is synonymous with instability, African governments will continue to turn to mercenaries and non-state actors to protect their power. The Wagner Group is perfectly positioned to exploit that need and to act as a proxy for advancing Russian interests in the region. The Wagner Group is likely to stay in Africa, doing the Kremlin's bidding. Sanctions are unlikely to change that. In the meantime the people of the Sahel not only have to contend with poverty, but also with the misery of displacement, violence and death. To advance U.S. objectives of combating democratic backsliding and violent extremism in the Sahel, the United States will have to be smarter when addressing the influence of quasi-private paramilitary organizations.

How Kais Saied's Racism Connects to a Long History of Tunisian Anti-Blackness

Ella Mannino

Tunisia is a country split between worlds, situated between Algeria and Libya with its northernmost region extending into the Mediterranean Sea and reaching out towards Italy. Ninety-eight percent of the population is Arab and Muslim, meaning that the country is predominantly Arab with membership in the Arab League; however, its geographic location in the African continent means that it also holds membership in the African Union and must coexist alongside African neighbors, often complicating perceptions of Tunisian national identity.

Because Tunisia's northernmost point is only about eighty miles away from the Italian island of Lampedusa, the country is an ideal destination for many sub-Saharan Africans who are trying to immigrate to Europe. Over 21,000 sub-Saharan Africans from countries like Ghana, Cameroon, Guinea, and Ivory Coast live and work there, saving up money with hopes of migrating to Italy. Tunisian President Kais Saied, who was elected in 2019, verbally attacked these sub-Saharan migrants in February 2023, claiming that they are coming to the country as part of a larger plot to "consider Tunisia a purely African country that has no affiliation to the Arab and Islamic nations." He called for urgent measures to address the entry of sub-Saharan migrants into the country, who he said have brought "violence, crime, and unacceptable practices" with them.

Following Saied's comments, the country erupted in anti-racism protests, while at the same time dozens of sub-Saharan Africans have been arrested, forced from their homes, prevented from taking public transportation, and have faced verbal and physical assaults in the streets. These racist attacks against sub-Saharan Africans became so life-threatening that the West African nations of Guinea, Mali, and Ivory Coast have announced that they will repatriate any citizens who wish to leave Tunisia due to dangerous

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President Saied's construction of the sub-Saharan migrant population as a political enemy conspiring to erase the country's Arab-Islamic identity has only sparked the underlying racism that has plagued Tunisia for centuries.

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conditions. Though the African Union has condemned Saied's remarks, and he has in turn denounced the "malicious interpretation" of what was meant to be solely a critique of illegal immigration, it's clear that the damage has already been done.

Many have argued that Saied's perpetuation of the great replacement theory, or the theory that the majority population of a country is purposefully being replaced by immigrants, is meant to distract from a worsening economic situation in Tunisia as well as criticism of his undemocratic rule. This is mainly due to his assertion that his political enemies and pro-democracy critics have been receiving payment for the settlement of sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia as part of this larger plot to transform the country's identity. In the month after Saied put forth this theory, dozens of Tunisian political figures, many from the Ennahda party which has openly opposed Saied's dismantling of parliament and constitutional overhaul, have been arrested on grounds of posing a danger to state security.

Though evidence suggests that Saied is attacking sub-Saharan migrants as a distraction from the current political and economic problems plaguing the country, his choice to blame black migrants for the country's problems merely takes advantage of the existing racism that has dominated many facets of Tunisian society for centuries. Tunisia's history of racism and colorism dates back to the early Islamic era, when Arab conquests of African lands led to the enslavement of many Black Africans, whose skin

color was equated with paganism and unbelief in the Prophet Mohammad. Though this enslavement often violated the ideals of racial equality emphasized in Islamic laws, conquerors and slave-owners became hallmarks of Islamic society in the Mediterranean world and persisted into the Islamic Middle Ages.

During this time, according to scholar Stephen J. King, agreements were made to supply certain kings with hundreds of black slaves each year, and Arab-Muslim armies occupying North Africa traded Black Africans across the Sahara. This slave trade was practiced into the 20th century over a time period spanning thirteen centuries, grossly overshadowing the four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is often referred to as "the Veiled Genocide" due to the fact that this slave trade is relatively unknown to the world despite the immense number of black Africans who were trafficked and lost. Additionally, throughout this time period, the word 'abd', meaning 'slave' came to refer solely to Black Africans in the Islamic world, with racial prejudice permeating some of the deepest facets of Arab-Islamic culture- the term is still used in Tunisia today to refer to the black and sub-Saharan Tunisian population.

Slavery continued legally in Tunisia until its abolition in 1841, which is surprisingly early in comparison to other North African countries such as Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania. However, the practice was so deeply entrenched in Tunisian society that it had to be abolished a second time in 1890, and research shows that slaves were still used for domestic and agricultural work in the southernmost, largely rural regions of Tunisia up

until 1956. Today, descendants of former slaves still maintain ties to certain white Arab-Berber families and are often expected to work for them in some form or another. Many Black Tunisians even have lines on their birth certificates which mention the white family that 'freed' their ancestors, especially in southern areas of the country. Segregation was found to still exist in some rural classrooms and buses, with Black students being forced to sit in the back of classrooms and white Tunisians refusing to sit next to those with darker skin. Additionally, human trafficking of Black migrants for domestic labor and prostitution is a prevalent issue in the country, existing as a modern form of Tunisia's historical slave trade.

In 2018, a law was passed aimed at addressing these serious issues by allowing victims of racial discrimination to bring their grievances against perpetrators in Tunisian courts. It enabled Black Tunisians to remove parts of their family names which refer to their inherited "freed slave" status, as well as to press charges against those who verbally or physically harass them on the basis of their race. However, it remains nearly impossible for Black Tunisians to prove that instances of racism have occurred due to the amount of evidence required to press charges, and it's clear that this law has done little to change the culture of anti-black racism in the country.

President Saïed's construction of the sub-Saharan migrant population

as a political enemy conspiring to erase the country's Arab-Islamic identity, despite only making up 0.175% of the population, has only sparked the underlying racism that has plagued Tunisia for centuries. Sub-Saharan migrants serve as the perfect scapegoat for Tunisia's current problems, and the racism that Saïed is fueling only further divides the country in a time of rising inflation and democratic backsliding while harming its relationship with neighbors in the African Union. Only a conscious effort to dismantle the structural racism that is interwoven within Tunisian society can improve this relationship with African neighbors and allow Tunisia to reconcile with its identity as not just a solely Arab and Islamic country, but an African nation as well.



The Politics of Archaeology and the 2011 Libyan Intervention

Simon Moncke

In the 5th century BCE, the Libyan city of Sabratha was founded and operated as a Phoenician trading post. Over the next few centuries, the city rose and fell out of multiple kingdoms and empires. When the Roman Empire colonized North Africa, Sabratha's infrastructure was replanned, and a large Roman theater was constructed. The Theater at Sabratha also changed with the times: Mussolini's archaeologists excavated the site during occupation, the Beatles considered performing their last show within it, and in 1982 Sabratha was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Today, the archaeological jewel of a city built by the Phoenicians—inventors of the alphabet—is covered in crude, written graffiti. It exists as a symbol of Libya's modern position in history that the Theater was added to UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger list in 2016. In early 2023, there were increased appeals to the Libyan Antiquities Department to preserve the site. The archaeological damage at Sabratha is one among many instances.

Since NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya, political insecurity has led to the destruction and smuggling of hundreds of Libyan artifacts and sites. Considering this outstanding instability and threat to Libyan cultural heritage, it is important to examine the tension between the West's embrace of international principles on cultural preservation and the material outcomes of the Libyan intervention—as seen in scholarship and cultural preservation efforts contra continuing Libyan instability. The contradictions in Western academic and conservationist focus on Libyan cultural heritage and the continuing instability rooted in NATO's intervention, show the way archaeology orbited the West's insufficient approach to Libya's human suffering.

In January and February 2011, Libyan citizens—inspired by the Arab Spring protests in Egypt and Tunisia—began countryside protests against Muammar al-Gaddafi's regime. The state responded with riot-force units, helicopters, and tanks which violently cracked down upon unrest, killing hundreds of civilians. Libya was soon embroiled in a civil war between opposition forces and the regime. The intervention began in March 2011 as a NATO-led coalition imposed a no-fly zone over Libya and ostensibly began an air offensive intended to overthrow Gaddafi—which, however, did not contain a strategy for Libya's reconstruction. By 2012, despite the provisional government's request for an extension of the operation, the

mission was ended, and NATO forces had left after Gaddafi's removal in October 2011.

While the humanitarian calls to end the Libyan state's brutality by the United States and NATO were unquestionably just, an underlying cynicism pervaded many leaders' discussions of the intervention. For example, upon hearing of Gaddafi's assassination, former American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reportedly said, "we came, we saw, he died". Likewise, a certain cynicism pervaded scholarship and punditry focusing on Libya's cultural sites—which amount to scholarly footwork for Western strategic interests. An internet search today on "Libyan archaeology" presents a series of academic articles—some thankfully discussing the need to address the damage to Libya's cultural heritage post-2011—much of which is littered with the same axioms of Libya's degrading cultural sites and artifacts pre-2011. This is not to say that these sites and objects were treated well under Gaddafi's regime—although, the assertions in many articles do seem to be overstated considering the prestige of the Libyan Department of Antiquities in the 1970s to 1990s. But rather, this literature, by so heavily focusing on Gaddafi, highlights a preference for stones over people: that the past and future are balanced poorly enough that cultural preservation can serve as a rationalization by academics for military intervention.

At the same time, cultural heritage itself has suffered in Libya post-intervention. Twelve years after the intervention, Libyan society is still reeling from their two civil wars and the damage done during the NATO intervention. An interim authority was established in 2021 after the formal ceasefire between competing militias in 2020. This government immediately came to a deadlock and its elections remain forestalled to this day. Any existence of a central governmental body is weak and thus armed groups have continued to be rampant. Cultural heritage has suffered both from smuggling and destruction during the conflict. The Theater at Sabratha was in fact previously damaged amid the clash of rival militias in 2017. It is estimated that between 500 and 1,000 artifacts were smuggled between 2011 and 2022. Besides from ancient sites, Sufi cultural sites have been particularly targeted by Islamists. For example, the Sidi Sha'ab Mosque—a mausoleum and mosque for the Sufi community in Tripoli—was bulldozed by militants in 2012. This destruction has occurred in the atmosphere of militia conflict, but equally in the context of economic immiseration—whereby smuggling has

become a means of survival for some.

In recent years, there has been a range of international projects aimed at protecting Libyan sites and artifacts from such destruction. The US has particularly aided the repatriation of smuggled artifacts. For example, in 2018, it signed an agreement making it illegal for certain archaeological and cultural objects from Libya to enter the country without official documentation. UNESCO has also worked with INTERPOL and regional security to increase vigilance on the transit of Libyan cultural property. In defending cultural sites, multiple bodies—including embassies, ICCROM, and UNESCO—have worked towards policies to increase security and fund conservation efforts upon vandalism. Even as these projects have been extensive, they have mostly only succeeded in preservation efforts, not protections. The same conditions exist whereby cultural sites and objects are destroyed. The extent of these projects further points to a contradiction in a humanist focus on cultural heritage materially, as archaeological scholarship shows intellectually.

Since 2011, Libya has suffered a loss of economic potential estimated at roughly 163.72 billion USD. The United States and European Union—key players in the NATO intervention—have, however, provided roughly 900 million and 96.29 million USD, respectively—numbers not even on the magnitude of the economic damage done. Ironically, the protection of Libyan cultural heritage from future attacks relies upon reconstructing the Libyan state and society. Yet, this discrepancy of focus also highlights a tacit preference for cultural preservation over human protection. Because Libya's contemporary bind would not exist as it does without NATO intervention and a lack of reconstruction strategy on the part of Western powers.

The extent to which contemporary Libya's woes may be causally connected to NATO's intervention is contested. However, the upheaval of Libyan society post-intervention in which NATO played a significant role complicates humanitarian narratives of the intervention. Likewise, the use of rhetoric focused on protecting cultural heritage should be scrutinized given the problems facing contemporary Libya. The monitoring of five Libyan archaeological sites—including Sabratha—and international preservation efforts are inspiring but have not prevented continuing damage across the country based on instability and economic conditions. Most importantly, the discourse of cultural heritage supersedes a humanitarian focus. An international approach focused on both the stable protection of its cultural heritage and the safety of Libyans requires a much more extensive policy.





AMERICAS

Learning from the Past: Ancient Solutions for the Water Crisis in Peru

Abby Green

Located in the heart of the Peruvian desert, sits one of the driest cities in the world, Lima, Peru. Home to nearly one-third of the country's population, the Peruvian capital receives just thirteen mm of rainfall annually, 187 times less than the Amazon rainforest. With Lima's demand for water significantly exceeding its water supply, the city is forced to find water sources outside the city limits. Historically, mountain glaciers in the Andes mountains of northern Peru have supplied water to three rivers—the Rímac, Chillón, and Lurín—feeding into Lima; however, as a result of climate change, these Peruvian glaciers are disappearing preventing Lima's water supply from recharging. Currently, the water management and distribution system in Lima, Servicio de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado de Lima (Sedpal), is only equipped to supply fresh water to Lima residents for twenty-one hours a day. Nonetheless, the already strained Sedpal system is expected to see more frequent, intense water shortages as the climate warms, putting Lima at risk of a humanitarian crisis disproportionately affecting poor and vulnerable communities.

Critical to understanding Lima's water crisis is recognizing the role of socioeconomic status in the perpetuation of water inequality, insecurity, and injustice. In the latter half of the 21st century, an economic and political crisis in Peru led to a mass migration of citizens from rural Peru to the city. As a result, people with limited monetary resources settled in large, informal settlements called *barriadas* along the edge of Lima. However, these territories were not intended for living. Lima's formal public water network does not extend to these territories leaving the population vulnerable. According to a recent study, the wealthiest households in Peru consistently had access to safe drinking water, while the poorest households—primarily in the *barriadas*—were the first to experience the effects of water insecurity, including outbreaks of disease, limits on economic prosperity, and decreased educational opportunity. In an effort to mitigate these problems, a proposal to introduce a water network to the *barriadas* has been written, but due to the intense urban growth and already established populations in the *barriadas*, its cost is an obstacle. For the government to effectively address this inequality and prevent the collapse of Lima's water supply, the efficiency of Lima's hydraulic plan needs to include a proper balance between the demand

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As scientists are finding out, modern technology, though useful, does not always equate to better results. In Peru, scientists are taking this lesson to heart.

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for and sustainable use of resources, and regeneration of the water supply.

A report published by the World Bank in 2019 revealed that the Peruvian government's conventional strategies to manage drought—dams, reservoirs, and storage under the city—will be inadequate by 2030, putting millions at risk. Current modern, conventional water management strategies, such as dams and reservoirs, were implemented with little consideration of their effects on the environment. As a result, the very practices intended to solve the water crisis have intensified it. Damming, a common water management practice destroys natural ecosystems such as wetlands and floodplains that act as carbon sinks, deprives ecosystems of nutrients leading to desertification, and creates wastewater through sediment buildup. In places experiencing the worst of the water crisis, like Peru, the mistakes of unsustainable water practices are fatal to the water cycle and the ability of freshwater to be revived.

In Peru, the *Camuneros*—members of an agricultural collective—uphold the belief that if preserved and respected the earth will provide. Lucila Castillo Flores, a local member of the *Camuneros*, highlights this relationship with water: “If we plant water, we can harvest the water. But if we don't plant the water, then we will have problems.” The *Camuneros*' respective and intuitive relationship with their water supply has prevented water waste, maintained local ecosystems, and allowed them to sustain a consistent water supply. Oftentimes, the public neglects the expertise of the indigenous and native populations, but as research has proven this traditional viewpoint rooted in eurocentrism has made the public and environment vulnerable.

Unlike conventional strategies, natural technology supports the ecosystem as it employs the environmental processes already in place rather than altering the environment. As scientists are finding out, modern technology, though useful, does not always equate to better results. In Peru, scientists are taking this lesson to heart.

Scientists in the highlands north of Lima in the village of Huamantanga are studying pre-Incan water management techniques with the potential to mitigate Peru's water crisis. Using water canals called *Amunas*, the locals can divert water from the mountain streams during the wet season and direct the flow of water into natural water basins. Due to the slow velocity of water as it travels underground through layers of gravel and soil, the water surfaces months later downstream during the dry season. This allows the watershed to naturally replenish itself, providing water to irrigation systems that support local agriculture without increasing stress on the environment and water supply. Furthermore, utilizing the natural flow of water from the Andes mountains to the desert has the capability to extend water to Lima and other dry parts of Peru. The water used for irrigation permeates back into the ground, revitalizing the rivers that reinforce Lima's water supply, and providing millions of people with a reliable water source during the dry season. The restoration of *Amunas* could potentially provide 99 million cubic meters of water to Lima each year, more than double Lima's current 5 percent water deficit all while preserving the natural ecosystems.

While the landscape, culture, and history of Peru are unique, the importance of water and the severity of the water crisis is universal. Similar to Lima, other cities in South America, La Paz, Santiago, and Quito, are also facing the growing threat of water scarcity due to glacier retreat. The solutions utilized in Peru don't need to be localized. Rather, the *Amunas* system and ancient technology has the potential to solve water problems across watersheds. In a situation as grave as the water crisis, governments must consider all solutions—old and new.

La Sentencia and Generational Statelessness in Hispaniola

Samantha Klos

On September 23, 2013, approximately 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent were declared stateless. This was the consequence of the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court Ruling 168-13, widely known as *La Sentencia*. The ruling retroactively denationalized anyone born in Dominican territory to undocumented inhabitants since 1929 and specifically targeted Dominicans of Haitian descent—an extension of anti-Haitian collective memory and policies that have existed for two centuries. The country has failed for nearly a decade to reach any solution, causing a problem of generational statelessness. This group of affected people, though born in the country and once protected by *jus soli* (birthright citizenship), are now considered illegal foreigners. However, given the historic recruitment of Haitian laborers and active ignorance of policies created to mend the situation, the Dominican Republic must reverse this law.

Though it was sudden, *La Sentencia* was not surprising. Anti-Haitian rhetoric has been growing in the Dominican Republic for years. For most of the 20th century, Haitian migrant workers saw a stronger Dominican economy that relied on the sugarcane industry. Thousands were legally contracted as cane cutters and enjoyed a much stronger economy than Haiti's own—in fact, Dominican officials and businesses actively pursued and assisted Haitian workers. However, *antihaitianismo* was institutionalized during the father-son Trujillo dictatorship from 1930 to 1994. This administration committed a mass execution against Haitian laborers known as the 'Parsley Massacre,' where laborers who could not pronounce *perejil* (parsley) in the 'Dominican way' without revealing an accent were killed. Then, when the sugarcane industry fell in the 1980s, both old and new migrant workers looked for jobs

elsewhere in the Dominican Republic. The influx exacerbated a fear among some Dominicans that an invasion was taking place, which has been consistently stoked as Haitians are still driven to flee unrest at home. To this day, Haitians migrate to avoid the lack of jobs, consequences of natural disasters and broken infrastructure, gang violence, and general political instability at home.

La Sentencia is the most extreme nativist and anti-Haitian policy to take place in the country since the Parsley Massacre. It represents "a crucial stage in a process of historical revisionism promoted by Dominican authorities" that denies the right to nationality from people born to undocumented parents and immigrants with "irregular status." But these categories are deceiving—first, Haitian migrant workers and their descendants were considered to be "irregular" and permanently "in transit." Second, since the mid-1900s, it has been common practice for officials to illegally deny proper documentation to individuals they believe are of Haitian descent.

The policy reversed the *jus soli* rule that existed in the Dominican Republic prior to 2010, meaning that now, individuals born in the country between 1929 and 2010 to parents who were unfairly deemed "irregular" or undocumented were denationalized. The Dominican Court defended this decision by arguing that 'nationality' is more than a legal term, but a "set of historical, linguistic, racial, and geopolitical traits," and without them, one cannot share "particular [Dominican] idiosyncrasies and collective aspirations." Yet, *La Sentencia* has led to reports of 3rd generation Dominicans, with no substantial connection to their Haitian ancestors or Haiti itself, becoming stateless.

In 2015, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) reported that Ruling 169-13 dis-

proportionately applied to people of Haitian descent, who are often identified "correctly or incorrectly" based on the birthplace of their parents, skin color, language, or last name, which arbitrarily denies their fundamental rights to equality, non-discrimination, and nationality. It also neglected an earlier IACHR precedent set in the 2005 case *Yean and Bosico v. Dominican Republic*. The case was brought on by two Dominican girls born to Dominican mothers who requested copies of their birth certificates, but were denied them due to their Haitian ancestry. The IACHR ruled in favor of the girls, arguing that these acts of discrimination were unlawful and prevented the girls from exercising their rights to nationality, equal protection, and education, among others. The Dominican Government immediately rejected this decision, and has since stood by this sentiment. The negative implications of *La Sentencia* are far-reaching. Immediately afterward, Haiti received a mix of deportees and "spontaneous" arrivals (which may include those who fled out of fear of deportation and unreported deportees). This total surpassed 100,000 people and is still growing today as Dominicans of Haitian descent continue to be rounded up in mass deportations and dropped off at the border. Haiti itself cannot accommodate them amidst their current turmoil and increasing legitimization of gangs. With nowhere for migrants to turn, the number of makeshift refugee camps on the border increased dramatically, and the conditions were awful—malnutrition, disease, and violence were rampant. Again, these realities have become generational. The denationalized children of 'irregular' or 'transitory' Haitian migrants without valid documentation lack the necessary requirements to seek education, formal work, adequate healthcare, and participate fully in society.

The invisible consequences are also severe. Dominicans of Haitian descent have been increasingly subject to human trafficking, from forced labor to sexual exploitation. *La Sentencia* exacerbated existing patterns on the island of undocumented people becoming more desperate for work, and therefore vulnerable to trafficking and dangerous types of informal labor. Again, these realities are ignored by officials. For example, in 2018, the Dominican Republic reported that there had been 96 victims of human trafficking that year, but that none were of Haitian descent. Although, major reports suggest these counts are false. While people of Haitian descent are often

trafficked, they are not included in official counts because they are seen as criminals, not victims. Children of trafficking victims then share these circumstances, creating a cycle until they are discovered. Even then, trafficked undocumented, black, and poor individuals are typically deported to Haiti before being offered support services.

One decade later, the Dominican Republic has still not adequately addressed the issue. In 2014, the Court introduced Law 169-14, a non-comprehensive plan that responded to international criticism over Law 168-13. The new law was advertised to create an administrative process that would restore nationality to those in the Dominican Civil Registry, or a more complex process for those not in the Registry that would register them as a foreigner and then allow them to apply for naturalization. However, this new policy lacked transparency, promotion, and had only a one-year window for applications—meaning most stateless individuals missed out. It also placed the burden of proof on those affected. Regardless, the Dominican Republic has refused to report how many applications were accepted and how many are still 'waiting.' This policy has not been revised or re-implemented in any way, and is condemned as a false display of redress.

In deliberately limiting the potential of Law 168-14, the Dominican Government has signaled that they recognize the presence of the crisis. In order to avoid further human rights abuses, international condemnation, or legal proceedings, they must act upon it. The problem with Law 169-14 itself was not necessarily its content, but the lack of transparency that surrounded it. The framework required to reverse *La Sentencia* is already in place, the Dominican Republic just needs to apply it openly and permanently. But it can't stop here—future generations of Dominicans of Haitian descent must also be protected. The reinstatement of *jus soli* and the addition of monitoring mechanisms to prevent future discrimination by Dominican officials would ensure this. Finally, it must address the consequences of denationalization found at the border and in human trafficking schemes with increased social support services and oversight. Until these steps are taken, the statelessness crisis in the Dominican Republic will only grow closer to the magnitude of those considered the worst in the world—from Myanmar to Syria to Côte d'Ivoire.



AMLO's Renationalization: Betting Mexico's Energy Future on Fossil Fuels and Failing Infrastructure

Jack Marin

Annually on March 18th, Aniversario de la Expropiación petrolera, or the Anniversary of Oil Expropriation, is observed across Mexico—a civic holiday to commemorate President Lázaro Cárdenas' 1938 nationalization of the country's oil reserves. This nationalization ushered in a period of sustained growth in Mexican energy markets, peaking in the 1970s. This period of great success for the nation's state-owned energy companies would come to a close by the 1980s at the hands of global financial turmoil; a decades-long process of gradual market liberalization in an attempt to recapture past growth followed. However, beginning in 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the sitting President of Mexico, brought an end to this long period of liberalization. Obrador has overseen the renationalization of the energy industry, returning competitive advantages to inefficient state-owned firms at the cost of increased energy bills, weakened relations across the Rio Grande, and slowed renewable energy development.

Like much of Latin America, Mexico maintained strict import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies up to the 1970s. These strict protectionist measures blocked imports that otherwise may have substituted goods produced domestically. Primary beneficiaries of Mexican ISI policies and energy nationalization were Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) and the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE), the state-owned oil corporation and electric utility respectively. This era of sustained growth for Mexico's energy state-owned

enterprises would come to a close with the recession of the 1980s and the subsequent Mexican debt crisis, beginning in 1982. Prior to this crisis, Mexican real GDP per capita growth had averaged 3.3 percent annually from 1960; between 1982 and 2016, this averaged 0.7 percent. Likewise, the Mexican peso saw an annual inflation rate of 61.8 percent in 1982 and peaked at 142.8 percent in 1987.

In the midst of this economic hardship, Mexican policymakers began to push national strategy towards a more neoliberal trade policy. Trade liberalization and privatization are central to the platforms of Mexico's two dominant parties, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Until 2018, these two parties together were the sole holders of the Presidency since the transitional Maximato ushered in the modern Mexican party system beginning in 1928.

Despite policy differences, at their core, both PRI and PAN maintain a preference towards market liberalization, which was put into law when Mexico entered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. More recently, Mexican neoliberals achieved their crowning victory after decades of measured efforts: energy privatization, enacted through a constitutional amendment passed under the PRI's President Enrique Peña Nieto in late 2013. For the first time since 1938, Mexico's state-owned energy enterprises, both oil and electric, were once again subject to private competition. In conjunction

with NAFTA, private competition in this case was, in large part, synonymous with American competition. Foreign multinationals enthusiastically leapt at the opportunity to reenter the once again open-for-business Mexican energy market.

The near century-long dual PRI and PAN grip on the Mexican Presidency came to a close in 2018 with the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, perhaps more commonly known by his initials AMLO. Obrador fashions himself as a leftist, casting the previous centrist and center-right so-called globalist PRI and PAN administrations as enemies of his eponymous Obradorismo style of populist politics. Since taking office, central to his mission of a nationalist rebranding of the Mexican economy is the "rescue" of Pemex and CFE, as he described it in his Second Annual State of the Nation address. To this end, the Mexican state has launched a bureaucratic war on foreign energy firms while granting preferential contracts to state-owned firms.

Pemex and CFE, with the support of the deep pockets and favorable regulatory climate of the Obrador-headed state apparatus, have edged private investment out, despite substantially higher operating costs compared to the latter. This burden is pushed to consumers, either directly through higher utility bills or indirectly through subsidization. Obrador's 750 million USD rescue package for Pemex in the form of tax cuts, along with an additional 7.4 billion USD in cash injections between 2019 and 2021, make this indirect burden obvious. Pemex remains the most indebted oil company in the world and the ninth most indebted company globally across all sectors.

Because of AMLO's actions against foreign investment, renewable energy growth in Mexico has declined. While some Pemex and CFE investment is allocated towards renewable energy sources, the majority of these investments flow to fossil fuels. Foreign energy investment, conversely, tends to flow in a comparatively greater proportion

to renewables. By stifling foreign capital inflows into Mexico's renewables sector, AMLO has made his nation's climate commitments, to which the Mexican state has committed 48 billion USD, more difficult to achieve at best and near impossible at worst.

At the same time, a brewing storm of retaliatory tariffs from the United States and Canada surrounds Obrador's platform. Last year, the American and Canadian governments lodged a joint complaint against Mexico, claiming that preferential treatment given to state-owned firms violates the U.S.–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), the successor to NAFTA. The U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai stated "Mexico's policies have largely cut off U.S. and other investment in the country's clean energy infrastructure," and representatives from Ottawa echoed a similar sentiment. Characteristically, AMLO describes the American and Canadian responses to his energy policy as products of corruption. "Nothing is going to happen", he responded to the press, and proceeded, in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, to play a song by Mexican artist Chico Che titled *Uy Que Miedo*, or "Oh, How Scary".

While energy policy lies central to the platforms of Presidents Biden and Trudeau, Obrador stands alone among his closest partners in North America. Through his renationalization campaign, AMLO has brought an end to the attractiveness of Mexican energy markets to investors abroad. At the same time, domestic energy consumers are faced with rising utility costs while simultaneously fronting the bill for bloated and hugely indebted state-owned enterprises with their tax dollars. Nationalization efforts have diminished renewable growth, while worsening relations with Mexico's northern neighbors and, in all likelihood, prompting soon-to-arrive punitive tariffs. By forgoing foreign investment in energy infrastructure, AMLO has bet Mexico's future on deteriorating CFE infrastructure and the longevity of oil—bets that the rest of the world would be wary to wager.

Deforestation in the Amazon is Causing a Human Rights Crisis

Levi Herron

The Amazon rainforest spans nearly 2.5 million square miles, almost the size of the contiguous United States, and is home to incredible biodiversity and natural life. The forest has historically served as one of the earth's greatest carbon sinks and is home to tens of thousands of unique plant and animal species. Despite this, the Amazon is being destroyed—an estimated 17-20 percent of the Amazon's rainforest has been cleared in the last fifty years as the agriculture, mining, and logging industries chip away at the wilderness.

The Amazon is home to numerous indigenous tribes that have made the rainforest their home for thousands of years, but the encroachment of commercial interests have put their way of life and survival in danger. As deforestation escalates, the resulting environmental catastrophe has caused a human rights crisis for these communities. As their lands are destroyed, the native peoples of the Amazon have been faced with disease, violence, and an annihilation of their traditional way of life. In order to accurately determine the impacts of this deforestation and act upon it, the devastating effects on the indigenous population must be recognized by the governments of the region. In addition, these governments must designate indigenous lands as protected territory, strictly enforce environmental laws, and support indigenous groups in their efforts to defend their own lands.

According to Survival International, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting native peoples, there are about 400 indigenous tribes residing in the Amazon, made up of over a million people. One of the largest of these tribes is the Yanomami, who reside on the border of Brazil and Venezuela in a territory twice the size of Switzerland. Since their first contact with modern civilization in the 1940s, the Yanomami have faced regular attacks at the hands of miners, large-scale pollution from mining operations, and continued destruction of the forests they rely on for their livelihood by cattle ranchers, loggers, and gold miners who often have connections to organized criminal groups. This is all in spite of the fact that mining is banned on their lands. In addition, malnutrition is rampant as their hunter-gatherer lifestyle has been damaged by the loss of forest lands, and diseases introduced by outsiders have wrought havoc on the population.

While the challenges facing the Yanomami are representative of the issues confronting most indigenous tribes in the Amazon, there are dozens of uncontacted tribes that face additional challenges. The uncontacted tribes, who either have no contact with modern society or avoid such contact at all costs, face extreme risks from the cattle ranchers, miners, and loggers invading their land and destroying the forests they have depended on for thousands of years. Because they avoid contact with modern civilization, these tribes have no immunity from common illnesses and are in danger of extinction from diseases brought in by outsiders. The tribes also face unprovoked and genocidal acts of violence by invaders hoping to clear them off their land so it can be exploited. Despite the vulnerability of these tribes, both contacted and uncontacted, the governments of the Amazonian countries



have failed to designate much of their land as protected territory. Even when they have, they make little effort to enforce laws to protect said territory. Deforestation is putting the existence of these uncontacted tribes in jeopardy. Unless there is immediate and forceful government action to designate their lands as protected and enforce regulations to protect it, these tribes and their immeasurable cultural history and natural knowledge will be lost forever.

The government of Brazil, the country which contains the largest portion of the Amazon, has historically had inconsistent and often weak responses to illegal deforestation. A recent study showed that 98 percent of “deforestation alerts,” reports to the Brazilian government of deforestation, resulted in no enforcement action whatsoever from the government. This is in spite of the fact that a reported 99 percent of deforestation alerts show some evidence of illegality. There have been successes in reducing deforestation, but they are dependent on the strength of enforcement. Brazil was able to significantly reduce deforestation rates between 2004 and 2012 through the creation of protected areas and the use of satellite imagery to detect illegal logging camps.

The progress reversed soon after however, as loggers began using new techniques that are harder to detect. To exacerbate the problem, environmental protection and law enforcement agencies were significantly weakened by budget cuts. When President Jair Bolsonaro took power in 2019, deforestation and the destruction of indigenous lands further increased as he opened protected lands to exploitation and rolled back enforcement of environmental laws, making it easier for the violent criminals responsible for much of the deforestation in the Amazon to go about their business. In the face of these continuing threats, many indigenous groups have been forced to take up arms against their attackers, putting their lives on the line to protect the forests

they call home. These “forest defenders” are effective at protecting their lands, but face significant threats from those invading their ancestral territories and lack support from government entities.

While deforestation decreased under the administration of leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who served as President from 2003 to 2010 and was elected last year for his second non-consecutive that began in January 2023, the scale of the destruction is still huge. The new president described the plight of the Yanomami as a genocide, referencing the diseases brought in by miners as well as the large-scale pollution of the lands and waters that the tribe relies on. While these developments are promising, the reality on the ground in the Amazon is still one of rampant deforestation and suffering for the indigenous peoples that call the region home.

Across the Amazon rainforest, the tribes that reside there are currently faced with catastrophic disease and malnutrition, destruction of the forests that they rely on for their sustenance and livelihoods, pollution poisoning the waters they drink and fish from, and widespread brutal violence. The deforestation of the Amazon is an environmental catastrophe, but it is also precipitating a devastating human rights crisis. The impacts of deforestation on the indigenous peoples of the Amazon must be recognized as a human rights issue, and treated as such. The lands traditionally occupied by indigenous tribes must be designated as protected territory and strict regulations established to protect it. These regulations must be enforced aggressively by law enforcement and violators should be subject to harsh punishment. In addition, indigenous tribes should be empowered to defend their own lands, as they have been forced to do for decades, and supported in their efforts to do so. The response must be consistent and strategic; the existence of the Amazon rainforest, and the lives of its indigenous peoples hang in the balance.

What You Think You Know (But Really Don't) About Tax Havens

Amer Goel

In 2016 and 2017, the Panama Papers and the Paradise Papers shocked the world, exposing a total of four terabytes of financial data and comprising the biggest data leak in history. These papers revealed the hidden tax structures of some of the most prominent figures in the world, including heads of state—such as the former presidents of Argentina, Ecuador, and Ukraine—and the offshore activity of Vladimir Putin and Queen Elizabeth II. The unprecedented leak exposed how high-profile individuals across the world avoided paying legitimate national taxes by diverting their funds through tax havens, which are autonomous nations that attract wealth since they lack common taxes like income taxes, corporate taxes, and capital gains taxes. For many people, these papers were an upsetting realization that the wealthy and powerful of the world were escaping the tax structures that many of them created, highlighting the need for systemic, international change. These events sparked international fervor and created a grassroots impetus calling for national governments to crack down on tax havens around the world. An enraged international public looked with contempt toward their own leaders, quickly losing trust in their political institutions. Most were ready to blame tax havens, pining for their elimination—but they were not aware of the consequences this elimination could have.

What should be eliminated is the abuse of tax havens, illustrated by the actions described in the Panama and Paradise Papers to avoid taxation. These actions impose undue harm on citizens without any justification. Tax havens themselves, though, provide other benefits that cannot be ignored, and eliminating them blindly would erase all of these benefits to the global economy. Specifically, they provide stability for marginalized entrepreneurs in unstable

environments, which encourages economic activity and movement. They also retain companies in the countries that govern them, which increases job opportunities and prosperity. Many of these havens also depend completely on these companies and policies, so it is unfair to the residents of these nations to disallow them.

The Cayman Islands is a particularly interesting example of a useful tax haven. This jurisdiction is a self-governing British Overseas Territory that, as of 2022, had 119,128 active companies registered in its jurisdiction. It is a popular destination for large corporations and hedge funds because it is tax neutral, which means it has no direct taxes on income, property, or capital gains. It also has protective tax privacy laws, which can shield investors in the Cayman Islands from international or government investigators. Because of this, the Cayman Islands has become notorious for money laundering and other investment crimes because some criminals clean their money through illegitimate financial instruments registered in the Caymans and hide their data behind privacy laws.

Although many criticize the Caymans for being too lenient with their legislation, their status as a tax haven does provide some undeniable advantages, mostly for those without privilege or security. The ease of access and transaction in these islands provides stability and encourages retention, which is important for the tax haven and the country that governs it.

Many entrepreneurs around the world are placed in economically unstable conditions. Those in unstable countries are worried about preserving the value of their innovations, but without a stable currency to store value in, or a stable government to protect them, investors are left without a way to monetize their creations. Tax havens like the Cayman Islands, however, remedy this problem by providing a stable, taxless, well-structured way to store and protect entrepreneurs' funds. The security the Caymans provide could encourage these entrepreneurs to capitalize on opportunities and ideas the

world could benefit from, which introduces new products and value into an international market. From a utilitarian perspective, it increases the total prosperity that the international market experiences because more businesspeople are rewarded for their work, and more of them can keep their rewards.

Critics of tax havens argue that these nations drain tax revenue from other high-tax nations, siphoning it off to tax-sheltered companies. They argue that this tax revenue, which could be used for social welfare programs in high-tax countries, just sits in the offshore accounts of hoarding corporations, unable to be used. However, many tax havens are governed by high-tax nations that claim to be drained, so the revenue brought in by the haven is still owned by the governing nation. For example, many of the world's largest corporations exist in the United States and the United Kingdom. These are the nations that have the most to lose from tax havens like the Cayman Islands. However, many of the world's tax havens are territories or states of the United States or the United Kingdom, so revenue collected by these havens is still under the control of the U.S. and U.K. governments respectfully. This revenue is still internal to these governments, so it is not being siphoned out of them.

Moreover, economists have shown that tax havens improve employment retention in developed countries, which could offset the loss in tax revenue. In 2018, Duke Economist Juan Carlos Suárez Serrato published a paper called Unintended Consequences of Eliminating Tax Havens, investigating the impact of a law that effectively eliminated Puerto Rico's status as a tax haven in the US. The study found that many large corporations previously registered in Puerto Rico chose to move abroad after the law, which increased unemployment by one million jobs in the US. Keeping governed territories as tax havens retain companies, and therefore employ-

ment, for the developed, governing countries, which could help neutralize the income cost of the tax haven.

For the Cayman Islands, a loss of jobs and financial activity as seen in Puerto Rico would be devastating, especially for the people that live there. Eliminating their status as a tax haven would debilitate the citizens and function of the nation. In 2021, for example, financial activities accounted for 33 percent of the Cayman Islands' GDP, the highest economic contributor by far, as well as thousands of jobs added over the last decade. To reduce or eliminate this aspect of the Cayman economy would eliminate over a third of the nation's output and the occupations of thousands of Caymanians. It is unfair to the citizens of these nations for other, often Western, governing powers, to destroy their livelihoods without further consideration.

However, this does not condone or encourage the use of tax havens to commit a crime or avoid paying legitimate taxes. The citizens of

high-tax countries may lose out on potential welfare programs, like unemployment benefits or healthcare, which many people depend on. Tax avoidance by large, wealthy corporations can cause undue suffering to underserving people. Yet, the benefit of tax havens comes from the other direction, by propping up innovation in underdeveloped nations and encouraging investment and retention in local economies.

Tax havens have received international backlash in the past decades due to the exposure of many world leaders exploiting lax tax laws to avoid contributing to the public good in their own countries. The Panama and Paradise Papers made this especially clear to an increasingly aware public that now demands transparency or the elimination of these practices. Elimination cannot be the solution, though, without proper consideration of the contribution of these ha-

vens. They provide valuable stability to businesspeople in unstable economies, encouraging innovation and movement in less prosperous countries, which contributes to the overall velocity of international economic activity. Also, tax haven-ship encourages companies to stay in the jurisdiction of the governing country, which retains employment. To eliminate tax haven status would be to push these companies out, devastating the employment metrics of the governing country and the livelihood of the tax haven.

Tax havens will continue to be controversial as they receive even more international attention, but they cannot be disregarded as vehicles for crime and vice. They provide positive, visible contributions to the global economy, and their preservation is important for financial systems and progress across the world.



Guacamaya, Abya Yala, and The Rise of Latin American Hacktivism

Jordan Halpern

In September 2022, dozens of Mexico-based journalists anonymously received six terabytes of Mexican Defense Ministry data. Among the thousands of files they received, journalists uncovered some of the Mexican government's darkest secrets: transcripts of internal government communication the army's immense control over the government, protected emails revealing sexual assaults covered up within the military, alleged collusion with cartels, the creation of computer malware to monitor online movements and communication of journalists and activists, government-recorded movements of U.S.-Mexico ambassador Ken Salazar, and even a revelation on President AMLO's health issues.

Behind the hack was one increasingly influential Latin American hacktivist group—the Guacamaya. Drawing its name from the Mayan word for the macaw bird, Guacamaya draws on indigenous themes and purports itself as a protector of indigenous interests—though it's unknown whether its leadership is indigenous. As a representative of the organization recently explained in an interview, “these hacks are another form of struggle and resistance—it is the continuity of an ancestral legacy.” In its leaks, the group pulls from indigenous themes, explaining it aims to free the *Abla Yala*—an indigenous term for the American continent—from “the extractivist presence of the Global North.” Drawing on a long history of indigenous mistreatment and abuse, Guacamaya uses hacktivism as a form of protest attempting to rebalance the distribution of power between the government and citizens. Since its emergence in 2022, Guacamaya has proven itself as a force to be reckoned with in the emerging hacktivism scene in Latin America. However, given the highly interconnected nature of cyberspace and the breadth of information available in these

leaks, Guacamaya and other emerging hacktivism groups need to exercise more caution in what sensitive information they steal and publish.

The reputation of Guacamaya across Latin America is a mixed one, as is often the case with hacktivists across the world. A hybrid between “hack” and “activism,” hacktivism uses digital tools to, often illegally, pursue a specific political or social end—though the line between “hacktivism” and “cyberterrorism” is often thin, differentiated only by whether there's an express purpose of inflicting violence. Hacktivism entered the public consciousness broadly in 2008, with highly publicized attacks against the Church of Scientology, and again in 2010, when the hacktivist collective Anonymous launched “Operation Tunisia.” The “Operation” used distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks—which entail flooding a network with so much traffic that the site can't operate—in effect taking down multiple government websites during the Arab Spring protests. In addition to DDoS, hacktivists use a variety of tactics including website redirects, defacement, data theft and release, and distribution of malware.

In the last year, Guacamaya has increasingly become a thorn in the side of Latin American leaders. To date, the group has leaked over twenty terabytes of stolen information (which roughly equates to 120,000,000 text files) with internal documents released in El Salvador, Peru, Guatemala, Colombia, and Chile. In Guatemala, the group released 4.2 terabytes from mining subsidiaries of the Swiss investment group Solway, which operates ‘El Fenix’ nickel mine in Izabal, Guatemala. It exposed wide networks of local government manipulation, journalist and activist surveillance, and pollution. In Colombia, 2.0 terabytes of communica-

tion between environmental oversight agencies and various public and private mining companies were released, along with other government agencies. Peru's military hack revealed documents detailing Peru's contingency plans in case of war with Chile. Guacamaya-released information has exposed deep-running government corruption, military ties to drug cartels, creation of spyware to monitor journalists and activists, willful and negligent permission of pollution, and direct government involvement in disappeared person cases. “This macaw,” AMLO exasperatedly proclaims at a press conference to address the leak of Mexico's documents, waving his hands in the air, “has become a buzzard!”

Within the nearly two dozen terabytes of information, journalists have also found a range of sensitive information released by the group. The organization releases massive swaths of information without vetting or checking its findings before beforehand, so they have often released key intelligence and security information. As the group itself explains, “It is impossible to analyze everything... neither we nor any group have time to review all the material.... [We] focus on hacking, and DDoSecrets and Enlace Hacktivista [two sites that host documents] focus on managing and disseminating, so that each journalist and organization can review the material that is of interest in their investigations.” With this ‘release-all, ask-questions-later’ approach, not all information published pertains to the government corruption or crimes that Guacamaya hopes to expose. Among the releases were lists of tapped telephone lines of cartel members and charts drafting intelligence agencies' understandings of cartel structure and hideouts—tipping the government's hand to cartels, who can adapt in response to what the government knows. The release also involved emails concerning personnel changes and management, revealing names, contact information, and whereabouts of federal government employees. Most critically, the files exposed Mexico's cybersecurity infrastructure and capacities; needless to say, releasing a ‘how-to’ for hacking Mexico, accompanied by a comprehensive list of vulnerabilities in the

country's cyberinfrastructure, may be reason for pause.

The decentralized structure of hacktivism groups, such as Guacamaya, means there is simply no way to regulate who releases what. Hacktivist groups evade prosecution for their illegal actions by leveraging a loose structure, where members' real identities are unknown within the organization. As a result, there is little to no ability to monitor their members' activity or ensure that those who use the Guacamaya name behave in ways that support its mandate or align with its values. That also leaves room for foreign involvement in the group—and although most officials suppose Guacamaya is locally-based, there's no way to confirm the attacks' origins. Some experts even speculate that China could be behind a number of attacks claimed by Guacamaya attacks. ProxyLogon, a critical server-side request forgery (SSRF) Microsoft bug that allowed access to Microsoft Exchange software, is believed by the U.S., UK, EU, and NATO to be first exploited by China. This same SSRF bug, emerging as a result of a Chinese hacking campaign in early 2021, was used in Guacamaya's attack of the nickel mine El Fenix in Guatemala in 2022. Though, given the fast-paced nature of information-sharing in cyberspace and the quick rise in popularity of ProxyLogon, the evidence is hardly conclusive—but the concern of foreign involvement in these decentralized groups is certainly a valid one.

Without a doubt, Guacamaya's work has forced transparency on governments, agencies, and firms who further pollution, corruption, and crime across Latin America. Their activism ties together a long history of indigenous protest, and social and political disenfranchisement, with a new way of forcing accountability and transparency onto oppressive structures. Guacamaya's work has been important and impactful—but it also highlights a profound lack in cybersecurity measures in the region. Guacamaya is enabled by, and continuously takes advantage of, lax security measures, which for the purposes of cybersecurity moving forward, governments should act quickly to strengthen.

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The United States, China, and the Feud for Latin America

Miguel Calle

China and Latin America – the two tend to not be linked together. But here's something most people won't know: according to the Foreign Affairs Committee, "trade between China and Latin America grew 26-fold between 2000-2020 (increasing from \$12 billion to \$315 billion); and is expected to double by 2035, reaching more than \$700 billion." China's influence in Latin America is expanding and will continue to do so; it's time for Washington to be concerned. Many attribute the start of China's ascent to a momentous February day in 1972, when President Richard Nixon visited Beijing. Others have claimed that its rise is due to the process of *Gǎigé kāifàng*, which means "reform and opening up." In December 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China started to institute capitalist reforms, calling it "Socialism with Chinese characteristics." From then on, China has achieved unprecedented growth. In 2001, it gained entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), and for the first time, China was allowed to make trade deals with Latin American countries. It is now one of two world superpowers, and that role brings with it certain responsibilities like military muscle, intelligence capabilities, and high technology. Another responsibility is trying to influence -- politically, socially, and economically -- countries thousands of miles away, because superpowers need geopolitical strength and a myriad of allies. This, more than a desire, is a necessity, and the United States has done it successfully for more than a century. China understands this, has read the U.S. playbook, and knows what it must do.

After WWII, the United States invested the 2023 equivalent of 173 billion USD to rebuild Western Europe through the Marshall Plan, which led to U.S. domination in the region and the creation of NATO. China is following in the U.S.'s footsteps doing around the world what America did in Europe by building what might become the largest global infrastructure network. Some call it the "New Silk Road," but its official name is the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Twenty-one Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries have signed up for it. This will augment China's sway in the region by making participating countries more economically dependent on China, promoting Chinese culture, and enhancing its image as a responsible world leader. Even though BRI has slowed around the world, one region where it hasn't as much is Latin America, because of Chinese foreign-direct investment.

Additionally, China has free trade

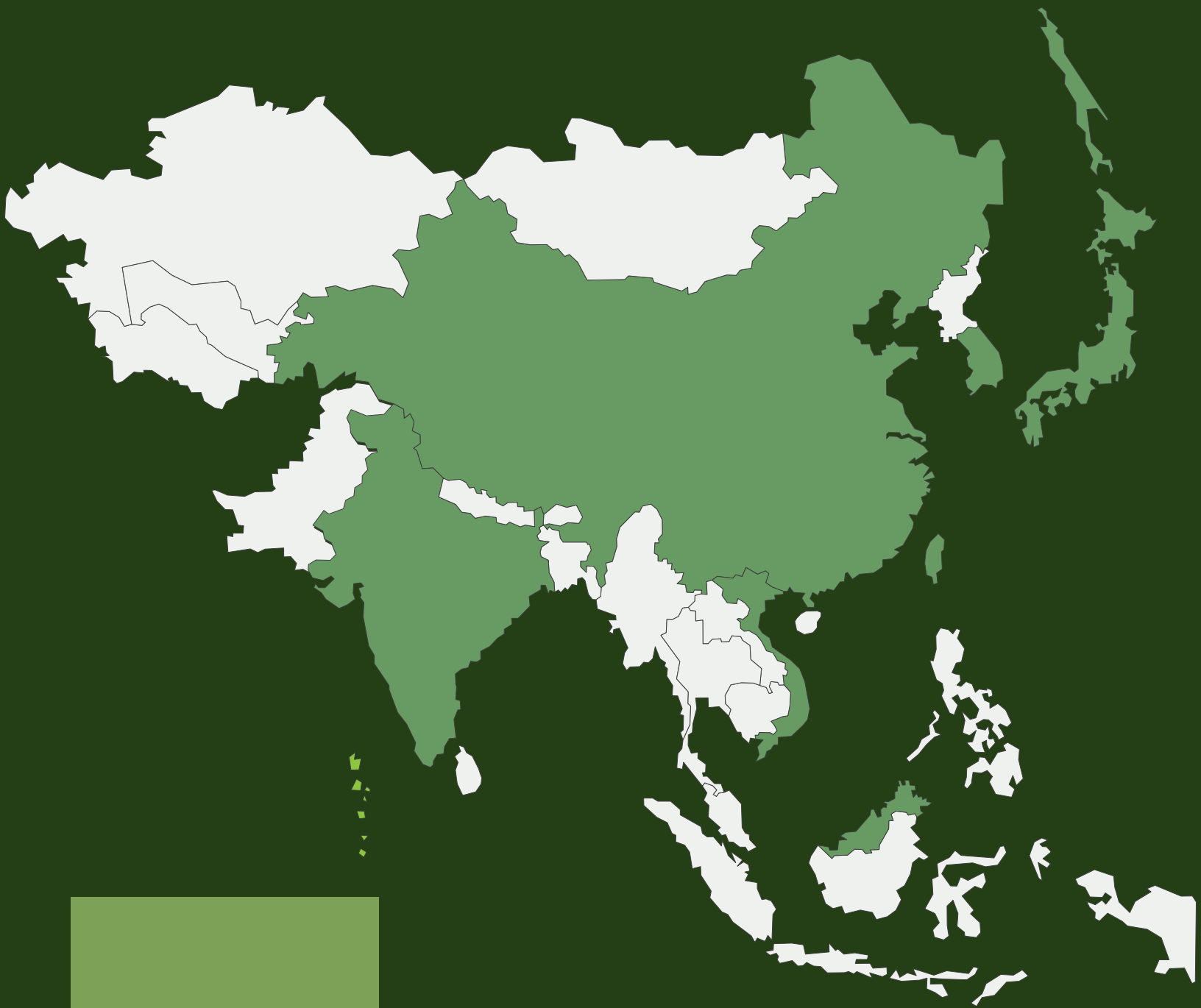
agreements in place with Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru, and is in talks with Ecuador and Uruguay. However, China is already the largest non-continental trading partner for Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, and the continent as a whole. In Latin America, only Colombia and Ecuador continue to trade more with the US than with China. Strangely though, Paraguay is the only Latin American country – and one of 14 remaining countries in the world – to adhere to the One China policy, meaning that it recognizes Taiwan as the sole legitimate government of China. This comes with conditions, and Paraguay has recently asked Taiwan to invest one billion USD in the country. If Taiwan disagrees, Paraguay might change its policy, which is only one example of how complex the China-Latin America relationship is.

China is investing in the region in more ways than one. The infrastructural projects throughout the region are not limited to BRI, and some have an unexpected impact. Colombia, widely considered the United States' closest ally in the region, has reached a deal to have a Chinese company (China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation) build the metro in Bogotá. While this may seem insignificant, it is a chance for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to have a perpetual foot in the Colombian government's door -- an unprecedented opportunity. Also, in February 2022, Argentina announced that China was financing around \$24 billion USD in infrastructure projects. To top it all off, in 2019, the Chinese company Tianqi Lithium purchased a controlling stake in Chile's Sociedad Química y Minera, the world's largest lithium producer. These are points of entry for the Chinese government in places that were previously inaccessible to it. In addition, the China Development Bank (CDB) has lent Latin American countries 99.1 billion USD as of 2021, almost four times the amount the U.S. Export-Import Bank has lent. China is saddling Latin America with debt. Besides this, China has established 28 Confucius Institutes in South America—"educational institutions" that China uses to wield soft power, but that are actually propaganda machines aimed at young people, as the country wants them to espouse CCP objectives.

All of these instances – the infrastructure investments, BRI, trade, and Confucius Institutes -- of Chinese cajolery are well-known. What's unknown is even more concerning, as no one outside of China has full awareness of what the country's political goals in the region are. The Center for Strategic and International Studies asserted that Latin America is "on the precipice of a downward spiral into populist

authoritarian governments." While it would be wrong to claim that China is responsible for this spiral, it has certainly influenced it. The leftist, populist, authoritarian governments -- mentioned below -- currently dominating the region are much closer ideologically to China than to the West and the United States.

Even though advocating for a 20th-century-style American intervention in the region would be illogical, that does not mean the United States should become a non-interventionist actor. The Biden administration and Congress should continue to invest more in the region -- especially in infrastructure. For example, Colombia is currently pursuing a radical energy policy that would eliminate all new oil exploration contracts. The United States could help accelerate that energy transition while protecting the Colombian economy, especially when China is influencing the country's transportation policy. At the same time, American political leaders should visit the region more and wield more soft power. Personal relationships influence foreign policy more than one would believe, as was the case with President Clinton's friendship with Colombian President Andrés Pastrana. Their rapport helped establish Plan Colombia, an initiative aimed at combating drug cartels. Lastly, America should expand trade with Latin American countries. President Biden has begun to do so with the new Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP), a plan to bolster trade and tighten the association between the U.S. and the rest of the Americas. Finally, the U.S. should still try to influence voters' minds, but it should not alter the results of elections or oust leaders in LACs. It should instead try to surreptitiously back (through funding and political strategy/advice), candidates – left, right, or center – that believe in the value of democracy and liberalism, and reject Chinese-backed populism. Many foreign policy purists will say this is wrong -- America should not play a part in international elections. This is nonsensical: China's doing it, Russia's doing it, and it will be impossible for the U.S. to compete if it doesn't do it. China's influence in Latin America will not decline any time soon. It's up to the United States to respond in kind, at least if it wants to maintain its position as a superpower.



ASIA

Outsourcing Imperialism on the Belt and Road

Ethan Wilmot

As China continues to expand its military capabilities, its Private Security Companies (PSC) are coming into view as a potential asymmetric threat to stability in the region. More than 7,000 PSCs have been identified to be working within Chinese borders, and between twenty and forty PSCs have been deployed overseas in forty different countries. The extraordinary number of organizations and the 4.3 million personnel that they employ suggest that their role in Chinese foreign policy is significant. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has stated that PSCs will play an increasingly important role in Chinese foreign policy, leaving the West to speculate on how their expansion may affect strategic goals worldwide. Internationally, there is a lack of regulation and oversight of this industry that requires clear legal frameworks to address the growing issue.

China uses contractors as a part of their foreign policy differently than other countries like Russia and the United States. Where Russia and the United States have Private Military Corporations (PMC) like the Wagner Group and Blackwater respectively, China primarily uses PSCs that operate in a much different capacity. PMCs often engage in combat operations and are armed with similar weapons and equipment as conventional militaries, while PSCs tend to be lightly armed and operate in a static environment, protecting certain embassies, ports, and other overseas assets. This difference is important to note because while China currently does not use these organizations in combat operations, their presence still represents

a threat and a potential escalation in asymmetric and irregular warfare.

Private military contractors of all types have been increasing in usage in recent years, especially in countries such as Russia and the United States. There are many advantages to using private military contractors instead of formal military or other security forces. One benefit is a level of deniability to domestic audiences. This strategy allows China to deflect claims of a military presence in certain countries to their own citizens, allowing the government to act freely. Contractors also allow for a lack of accountability on the world stage. China can dodge accusations of a physical presence in regions because of the deniability of the relationship between corporations and the government. The usage of these groups can also bolster China legally, as international and domestic regulations prevent the presence of Chinese military forces in many areas. The complex legal definition of a PSC allows China to navigate regulations and avoid conflict. Finally, PSCs can be more cost-effective than conventional military forces, making deployments easier to propose. China can use these companies to train foreign police and military forces and enhance its military presence.

The increased presence of Chinese PSCs could have major ramifications on its foreign policy strategy. As opposed to conventional military units, PSCs allow China more freedom in achieving its strategic objectives abroad. In South East Asia, Chinese corporations that are

participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are frequently contracting PSCs to secure their assets. These corporations often operate in special economic zones, like the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos, that China uses to spread its influence and profit. An increased and shadowy security presence in exclusive economic zones could have negative consequences for the host countries. If China is able to use these security forces, it gives greater autonomy to the special economic zones that could be politically dangerous and threatening to the sovereignty of South East Asian countries.

China also frequently uses PSCs in the South China Sea in anti-piracy operations. Piracy has become a major issue in the South China Sea due to disputes over ownership of the waters and the high volume of shipping that occurs within the region. To combat this situation, Chinese corporations are hiring PSCs to protect shipping lanes and other assets. Through this, the hotly contested territorial disputes in the South China Sea are complicated by the presence of private security forces. The political differences between using PSCs and military forces give China the opportunity to extend its claims without further damaging its relationships with neighboring countries.

In Africa, Chinese PSCs are the primary force behind the security and execution of many BRI projects. Their presence has led to numerous security issues on the continent and hints at the potential for further violence. Between 2010-2015, nearly 350 security incidents involving these security organizations occurred overseas, including a notable attack at a Malian hotel in 2015 that left three security personnel dead. African citizens feel threatened by the presence of foreign security forces in their country, especially when these groups are permitted to conduct searches and enforce regulations. In some instances, Chinese PSCs have been used to enforce poor working conditions on BRI

projects. This was seen in Zambia in 2010 when two Chinese mine managers were not punished after shooting eleven Zambian miners over a worker's rights dispute. These organizations are largely unregulated and operate in a gray area in international law, making it difficult to address the problem.

An international framework and clear legal definitions are needed to fully identify the threat of PSCs and control their impact. Currently, the primary international legal regulations for PSCs and PMCs are lacking and nonbinding. The Montreux Document that was created in 2008 provides some framework for the regulation of the industry, but it relies on the self-reporting of these companies and does not have any binding regulations for countries to follow. The International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA) is an international regulatory body that has attempted to control the industry but has also encountered issues of non-compliance and a lack of self-reporting. Not all PSCs and PMCs are signatories or members of these organizations and thus have no international oversight or authority.

To combat the growing use of PSCs, the legal definitions of the industry need to be clear and internationally recognized. It is also necessary to improve upon the current regulations by mandating the self-reporting of PSCs and clear oversight and regulation of the industry by an internationally-led organization. These regulations can be enforced through strict legal definitions and harsh sanctions for those that do not meet industry standards. All security incidents involving these organizations should be transparently reviewed and monitored to ensure the safety and security of the host countries. Through these changes, Chinese PSCs would be more limited in their ability to conduct shady foreign policy programs and would provide an important precedent in the industry.

Agent Orange and Unexploded Ordinances: A Lingering Tension in Vietnam-U.S. Relations

Joey Do

It has been almost fifty years since the Vietnam War ended in April 1975. For some Northern Vietnamese people, the war is now only a distant, blurry memory, but for many others residing in the provinces of the Central and Southern Coastal region of Vietnam, the war is still very fresh in their minds.

Since the U.S. “Operation Ranch Hand” in the 1960s, it is estimated that fifty million liters of Agent Orange— a teratogenic and carcinogenic herbicide containing dioxin— has been sprayed over fifteen percent of Vietnam’s territory. In Vietnam, an estimated 400,000 victims have been left with severe birth defects and health conditions from exposure to the dioxin found in Agent Orange. In post-war socialist Vietnam, this placed a heavy burden on the social security net of the newly independent government in post-war socialist Vietnam. In addition to chemical warfare, the U.S. employed arguably one of the most intense aerial bombing operations in human history in North and Central Vietnam, with an estimated 6,162,000 tons of bombs and other ordnance deployed in “Operation Rolling Thunder” from 1965-1973. Now, nearly half a century later, many school-aged children in the Central provinces of Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên Huế often find unexploded dangerous bombs in the ground on their commute to school. Many villagers have even adopted an entrepreneurial mindset, starting businesses to scavenge highly dangerous mines and bombs to sell for scraps.

To this day, the aftermath of the WMDs used in the Vietnam War has never been fully acknowledged and redressed. Washington denied causality between dioxin and birth defects and refused to take responsibility for the atrocity, while Hanoi insisted that there is a link established. Despite Vietnam-U.S. diplomatic relations resuming in 1994 after President Clinton’s visit, and even after Obama and Anthony Bourdain enjoyed “Bun Cha” together on plastic stools at Huong Lien restaurant in Hanoi in 2016, this issue still persists as one of the thorniest points of contention in establishing full reconciliation between the two nations.

From a political and economic perspective, Vietnam has legitimate motivations to pursue a much less vocal stance on the issue. In terms of geopolitics, Vietnam lies in a strategic position in the Indo-Pacific, vulnerable to China’s aggression in the prolonged South China Sea conflict. In such a situation, Vietnam is aware they need support from the international community, especially the United States, to protect its maritime interests and sovereignty. And, for the United States, Vietnam’s strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region supports its geopolitical goals,

“ If history taught us anything, it is assured that a path to complete Vietnam-United States reconciliation will be a painful, non-linear, and time-consuming process. ”

serving as a counter to China’s aggression, especially with the current crisis in Ukraine and possibly Taiwan. Overall, this act is in alignment with Vietnam’s Bamboo Diplomacy, a term coined recently to reflect the nation’s delicate acts of balancing major powers in foreign affairs.

In terms of trade and technology development, Vietnam is also advancing as a result of its cooperation with the U.S. and other foreign investments. Under the framework of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an economic initiative of twelve countries started under the Obama administration in 2009, Vietnam’s foreign direct investment (FDI) and U.S. exports in manufacturing and textile have increased significantly. Notably, Vietnam serves as the first communist country to be included in the framework. Since formalizing relations in 1994, the U.S. and Vietnam have strengthened their relationship, with bilateral trade increasing from just under 500 million in the 2000s to seventy-seven billion in 2019. Under its fruitful trade relations with the U.S., Vietnam could potentially serve as a promising destination for many more supply chain manufacturers from other nations. In 2022, Lego built its first billion dollar carbon-neutral factory in Binh Duong, one of the major manufacturing hubs in southern Vietnam. Experts also predict that Vietnam will soon be a manufacturing hub for semiconductors after Samsung and Amkor Technologies shifted engineer training to Vietnam. At the end of the year, Amkor Technologies hopes to open its 1.6 billion USD semiconductor factory in the northern province of Bac Ninh.

Most importantly, Vietnam’s less vocal stance on this issue reflects its internal desire to amend with its turbulent past of the American War era. Whether it is foreign affairs or international trade, all these external decisions to “move-on” from the past were internally made by the powerful eighteen members of the Politburo (Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party). After the Đổi Mới “Renovation” policies of 1986, the Vietnam’s Politburo

decided to open the country to the market economy, ending its decades long of isolation prompted by the fall of the Socialist Bloc in Eastern Europe. For fear of economic backwardness, the country was desperate for change and economic revival. Ever since, the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) has constructed a new political identity for the nation, spearheaded by the desire to lead all its people to “move forward.” Such sentiments and future-oriented thinking can be found in the literature of the Resolution of the Vietnam National Assembly (VNA) in the past two decades. In short, the Resolution serves as the most crucial document after every VNA. It outlines the vision and blueprint for the nation’s development in every 5-year period decided by the VCP. In the last two resolutions of 2016 and 2021, words such as “hopeful,” “globalization,” “unity,” and “forward” could be spotted repeatedly. In the Resolution of 2021 following COVID-19 especially, the sentiment to move forward is much stronger in comparison to 2016.

So far, in 2023, within the metropolis of Hà Nội, Đà Nẵng, or Hồ Chí Minh city, shopping malls, theme parks, and residential developments are springing up at an unprecedented rate. It is difficult to fathom that these sites used to be in complete ruins after the U.S. aerial operations in the 1970s. If history taught us anything, it is assured that a path to a complete Vietnam-United States reconciliation will be a painful, non-linear, and time-consuming process. Regarding the current geopolitical and economic situation, a process of negotiation for reparations for Agent Orange and the unexploded ordnance (UXO) is progressing steadily between the two nations. But more importantly, the hopeful narrative as an internal political decision represents the VCP’s desire to move Vietnam forward as a nation after decades of isolation. After all, every process of moving forward requires certain compromises to leave behind painful narratives. In this case, Vietnam is not an exception either. It joins many other countries across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, moving one step at a time closer to a hopeful future.

One Nation, 19,569 Languages

Anna Heiss



Throughout his term as Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has capitalized on the slogan “One Nation” to promote uniformity across Indian states. With slogans ranging from “One Nation, One Election” to “One Nation, One Fertilizer.” Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have pushed for nationwide alignment of countless regulations and ideals. This shift towards unitarism has drawn criticism from certain groups, particularly identity-specific minorities. India is one of the most diverse countries in the world, containing dozens of religions, ethnicities, and ideologies—what is especially notable, however, is the number of languages spoken in India.

In the most recent census, conducted in 2011, an astounding 19,569 languages were reported as “mother tongues” (the language spoken during childhood). A mere twenty-two languages are recognized as scheduled languages by the Indian government, meaning that they can be used for government administration and communications, but the idea of a single standard language for public use has been pushed by the BJP. Members of the party have employed the slogan “One Nation, One Language” to advocate for the designation of Hindi as the national language to be spoken across the country, envisioning a world in which learning

Hindi, much like Japanese or German, is associated with global connectivity. Home Minister Amit Shah holds that because Hindi is the most widely spoken language in India, it makes sense for it to be a unifying language across the country. However, only 44 percent of people in India speak Hindi, and this number is reduced to 27 percent when distinct languages grouped under the Hindi classification, like Kurmali, are excluded. In this country of extreme linguistic diversity, many citizens view the promotion of a sole national language as diminishing the value of other regional languages. They have responded with public outrage, protests, and even violence. Rather than unifying the Indian public, the implementation of a national language policy will deepen existing divisions between states and groups of people.

This linguistic hierarchical system has been capitalized upon by both imperial and postcolonial governments to gain power over populations, unite groups, and cause social division. During the colonial period, the British employed language in conquering and governing Hindustan, which comprised modern-day Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Through measures such as changing the languages used by legal institutions and man-

dates for education to be conducted in certain languages, the British controlled who was able to participate in politics and other crucial aspects of society. Linguistic policies varied across states and typically promoted English or regional languages studied by the British, such as Persian. This disadvantaged those familiar with less widely-spoken or tribal languages, and was particularly detrimental to people of low economic status in Hindustan, who were often illiterate or lacked the financial capabilities to pursue formal language education.

The imposition of linguistic policies by British colonizers also led to friction between religious groups. Hindustani served as a lingua franca, or bridge language, in Hindustan, and is the language from which Hindi and Urdu developed. The British affiliated faith with language, ultimately leading to associations between Hindi and Hinduism, and Urdu with Islam. By associating faith with language and closing certain religious schools, particularly Muslim institutions, division grew between people who practiced different religions. As identity became synonymous with faith and language, political parties became increasingly tied to these factors and extreme polarization occurred between Hindu and Muslim groups. This contributed to the violent Partition of India and Pakistan and the tensions that persist between the two countries today. The interconnectivity of language and religion has permeated regional politics, and animosity between communities has ensued.

People in India recognize the political and social implications of promoting certain languages, and this has led many groups to push back against the federal government's efforts to implement a national Hindi policy. In 2019 in Tamil Nadu, members of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party were arrested after crossing off a Hindi label on a sign in protest of Amit Shah's use of the phrase “One Nation, One Language.” Aside from peaceful forms of protest like walkouts and marches, some people have turned to more radical methods, using public suicides or other forms of self harm to demonstrate their commitment to their language. In 1964, a man named Chinnasami proclaimed “Inti oļika! Tamil vāļka!” (Death to Hindi! May Tamil flourish!) while lighting himself on fire at a railway station in southern India. By the 1980s, at least thirty-one self-immolations in the name of Tamil had been recorded. Potti Sriramulu fasted three times for the Telugu language, with his third fast end-

ing in his death. This resulted in widespread protests and violence, forcing then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to announce the formation of the Telugu linguistic state of Telangana.

The national Hindi policy pushed by the BJP will exacerbate the existing hierarchy of languages in India with Hindi reigning supreme, a low prioritization of regional languages, and so-called “vernaculars” given no space in the public sphere. Amit Shah has called for Hindi to be used for government recruitment examinations, meeting backlash from states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Many essential services are exclusively offered in Hindi and English in some states, like opening a bank account and paying for public transport. This is the case in West Bengal, where over 86 percent of the population speaks Bengali. The national imposition of Hindi would put a majority of India's population at a disadvantage in terms of education, career opportunities, and accessing public services. Non-Hindi speakers would be forced to learn the language, and those who lack the resources to pursue a formal Hindi education would be excluded from fully participating in society. Given the backlash to Hindi becoming the national language and its lack of speakers nationwide, it is clear that implementation of a national Hindi policy is unrealistic.

While having a primary language is feasible in a country like England, where most people speak English, the Indian government acknowledges an astounding 121 “real” languages as being spoken out of the 19,569 reported. The influence of western ideologies in government led to the idea that linguistic uniformity is necessary for unity within a state, but this is untrue; although language was an integral part of one's identity prior to the colonial period, it lacked the power to divide groups as it does today. Language would not be a point of contention in India if not for the associations conceived by Western colonial powers, which are now capitalized upon by Indian political parties and states. Conformity with Western ideals should not be a necessary precursor to garnering respect on the international stage. India is already the world's largest democracy, a major economy, and recognized as an emerging global power. The presence of a national language will not change that. Advocating for a national language is a misguided attempt to unite India, and such a policy would create further division. The Indian public has made this clear, and the government should listen.

Malaysia's Political Puppet Master May Not Be Gone After All

Tyler Tjan

On February 1, 1946, a district officer named Onn Jaafar stood outside a mosque in Skudai, Malaysia; he and his allies held signs and shouted slogans protesting a treaty with Britain that established a Malaysian parliament. The treaty, they feared, would bury Malays in national politics by giving non-Malay immigrants citizenship, and therefore power, in the new parliament. Understandably, over a century of the British colonial system pushing them below Europeans and Chinese and Indian immigrants in politics and the economy outraged Malays like Jaafar—this new government would force Malays to continue to fight for power in a government that nationalists believed was theirs to control. Jaafar went on to rise in Malaysian politics, founding the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) later that year. When he left the increasingly ethnicist and nationalist party in 1951, it only continued to grow, and, in the six decades after, UMNO and its Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition dominated Malaysia through a political system designed to maintain the party's success.

That system began to crumble in 2018 when UMNO lost its absolute political dominance in the general elections. Its neoliberal policies failed to fulfill the party's promise to uplift the lower and middle classes, and its administration faced substantial allegations of corruption. A new, ethnically diverse coalition, the Pakatan Harapan (PH), took BN's place. PH took 115 seats in parliament—two more than they needed to form a majority coalition in parliament government alone—to Barisan Nasional's 79. Malaysians decisively showed that they would no longer allow UMNO

to rule on unfulfilled promises and trading political favors.

A force as dominant as UMNO completely collapsing in one election seems impossible: the party had controlled Malaysian politics since the country's independence. However, UMNO losing any degree of its power makes the future of Malaysian politics difficult to navigate. Looking into the dynamics within the ruling coalition, Pakatan Harapan, and the politics of its opposition can offer strong clues. UMNO will continue to play a key role in the evolution of Malaysian politics by influencing parliamentary coalition leaders, and the end of the party's full political control could cause stronger polarization in a Malaysia without a single ruling party.

In 2020, UMNO and its leader, Zahid Hamidi, scrambled into a new ruling coalition with conservative and nationalist Malay parties, triggering a political crisis in Malaysia. UMNO did not lead this new coalition, but having membership gave the party a say in policymaking. Pakatan Harapan, led by current prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, fell back into the opposition after its decisive 2018 win that allowed it to unseat UMNO. Ibrahim and Hamidi should have despised each other after UMNO played a key role in collapsing PH's government. The next year, though, they praised each other and dismissed any disparaging comments they made about each other as "just politics" in a leaked phone call. The two denied the legitimacy of the phone call, calling it propaganda from their opposition. Whether or not the recording was genuine, it reflects a bond that these key politicians have—

they worked together closely in UMNO leadership during the 1990s and have capitalized on the establishment party's reputation to launch their political careers.

UMNO showed the strength of this relationship in 2022 by joining Pakatan Harapan, giving the coalition the majority again and installing Anwar Ibrahim as prime minister. Apart from any friendship he may still have with Zahid Hamidi, Ibrahim has practical political reasons for including UMNO in his coalition. Even after a dramatic fall from grace, the party maintains a strong base of rural Malays. Partnering with Hamidi and UNMO by letting them into PH allows Ibrahim to maintain his legitimacy to those voters in a coalition that also caters to Chinese and Indian immigrants.

As much as partnering with UMNO may help Prime Minister Ibrahim and Pakatan Harapan's political legitimacy, it may also harm their ability to make real progress in Malaysian politics. Reformist wings and parties representing ethnic minorities may urge the Prime Minister towards reform like eliminating explicit advantages for Malays in employment and college admissions. UMNO's nationalism and corruption-tarnished reputation may hold him back. However, Ibrahim has longed for power for decades, even serving two prison sentences on his route to the premiership. To keep it, he may choose to keep UMNO on board despite an awkward political fit and the party's controversial history. Future Malay political leaders, whether from fundamentalist or reformist ideologies, will also find it hard to reject UMNO's seats earned from its rural base and brand recognition. As long as partnering with UMNO means survival amidst political chaos, Malaysia's grand old party is here to stay.

Although Pakatan Harapan currently controls the Malaysian parliament, the party with the most representatives, the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), leads the opposing coalition. This party's strong representation suggests a continued and potentially worsening fragmentation of Malays' opinions on what a Malaysia

that prioritizes them looks like. PAS, an Islamic fundamentalist party that caters to conservative Malays, and its Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition closely compete with PH in Malaysia, holding 74 seats to the ruling coalition's 82. Voters in Malaysia are roughly split on which coalition they would prefer to rule the country, with the country slightly favoring the more moderate PH. PAS rode a wave of support for their party in the 2022 general elections, and in districts where it and its partner party lost, they lost by thin margins. Before 2018, UMNO was trending away from more moderate politics towards conservative positions. PAS and its coalition are now riding that ideological tide.

The popularity of Perikatan Nasional, a haven for conservative Malay politics, implies that dedicated Muslims and Malay nationalists alike feel that UMNO and the current ruling coalition do not represent them. In the past, Malays expected UMNO to advocate for nationalist and religious politics as their party. Exiting an era of outward unity under UMNO, Malaysian politics may sink further into polarization. So long as conservative Malays do not feel represented by the dominant coalition, they will organize against it.

UMNO can revert to conservatism and PAS' politics after future elections as the party did in 2020. The potential for UMNO to oscillate across these longstanding divisions in Malaysian politics means it could serve as a moderating force, pulling whichever coalition it joins closer towards a moderate nationalism. However, it could also exacerbate political divides by organizing against whichever side it sees as weaker. The party's history of political pragmatism makes the latter a realistic possibility. Polarization and discouraging election results do not spell the complete death of UMNO's influence. The party can still play this role as a dangerously powerful agitator in Malaysia. Its time as the sole powerful party in Malaysia may be over, but UMNO and its president Zahid Hamidi still have a hold over Malaysian politics.

Masked Beneath The Smiles: The Dark Truths of South Korea's Popular Industry

Tiffany Pham

From the growing admiration of kimchi and K-Pop, Korean culture has been spreading like wildfire on a global level. This phenomenon has been coined as “hallyu,” translating to the “Korean wave.” K-Pop groups such as BTS have broken countless records, most notable of which being the most viewed YouTube music video in 24 hours. Despite the magnitude of their impact, the Korean popular industry has a tendency of harming K-Pop idols, who are typically models, singers, actors, and dancers between the ages of 12 and 25. Idols are typically part of a group with little to no say in what music they get to produce and are mistreated through intensive training, unethical lifestyles, sexual assault, and the sexualization of minors. These conditions leads to harmful outcomes like eating disorders and suicide. Idols are groomed to perceived perfection at a young age by the entertainment companies such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment. Moreover, the spreading admiration for the K-Pop industry must come with fair treatment and ethical lifestyles for the idols within it.

Companies in the K-Pop industry mistreat those working for them, even before they actually enter it. According to the Los Angeles Times, “before even having the chance to train under entertainment companies, kids and young teens attend cutthroat auditions, which on average have competitive rates of 700:1.” The pressure caused by companies drives extreme competitiveness for these positions, causing toxic habits with youth, where they take unhealthy measures such as starving and overworking themselves to fit a specific image and get a spot.

If one manages to pass the audition, they are put under a contract with their corresponding company. These contracts can range from two years to a decade. Once in the company's training program, trainees go by schedules starting as early as 4 a.m. and ending as late as midnight. During these training sessions, they are drilling their choreography and vocals, along with perfecting their behavioral image through practicing public speaking, proper posture, facial expressions, networking, and modeling.

Not only is their intensive training schedule harmful to developing adolescents, but issues such as body shaming and rigorous dieting are problematic. Young idols are expected to fit into a strict beauty standard in which women are expected to have small waists and men must have defined jawlines. Idols have also gone on diets where the only thing they consumed was an ice cube. Molding into this beauty standard is only accomplished quickly through dieting to achieve the entertainment industries' ideal weight. Idols such as OH MY GIRL's



Hyojung reveal how they were forced to fit into a strict weight range, not allowed “to surpass 99-101 lbs (44.9-45.8 kg).” According to the International Business Times, Twice's Momo also shares how her industry demanded she must weigh 7 kg (15.43 lbs) less in a week for their debut showcase. These conditions only serve to reinforce body-shaming which leads to eating disorders, a common and normalized experience many idols face. With this harsh beauty standard, everyone in the industry must fit in the perfect image the companies push their idols into. If they do not follow their ideal beauty standards, they face shame and are ultimately deemed as worthless.

K-Pop stars are treated as prized possessions, controlled like puppets by the companies rather than treated as human beings. This is reflected in how they enter the industry by signing a contract that states they are not able to share their input in the creative aspects of their performances and music, preventing them from expressing themselves fully. They are also controlled in more personal aspects of their lives as seen in the dating contracts idols are forced to sign, essentially banning them from pursuing romantic relationships in their youth and even years after they debut. Trainees are also forced to act heterosexual, even if they aren't. This goes to show how K-Pop stars are treated like dolls who are expected to follow unfair standards.

These harsh conditions have become the new normal for K-Pop idols. Thus, South Korea's government must enforce ethical labor practices through their working standard laws, requiring agencies to follow nondiscrimination laws and to ensure they are fairly compensated for the work they are doing. South Korea is currently proposing a 69 hour long work week, which is up 17 hours from the 52 hours that is already expected. Proposing this will only serve to increase health risks, and the expectation to work this intensely is specifically detrimental to the mental health of Korean workers overall. According to a study by the National Library of Medicine, “among the external causes of death, suicide risk was higher (HR 3.89, 95% CI 1.06–14.29) for working 45–52 hours per week compared to working 35–44 hours per week.” South Korea should not only enforce better working standards in the entertainment industry alone, but to all of their industries in general as these circumstances are problematic to South Korean work culture at large.

Clearly, then, beneath the sparkles and glitter of the K-Pop industry are normalized experiences of mistreatment and unethical standards that idols must overcome. Entertainment companies exploit their idols as possessions rather than human beings to profit off them. Altogether, the growing attention towards Korean popular culture must provide the idols within it with ethical and fair standards in return.

Once Japan's Wound, Nuclear Energy May Now Be Its Salvation

Rick Walker

Japan's nuclear renaissance was cut short on March 11th, 2011, when a 9.0 Mw earthquake hit off the eastern coast of the nation. The earthquake triggered a tsunami, which hit the coast ten minutes later, overwhelming the sea barriers of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Ōkuma, Fukushima, Japan. This instigated a series of chain events that would lead to the first 'level seven' nuclear disaster since Chernobyl—and with it, a decade long disdain towards nuclear energy in Japan and the nation's contemporary energy crisis.

Following the events of Fukushima and the subsequent public outrage, Japan shut down all of its fifty-four nuclear reactors, which had previously made up thirty percent of the nation's energy generation. The country had formerly been on track to expand its nuclear share to at least forty percent by 2017, but this number has now been slashed to twenty percent by 2030. This comes as a result of only ten of the thirty-six reactors having been restarted, with only an additional sixteen under current review. This extreme reduction in nuclear-provided energy has led Japan to rely on fossil fuels, importing ninety percent of its crude oil and nearly thirty-six percent of its liquid natural gas (LNG) from foreign countries. While Japan receives much of its oil needs from the Middle East, Russia accounts for nine percent of LNG imports—but with the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, Japan ceased their LNG imports from the nation. In a time when many other countries are also looking to switch their gas sourcing, this means paying a premium to reconcile the deficit in supply. Now, the one-year anniversary of the onset of the conflict has highlighted the recent energy crunch the nation has been fighting since 2011.

Owing largely to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, energy prices in Japan have soared 23.3 percent year to date. Additionally, companies like Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings reported

a 5 billion USD loss between April and December due to energy subsidies provided to the public. This number eclipses the 4.5 billion USD the firm lost in response to the Fukushima triple meltdown. This combination of both consumer and producer shock has led public opinion to, for the first time since 2011, shift in favor of restarting Japan's nuclear agenda. According to a Nikkei survey in March, fifty-three percent of people said nuclear reactors should restart if safety can be ensured. And finally, despite extreme hesitancy by earlier Prime Ministers, Fumio Kishida has now instructed his cabinet to begin exploring the benefits in constructing new, next-generation reactors.

Governmental support in favor of nuclear power is just one in a series of multilateral initiatives to abate Japan's ongoing energy crisis. Other measures include revitalizing aging coal-fired power stations like Takasago Thermal Power Plant, which is currently in its fifth decade of service. Or, a new provision, which would require over fifty major developers and real estate companies to install solar panels

on all new houses constructed after April 2025. However, these options fail to compare to the amount of energy generation possible through the reopening and construction of new nuclear reactors for a number of reasons.

Extension of life times for various thermal power plants, like Takasago, falls short in nearly every metric when compared to its nuclear counterpart. Coal plants only have a capacity factor of 40.2 percent, compared to nuclear power plants of 92.5 percent. Additionally, this factor means that you would need almost two coal or three to four renewable plants (each of one gigawatt {GW} size) to generate the same amount of electricity onto the grid as a one GW nuclear reactor. The other benefit contributes to Japan's new ten-year road map "GX", or "Green Transformation." Primary tenets of the road map include measures to revive the nuclear industry, strengthen the country's grid, and begin introducing carbon pricing, all with the overall goal of creating a carbon-neutral Japan by 2050. Reactors would play a paramount role in this transformation, allowing large amounts of self-sustaining, carbon-neutral energy production.

With Japan's reputation as the largest island country in East Asia, with 29,751 km of coastline, the obvious green, nuclear energy alternative is wind power. Although General Electric (GE) plans to bring wind turbines to Japan's extensive coastlines, unfortunately, what makes Japan perfect for this energy source is exactly what creates its greatest hindrance: typhoons. GE's plans have been halted while they wait to attain their T-Class certification, which denotes the durability to withstand

wind speeds intrinsic to typhoons.

So why hasn't Japan gone all-in on nuclear energy? Until very recently, it had been due to overwhelming public fear of another Fukushima-like disaster. However, with Japanese citizen's wallets weighing more on their consciousness than their fears, the primary focus has shifted to cost. While the rules governing the length of operation of nuclear reactors, which currently stand at forty years in principle and sixty years maximum, have been amended to allow for extended operation past sixty years, the cost to extend one GW of nuclear capacity for at least ten years costs about 763 million USD. On the other hand, even restarting old reactors faces significant implementation costs ranging from 700 million USD to 1 billion USD per unit, despite reactor size or age. All said and done, the costs to implement government-mandated safety measures, maintain facilities, and decommission commercially operated nuclear power plants will be around 123 billion USD.

Despite what many would consider to be a cost large enough to give pause, now is the time for Japan to commit to nuclear energy. With public sentiment not only in favor of nuclear energy, but yearning to be free of the burden of foreign gas, Tokyo has the mandate to finally wake up their long-dormant reactors and even erect new units. Now is the time for full steam ahead on nuclear power, rather than to restore old reactors. It may be months, years, or even another decade before Tokyo has the perfect storm to instigate this agenda; this is their opportunity to galvanize the public and private sector, and toss off the yoke of foreign energy imports.



Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, 2007

India's 100 Smart Cities Initiative Spells Harm for the next 100 Years

Aditya Kalahasti

After gaining independence more than seventy years ago, India has become one of the fastest developing nations of the globe. By investing crores of rupees into urban development plans and international trade, the Indian government has been able to turn what was once a colony into one of the most economically strong countries. But, recently, these development plans which once catapulted the country to international prominence have become the bane of India's poor. The new 100 Cities Initiative of the Modi government, under the guise of poverty mitigation and infrastructure improvement, promises to perpetuate the harms of urban planning initiatives of decades past – but with worse results.

Looking at the historical impacts of similar policies, it becomes clear that Modi's 100 Smart Cities Initiative will disadvantage lower socioeconomic classes. After independence, India's urban planning policies were deliberately designed, not with the goal of social elevation for lower classes, but with the goal of jumpstarting India's global economic development. India first began urban development in earnest around the 1960s and 70s when the novel ideas of globalization and the world economy began taking off. Proponents of globalization said cities would be "upgraded" into a network of supply chains and gain global status, thereby increasing the growth of the country and benefiting all, one particular example being the city of Mumbai. Its reputation as a global city and shipping hub has been earned at the cost of policies that pushed the home and jobless out from industrial cores and into the outskirts of the city. In the 1990s, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority Plan of 1995 aimed to make the city a center for private sector finance companies, which suggested a shift in financial resourcing and administration from public to private sector and requiring more private sector investment. This plan created plans for the acquisition

of land that was often occupied by the home and jobless. Instead of trying to equitably relocate them and provide them with social programs, they were instead forcibly relocated to slums outside city limits. Additionally, it created road schemes that prioritized private motor transport with little to no emphasis on public transport which was far cheaper and more accessible. The final nail in the coffin was the state government's Slum Redevelopment Scheme, a real-estate oriented plan that traded urban land with development rights to the private sector, which enabled them to remove slums from the prime lands of the city to the outskirts.

Modi's 100 Smart Cities Initiative promises to do the same. Declared in 2016 in response to high population growth, Modi said the mission aims to ensure access to basic services for the people. Programs like low-income housing, advanced communications systems, waste management, water quality control, and healthcare, with the general goal of reducing poverty. However, in the name of gaining urban land to develop, the government has seized land and bulldozed entire slums, often without giving notice to slum dwellers, a historical continuation of policies like the Slum Redevelopment Scheme. In the name of development, the government is taking over urban land where millions of the poor have lived for decades, and evicting them in drones just to increase GDP growth rates—leading to significant economic harm for India.

The root of the disparities that this policy will cause is in housing.

India's future rests on education and economic growth. Although well-intentioned, Modi's plan of "upgraded" cities threatens to damage these pillars.

Recently, the South Indian city of Hyderabad developed into what was known as the HITEC smart city, which is used as a place for businesspeople who work with foreign companies to access housing, food, and public service. However, it's extremely expensive to live in. There are slums almost immediately nearby (Serilingampally), but they have seen little improvement in job prospects or in any kind of assistance by the government. These two very different spaces, with high differences in affordability, create a feedback loop: people can't get access to high-quality housing because it's so expensive, so they have to move farther away from their jobs. This forces them to spend more on transportation, which only contributes to increased lack of funds to spend on housing. This cycle is what keeps people in poverty, and inevitably will lead to worse conditions and financial standings for hundreds of thousands of slum residents displaced by this policy.

The second way in which this policy will harm Indian society in the long-term is through widening divisions in the education sector. As the backbone of the economy by effectively providing training for the workforce, India's education sector is critical to economic and societal development. However, this policy harms the education sector by creating a system where people get access to different services and opportunities based on where they live. The 100 Cities plan pushes lower socioeconomic classes, who have a greater need for workforce training, further away from essential services like schools and colleges. Since the infrastructure developments in these cities serve to make them more appealing for global trade and support white collar jobs,

this locks slum residents who are unable to get education even further out of the workforce. Additionally, the forceful relocation of slum residents creates a worse social trend of limiting opportunities for socioeconomic development because of low access to education, which forces people and children into lower-paying jobs, which leaves them dependent on factories, unable to find employment or a better community, further preventing access to education.

This trend of ghettoization isn't unique to India. China's transition to a more globalized economy has created similar problems, because Chinese cities (like Indian ones) want to project the image of a highly developed and modern nation, which means looking the part. One example was the city of Kunming, as it prepared

for the 1999 International Horticulture Expo. The city created housing practices known as *chaiqian*, prioritizing policies of demolition and relocation for different communities with little compensation or alternatives. After seizing and demolishing entire apartment blocks, people who used to live there were forced into low-income housing on the city's borders. Once again, people are more cut off from essential services like sanitation and healthcare, as a result of the focus on development policies to attract foreign trade and investment. Though global trade and the influx of foreign investment money may be beneficial, they have little impact on lower-income people who are hurt by the policies.

Just like in China, in the long term, these policies are unsustainable. Massive population growth

in recent years has further entrenched the disparities between socioeconomic classes in India, with access to crucial services like water, food, and healthcare being the biggest players in this game. India's future rests on education and economic growth. Although well-intentioned, Modi's plan of "upgraded" cities threatens to damage these pillars. As the continuation of a decades-long trend that has seen millions pushed into poverty, it fails to improve the living conditions and long-term prospects for millions of Indians. Since its independence in 1947, India has seen tremendous growth, both financially and socially, however, if these policies continue forward, it's likely to put an end to that growth.



What Taiwan Can Learn From Ukraine

Ben Antonow

For decades, the Peoples' Republic of China has aimed to reunify Taiwan with mainland China. The island nation's sovereignty has been a contentious point in global politics since 1949, and contesting the PRC's status as the de jure government of Taiwan is something most countries are strategically unwilling to do. China's growing economy and military might foreshadow an imminent invasion of Taiwan, a goal that has been publicly illustrated for years in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 5-year-plans.

In October 2022, at the 20th National Congress, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a speech suggesting accelerated efforts to annex Taiwan. United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reacted by saying, "Beijing has made a fundamental decision that the status quo is no longer acceptable, and Beijing is determined to pursue reunification on a much faster timeline."

In terms of global superpowers invading smaller, sovereign nations, our most recent case study is the ongoing Russo-Ukraine War. Many comparisons have been drawn between Ukraine and Taiwan, due in part to the circumstances and justifications of Russia's invasion: to reunite a "lost territory" with the mother country. They are also comparable due to the unexpected fortitude of Ukraine's defense, and the incompetence of Russia's military strategy. A year into the conflict, Russia has only secured eleven percent of Ukraine, yet has suffered 70,000 more deaths than its opponent—an unexpected reversal of what was expected at the beginning of the conflict. Along with the resounding support of Ukraine from much of the western world, this does not bode well for China's hopes of annexation. But does the enormous strategic blunder that is Putin's war suggest a similar outcome for China? Not necessarily.

China is already very aware of the soft power implications, or the blows to one's reputations, that an imposition on a func-

tioning democracy would have. The CCP has expressed concerns about how an escalation of the Ukraine conflict could rally western support for defending democracies and paint China in a negative light. Foreign Minister Qin Gang said, "we urge certain countries to immediately stop fueling the fire, stop shifting blame to China and stop touting 'Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow'."

That being said, the consequences of Russia's actions will probably not deter China from invading Taiwan, as this is something that has been in the works for decades. Ukraine simply offers a preview of the potential fallout and consequences of a Taiwan invasion.

Arguably, the most important thing Taiwan can learn from Ukraine is the extent to which the US will directly intervene in a conflict with a nuclear power. Before Russia invaded, Biden said that "direct confrontation between NATO and Russia is World War III," offering a potential explanation for why China has recently made an effort to bolster its nuclear arsenal. Although China is uncertain if they will have to face the US directly in this war, leveraging nuclear weapons could certainly dissuade direct American involvement. When Putin put Russia's nukes on "high alert" in February 2022, Biden chose to de-escalate rather than match the advance by putting the US's arsenal on DEFCON-3. If China offers a similar threat, it could deter the US from being outwardly supportive of Taiwan.

One of Russia's main blunders has been underestimating the resounding, unanimous support of Ukraine from most of the western world. China, however, will likely not make the same mistake. After seeing Russia hit with an onslaught of tariffs and being made a global pariah, it would be foolish for China to risk a similar fate. One of the most effective strategies against Russia has been the steadfast coalition of NATO and other major powers in supporting Ukraine militarily and condemning Russia. However, there were still cracks in said coalition, like India. Despite the nation's foreign minister personally denouncing the conflict, India has yet to formally condemn Russia's invasion due to economic and military ties.

India's relationship with China is similar. China is by far India's leading import partner, receiving \$89.6 billion in Chinese goods in 2022. The relationship is growing even more dependent, as we saw a 15.3 percent increase in Chinese exports to India in just the first quarter of 2022. India is also entrenched in a tense border dispute with China, further complicating their fragile relationship. Aside from some western frustration, India has not faced many consequences for acting as a bystander in the Ukraine war, and therefore is unlikely to risk relations with China by supporting Taiwan. Taiwan should be ready for China to leverage the economic dependencies of non-NATO states in order to deter major players from intervening in the potential conflict, and Taiwan should proactively try to garner support from bystanders.

One of the most significant oversights in Putin's invasion has been President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy's unexpectedly strong leadership. He has done an exceptional job keeping morale and confidence high within Ukraine. Through constant communication with citizens through video messages and by putting his life on the line to prove his dedication to the war effort, the unlikely president has proven himself as an incredible leader, reflected in his approval rating skyrocketing from twenty-seven percent to eighty-four percent from December 2021 to 2022. Zelenskyy's perceived trustworthiness and ability to dominate information channels through frequent communication with the populace has thwarted the advance of misinformation and confusion. Russia, however, has spread mixed messages, propaganda, and has restricted accurate, reliable documentation of the conflict in order to convey an artificial message within its borders.

If China wants to stage a successful invasion, an effective strategy would be to confuse and demoralize the Taiwanese populace. The CCP is already making efforts to infiltrate information channels within Taiwan by investing in media outlets and recruiting intelligence assets. By causing local divisions intended to destabilize the government, subsidizing "pro-China" reporting, and using intimidation tactics to hush reporting on perceived flaws of the CCP, Chinese influence in Taiwan is considered by analysts to be "very high." Doubling down on the non-kinetic elements of this conflict, as well as assassinating Taiwanese leaders to prevent the emergence of a single, charismatic leader like Zelenskyy, could seriously inhibit Taiwan's ability to unify.

As each day goes by, an invasion of Taiwan looks more and more likely. An island nation versus a global superpower? On paper, it seems like China would be a clear winner. But it would behoove China to ignore the lessons of the Russo-Ukraine war, and a clear understanding of Russia's blunders and triumphs should be central in the CCP's game plan.

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Ukraine simply offers a preview of the potential fallout and consequences of a Taiwan invasion.

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EUROPE



How to (not) save a language: Ireland's halfhearted deliverance of *Gaeilge*

Fiona Caughey

This year's American Academy Awards ceremony featured a duo of Irish movies contending for two of the loftiest Oscars: Best Picture and Best Foreign Language Film. Both *The Banshees of Inisherin* and *An Cailín Ciúin* (*The Quiet Girl*) have enjoyed considerable international success, demonstrating that Ireland's "green wave" has made its way to Hollywood this March. Irish movies and actors have had a long history of success in the American film industry—take the 2021 film *Belfast*, for example—yet they have all been produced in the English language. Compared to *The Banshees*, which is not considered an "international" feature, *An Cailín Ciúin* is a small arthouse film that struggled to secure its single nomination. Almost entirely shot in the Irish language, activists have received *An Cailín Ciúin* as a milestone for an increase in recognition of the spoken language and revitalization efforts at the national scale.

To be clear, Ireland is not an exclusively anglophone country. Alongside English, the Irish language is officially recognized in Ireland, and the country has worked for decades to stimulate the development of a national bilingualism. From Irish-English street signs to bilingual airport terminal announcements to grocery store labels, most aspects of public life reflect the Irish government's aim. Today, however, out of the 1.9 million who claim proficiency—less than half of the entire population of the island—only around 73,000 Irish citizens speak Irish daily. Along with sorry proficiency rates, poorly translated signage remains the status quo. So, despite the recent global craze, why is Ireland failing at saving its own language?

The indigenous language of Ireland, *Gaeilge*, or Gaelic in English, is 4000 years old. It long predates both English colonialism and the birth of Christ, and its development is more or less contemporaneous with the construction of the Egyptian pyramids. The Irish language was exclusively spoken in Ireland until the 17th century, when, upon the arrival of the English, *Gaeilge* witnessed a systematic extermination, beginning in the schooling of Irish youths. Urban populations lost the language before poorer rural ones, but the infamous potato blight catalyzed its deterioration, causing the deaths of over a million Irish who had long-lived at the subsistence level and were already vulnerable to malnourishment. Today, the most concentrated populations of *Gaeilgeoiri*, or those that use Irish as their vernacular, reside in the *Gaeltacht*, rural pockets of land that mostly lie on the island's western coast. 67 percent of the population, or around 96,000 people, in the *Gaeltacht* identify as *Gaeilgeoiri*. This number, however, is declining: young people are simply speaking more English than older generations.

The body responsible for "saving" the Irish language is called the *Foras na Gaeilge*, which was established in 1999. It functions across an international border, both in the Republic of



Bilingual direction signs at a road junction in Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, Ireland.

Ireland and Northern Ireland. The majority of the *Foras*' language promotion focuses on education initiatives. The agency supports Irish-medium instruction, or schooling that is completely conducted in Irish in lieu of English. These schools are commonly referred to as the *gaelscoileanna*. On the island of Ireland, (including both the Republic and North) around 50,000 students are enrolled in a *gaelscoil*. Through immersion, most students in the *gaelscoileanna* enjoy complete fluency in Irish, unlike those who attend English-medium schools, where in the Republic of Ireland, Irish language classes are compulsory at both primary and secondary levels. Unfortunately, very few students from the public system reach fluency due to ineffective class structure and frequency. The success of the *gaelscoileanna* is often attributed to the local communities in which they are located, rather than the top-heavy state policy requiring Irish language coursework in public schools.

While the main issue in the Republic of Ireland lies in the organization of successful Irish classwork and curtailing of language-learning apathy among youths, securing the place of *Gaeilge* in Northern Ireland meets even heavier obstacles. In the North,

a constituent country of the United Kingdom with largely segregated Catholic-Protestant populations, Protestant communities often suspect usage of the Irish language as a means to a political end—a reunification with the rest of Ireland. This is why it took until 2022 for the House of Commons to pass the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) act, which guarantees official status and protections of the Irish language in the North. The act would theoretically place Irish in the public sphere similarly to that of the Republic, though excluding compulsory language instruction in schools; Catholic schools in the North, however, have traditionally offered Irish classes.

Unionists, perhaps reasonably, questioned the efficacy of 600 new English-Irish street signs and the £56,000 price tag. However, Irish language activists suspect this to be the first of many dismissals of the act. That is, in a region where unionist lawmakers liken the "foreignness" of the indigenous *Gaeilge* to Polish, language advocates worry that the act will never be implemented on the ground if sectarian sentiments persist. This is due not only to the Democratic Unionist Party's continued boycott of Stormont, or Northern Ireland's own government, but also the general disrespect charged towards the language among hard-line unionists. "Curry my yoghurt can coca coaler," joked unionist MP Gregory Campbell in 2014 at Stormont, making a semi-phonetic parody of the Irish *go raibh maith agat, Ceanann Comhairle*, or "thank you, speaker." This January, a *gaelscoil* in County Down was vandalized with a "Keep Irish Out" sign in front of its main entrance.

Regardless of the Irish praise of *An Cailín Ciúin*'s global stardom, there remains a post-colonial antipathy, and at times disdain, of the presence of *Gaeilge* in practice, even by Irish people themselves. The achievements of the *gaelscoileanna* serve as a success story of more grassroots initiatives, compared to the federal top-down scheme producing lethargy among Irish students in schools. However, enrollment remains slim for these immersion programs. There is without doubt an attraction for Irish nationals to learn *Gaeilge*, but the tedious and understimulating language requirement may be killing this very appeal. The primary motivation for learning Irish is to remain in touch with one's native cultural identity, but let's face it: learning a second language, especially *Gaeilge*, is difficult. The Irish government needs to take a look at the numbers; there would be clear benefits in reimagining the superficial language requirement while boosting resources and enrollment in the *gaelscoileanna*. As seen with *An Cailín Ciúin*, the arts can serve as another valuable outlet for Irish language advocacy. Ireland must consolidate their ambition to "save Irish", because at this rate, the status quo will remain a nonstarter.

Holding NATO “hostage”:

Sweden and Finland extorted to exchange political independence for military security.

Alexandros Triandafillidis

With the war in Ukraine raging on, many countries who share a border with Russia, such as Finland and Sweden are faced with increased national security concerns, as a revanchist Russian state threatens world peace. Both Finland and Sweden sent official requests to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on May 18, 2022. NATO functions on what is known as the “open door policy,” which affirms that any nation is invited to join the alliance. Once a member of NATO, Article 5 guarantees that if a NATO member is attacked the other signatories of the pact will join in its defense.

However, before a nation joins, all the pre-existing members of the alliance must reach consensus, meaning that if any NATO member has an objection they can veto the bid, rendering the application “frozen” until the issue is resolved. In the case of the Finnish and Swedish bids, twenty-eight out of thirty NATO members swiftly accepted and acknowledged Sweden’s monumental shift away from its century-old neutrality as well as that of Finland, which has been preserved since the end of World War Two. However, two nations stand out in their hesitancy to welcome them: Hungary and Türkiye. Hungary’s PM Victor Orbán has stated that he “has to take Turkey’s sensitivities” into account before accepting. Thus, the major obstacle to this potential expansion of NATO is Türkiye—more specifically, its president Redjep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Erdoğan’s objections focus on the relationship between of Turkey’s Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the two Nordic countries—particularly, Sweden. The PKK not only represents Kurds in Syria, but also, according to the Turkish narrative, has military and political extensions in Syria, the Democratic Party Union (PYD), and its militia, the People’s Defense Units (YPG). Many Turks, including Erdoğan, define the PKK and its affiliates as terrorists, drawing on the ethnic tensions that have long defined Kurds as a threat to Turkish national security. The ethnic identity of the “Kurds” has been mentioned frequently in recent years, but few know

what a “Kurd” is. Inherently, Erdoğan’s foreign policy is greatly dictated by the ethnic conflict between Turks and Kurds, a long divide whose context is crucial in order to make sense of the aforementioned Turkish objections.

The Kurds are ancient peoples, indigenous to the Mesopotamian plains, and are mostly Sunni Muslim. They speak the same distinct language, and practice particular ethnic customs. Despite having a population of 25 million people, they are de jure stateless but hold a large presence in Syria, Iraq, and especially Turkey, where they constitute 20 percent of the population. The Kurdish population has long suffered political suppression from Ankara. In the 1920s and 1930s their language was outlawed, and in an erasure of Kurdish identity, Turkey referred to millions of Kurds as “mountain Turks.” Additionally, the Turkish state made many attempts to relocate Balkan Muslims in Eastern Turkey to dilute Kurdish majority areas, with limited success. In 1978, the PKK was founded on a Marxist ideology that proclaimed an armed struggle until the creation of an independent state for the Kurds of Turkey, otherwise referred to as Kurdistan.

The PKK has engaged in violent campaigns of sporadic terrorist attacks since 1978, their most recent one killing six in Istanbul this past November. The failure of the American occupation to stabilize Iraq and the collapse of the Assad regime have brought Kurdish groups to higher echelons of power in Syria and Iraq. Turkey has aggressively monitored the situation in Syria. In 2016 and 2019, they invaded to prevent military the military victory of the YPG whom they consider an affiliate of the PKK.

The connection between the PKK and the YPG is the root cause of the issue. The international community widely recognizes the PKK as a terrorist organization. The United States, the EU, and most importantly Sweden, one of the first to do so in 1984, also recognizes that as a fact. Opinions diverge on the YPG, America directly aided the YPG

with weapons and air support to the dismay and protest of Erdoğan. Likewise, Sweden in 2021 pledged 376 million dollars in humanitarian aid, democratic development, and “human security.” Therefore, in the opinion of Erdoğan, this is a direct threat to Turkish security. Erdoğan demands that Sweden must “extradite nearly 130 terrorists”, most of which are suspected PKK members as well as conspirators in the 2016 Turkish military coup attempt, before their bid can reach the Turkish parliament. Sweden holds a population of almost 100,000 Kurds, a testament to their openness towards migrants from the Middle East. Recently, Sweden has become a hotbed of tension, within the span of a few days, right-wing Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan led a Quran burning on January 21st, while PKK supporters protested Sweden’s application to NATO. In the meantime, pro-Turkish supporters agitated in favor of the extradition of Kurdish terrorists. Understandably, the sentiment in Ankara has now more than ever been swayed towards the fact that Sweden is harboring ties to the PKK, both due to their belief of the connection to the Swedish-funded YPG, the PKK protests in Sweden, as well as the rampant Swedish Islamophobia. Erdoğan has gone as far as to present the Swedes with a 10-week deadline to extradite Kurds and end the support of the YPG, which Sweden is quoted as requesting

6 months for, seeing as they would have to overrule their constitution in order to extradite the people on Erdoğan’s “list”.

The expansion of NATO is a logical and positive occurrence; it would provide the alliance with more manpower and strategic locations in Scandinavia from which to contest Putin’s expansionist vision. Additionally, both Sweden and Finland have strong arms manufacturing sectors and have already provided military aid to Ukraine, 419 million dollars worth of Swedish artillery and infantry fighting vehicles, and 400 million euros worth of assault rifles, ammunition, and tanks from Finland. Turkey has held the world responsible for its own sectarian issues for far too long. It is a well-documented strategy that when Erdoğan faces internal issues, such as the recent economic collapse and tragic earthquakes, he tends to focus Turkish sentiment outwards, away from the upcoming presidential elections on May 14th, in which he aims to continue his dictatorial rule over Turkey. The members of NATO ought to remember who sends weapons to Ukraine and the likes of Erdoğan who stated that he “maintained our ties with Mr. (Russian President Vladimir) Putin” under the shady auspices of humanitarian agreements. NATO must take responsibility and allow for the inclusion of Sweden and Finland before it is too late to do so.



Putin Struggles to Bring Prigozhin to Heel

Ella Sieger

“Wagner’s Founder Yevgeny Prigozhin is in a Fight for his Life,” a headline from March 2023 declares, and for good reason. Prigozhin, a name prominent in dozens of news outlets across the world, wasn’t always such an established public figure. For years, Prigozhin operated in the shadows as head of the Russian mercenary organization known as the Wagner Group. Since its initial rise to prominence in the 2014 Donbas War in Ukraine, the group has been involved in conflicts in countries including Mali, Libya, the Central African Republic, and most recently, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Prigozhin denied all ties to the Wagner Group until September 2022, when he publicly announced that he was the founder of the organization. “I cleaned the old weapons myself, sorted out the bulletproof vests myself,” he wrote in an online message posted by his catering company, Concord.

Even before Prigozhin’s announcement, the paramilitary group was seen as a de facto army of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, serving as a way for the Russian government to maintain plausible deniability in advantageous conflicts and to control information about Russian successes on the battlefield. The Wagner Group is widely regarded as Kremlin-adjacent by Russian and foreign media, as Prigozhin has strong ties to Putin, having formerly been his personal chef, and has, for years, been known as a top confidant of the Russian leader. However, Prigozhin’s sudden entrance into the public sphere may suggest an attempt to shift the balance of power in Russia during a moment of political disarray.

The Wagner Group has been heavily involved in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with the Pentagon’s John Kirby claiming that Prigozhin sent 50,000 troops into Ukraine. The group has been successful in attempts to capture the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, with Ukrainian intelligence reports documenting how difficult the paramilitary organization is to defeat. 80 percent of Wagner Group troops are recruited from Russian prisons, and Prigozhin’s favored tactic has essentially been to throw bodies at Ukrainian forces. “The deaths of thousands of Wagner soldiers do not matter to Russian society,” one Ukrainian report states. As a result, Ukrainian forces have been overwhelmed by the sheer number of troops that are entering the conflict.

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After so many years of silence and anonymity, it appears that Prigozhin is now attempting to climb the greasy pole of Russian politics.

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Human wave attacks are a longstanding Russian military practice, intended to overwhelm defenders with the sheer weight and momentum of troops.

Prigozhin has emphatically claimed credit for the successes of Russia in the conflict, putting him at odds with Russian military officials. In other conflicts that the Wagner Group has been involved in, Prigozhin has enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy over strategy and coordination. But the war in Ukraine is not just his own. “All these bastards ought to be sent to the front barefoot with just a submachine gun,” he said about commanders of the Russian army. He launched a devastating media campaign against Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, claiming that the defense ministry was intentionally withholding ammunition and supplies from his troops. Retaliating, the two defense officials convinced Putin that Wagner’s inflammatory rhetoric was a threat to the war effort. In response, the Kremlin put Gerasimov at the head of the military operation. Prigozhin has also reportedly been one of the only people to discuss the mistakes of the Russian military with Putin himself.

There is no doubt that Prigozhin’s highly public dispute with the defense ministry is undermining Putin’s rallying cry to the Russian public to unify in wartime. His ruthless, shameless, and vulgar statements about Russia’s elite and the Kremlin itself have won him many enemies. Amongst these enemies is the current governor of St. Petersburg, Alexander Beglov. There has been tension between Prigozhin and Beglov for years, mainly regarding Beglov’s refusal to contract Prigozhin and his companies for projects in the city. Now, however, Prigozhin has officially accused Beglov of corruption.

After so many years of silence and

anonymity, it appears that Prigozhin is now attempting to climb the greasy pole of Russian politics. Prigozhin has clearly stated his ambitions to create an “army with an ideology,” focused on the struggle for justice. This poses a threat to the Kremlin: a personal army is great for the Russian government, but only when it is under state jurisdiction, out of the limelight, and certainly not with any political ambitions. The warlord has plans to open recruitment centers in 42 Russian cities to compensate for massive infantry losses on the battlefield.

Despite Prigozhin’s recent actions, Putin has not shut the Wagner Group down, likely because the sheer number of troops and Prigozhin’s experience on the battlefield are invaluable to the war effort. By all accounts, Prigozhin has framed himself as a straight-talking patriot willing to do whatever duty necessary to protect the motherland. But with every antagonistic statement he releases about the Russian elite, the gap between Prigozhin and Putin grows. Prigozhin has presented himself as an alternative to the military bureaucracy which has been unsuccessful in defeating the Ukrainian army thus far. In doing so, he has inflamed Putin and his allies, who have built their regime on the cornerstones of obedience and coordination. Prigozhin’s entrance into the political sphere threatens to destabilize Putin’s long-standing dominance—when his mercenaries have all succumbed to the plights of battle, and the war is over, his antagonism towards Russia’s elite will only grow. Putin will attempt to keep him in check in the meantime, but Prigozhin shows no signs of slowing down his caustic attacks on generals, mayors, and officials. As long as he and his troops are valuable to the war effort, Putin must keep him around—giving the warlord even more time to unify a jilted Russian public against Putin’s bureaucracy.

Italy's Persisting Population Problem

Grace Manella

Since the September, 2022 election of Italy's first female Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, the country has been undergoing a political transition. She entered office while Italy is confronting its shrinking population, which has been a longstanding issue. Meloni introduced new policies in hopes of increasing the birth rate in Italy, but these changes do not address the larger problem of why Italians emigrate or choose not to have children. If Meloni does not prioritize education, the population problem will persist and worsen.

This is not the first time Italy has tried to increase its birth rate. Meloni's baby checks mimic the "Battle for Births" that took place throughout the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, fascist Prime Minister Benito Mussolini increased tax breaks and healthcare options for women who had produced more than the country's target of five children per family. Furthermore, married men with more than five children paid no taxes; the government required bachelors up to the age of 65 to pay increased taxes as a way to incentivize Italians to marry and start a family. The reality of these policies is that the birth rate did not increase substantially, but the infant mortality rate increased. Roughly a century later, Italy's population is aging at a faster rate than its European counterparts and is expected to decrease to 47 million from its current 59 million by 2070.

It's natural to wonder how a country with universal healthcare, beautiful scenery, and a rich history has had over two million of its young citizens

leave in the past decade. However, the reality is that Italy lacks professional and educational opportunities. In 2022, its youth unemployment rate reached 24 percent. For comparison, the European Union average is 15 percent. Unemployment troubles don't stop once an Italian is older, though: nearly 29 percent of Italians aged 20-34 are neither employed nor pursuing an education. This is the highest rate in the Eurozone and causes the majority of young Italians to live with their parents.

To put Italy's educational opportunities in perspective, it's necessary to acknowledge that nearly 40 percent of Italians do not have the equivalent of a high school degree. Compared to other European countries, Italy also invests less of its GDP into public education. Additionally, for the majority of Italians who do want to pursue higher education, only 2 percent of them pursue one in information and communication technologies (ICT), which covers the lucrative umbrella of developing digital skills. This can be explained by the popularity of humanities subjects in Italy, but it limits the ability of Italians to work both in and out of the country. If citizens wanted to use their humanities degree to work in academia, they're likely to be paid nearly a third less in Italy than in other EU countries. Moreover, COVID-19 worsened this already weak education system. Since the pandemic, Italian literacy levels have fallen, nearly 30 percent of students stopped attending school when online instruction began during the pandemic. This only hurts the youth unemployment rate and likely will encourage Italians who want more opportunities to explore alternative options outside of their home coun-

try.

So, where have these two million Italians been going? Italian citizens are able to work anywhere within the EU, and some even travel to the USA. Biana Giacobone, who works for NPR in Washington DC, reflected on how her now-separated friends and family didn't feel like they could live their most successful lives in Italy: "We all look longingly back at our country, wondering when and if there'll be a good moment to go back, and have a job and a career comparable to the one we can have abroad." This quality is also impacted by Italy's current family policies; parental leave is compensated significantly less than maternal leave for working mothers. The UN also surveyed that most Italians have a negative view of working mothers, with the majority of Italians stating that young children suffer when mothers work. This stigma only adds more difficulty with helping the shrinking population. Given that long-term quality opportunities may be better abroad has contributed to Italy officially having the lowest crude birth rate in Europe - this has inspired Meloni's current political agenda.

Meloni recently announced Italy's new budget would incentivize companies to hire women and young workers. Besides allocating money dedicated to this cause, there have been few concrete plans on how to execute this. The country wants to invest the money in improving the health of Italy's large, elderly population: "They represent the heart of society, and a patrimony of values, traditions, and precious wisdom". Ironically, Meloni has delayed a program to build new nursery schools but still wants to reduce childcare costs. She also enacted a 50 percent increase in the "baby bonus" checks Italian parents receive the first year after the birth of a child, and a reduced tax on necessities for newborns, like diapers. While these new policies improve conditions for Italian mothers, it is not a viable solution. Some Italians may feel more financially comfortable having children, but this will only be for people who have not left Italy. While this may have a marginal effect, the policies alone will not stop citizens from leaving and starting families elsewhere.

Meloni's current attempts to increase Italy's population will likely result in more Italians leaving the country for other educational and academic opportunities. If Italy wants viable solutions to help its population crisis, Meloni's policies should focus less on financial obligations and more on improving education and work opportunities in Italy.



The United Kingdom's National Health Service is No Longer Sustainable

Chris Coffey

In 1942, the Beveridge Report—a government report drafted by the Liberal economist William Beveridge—recommended that the United Kingdom should create “comprehensive health and rehabilitation services for prevention and cure of disease.” Beveridge believed that widespread reforms to Britain’s system of social welfare were necessary to combat the “five giants” of “idleness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want” during reconstruction from the ravages of World War II. When Clement Attlee’s Labour Party won the watershed 1945 general election in a landslide, the postwar consensus supporting Beveridge’s initially controversial “cradle to grave” social welfare scheme was consolidated.

Attlee’s Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan, began the process that produced the National Health Service (NHS) as we know it today. The Labour government defeated Conservative amendments to Bevan’s bill, designed to maintain local control and ownership of hospitals instead of instituting national ownership of all hospitals. The NHS is still a single large national organization, albeit divided into devolved equivalents; subsequent governments have implemented financing arrangements with private firms through private finance initiatives (PFIs). In the first decades after the founding of the NHS, Conservative and Labour governments battled back and forth over whether or not to introduce fees for the provision of certain services. Nevertheless, the NHS has become an integral part

of Britain’s national psyche and reform to the NHS is widely regarded as the third rail of British politics.

Despite the unpopularity of reform, due to the enshrinement of universal public healthcare into the UK’s national psyche, the NHS is no longer functional as currently constituted due to an aging population, chronic lack of funding, and lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 1945, the year of the Labour landslide that precipitated the 1948 formation of the NHS, the life expectancy in the UK was just over 64 years. By 2020, the life expectancy had risen to over 81 years. Britain’s aging population will only continue to increase demand for the already strained services of the NHS. According to the Organiza-



tion for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the elderly require three to five times the amount of healthcare that younger people do. The current population of the UK is over 67 million. By 2041, the number of British people aged 85 and above is projected to double to over 3 million. Lord George Filkin, a British Labour politician, has remarked on the crossroads confronting the NHS, saying that, “Britain stands to either suffer or benefit from the growing aging demographic shift depending on how it responds.” The challenge of an aging population, which is widespread throughout the developed world, would be difficult enough for the NHS to contend with even if the system was efficient and sufficiently funded. Some degree of privatization could serve as a solution for Britain’s ailing healthcare system.

Healthcare spending in the UK increased nearly every year since the establishment of the NHS due to increased life expectancy and population growth. However, for the decade prior to the onset of COVID-19, the growth in NHS funding had been failing to keep pace with demand and was below the long term average. The percentage of Britain’s GDP being spent on healthcare grew from 9.9 percent in 2019 to 12 percent in 2020, with the growth in spending almost entirely due to the COVID-19 pandemic rather than as a response to the challenges facing the NHS. For more than a decade, the NHS has prided itself on being one of the leanest government-run healthcare systems in the developed world. Between 2010 and 2020, inflation-adjusted per capita NHS funding declined slightly, by about 0.1 percent. Before 2010, both Conservative and Labour governments ensured that NHS funding grew faster than both inflation and population growth. Britain’s Conservative government, under multiple prime ministers, has dramatically increased NHS funding since 2020, but that spending has almost entirely gone toward combatting the pandemic. The NHS was woefully unprepared for a public health emergency on the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, so the extra funding merely mitigated an already grim situation.

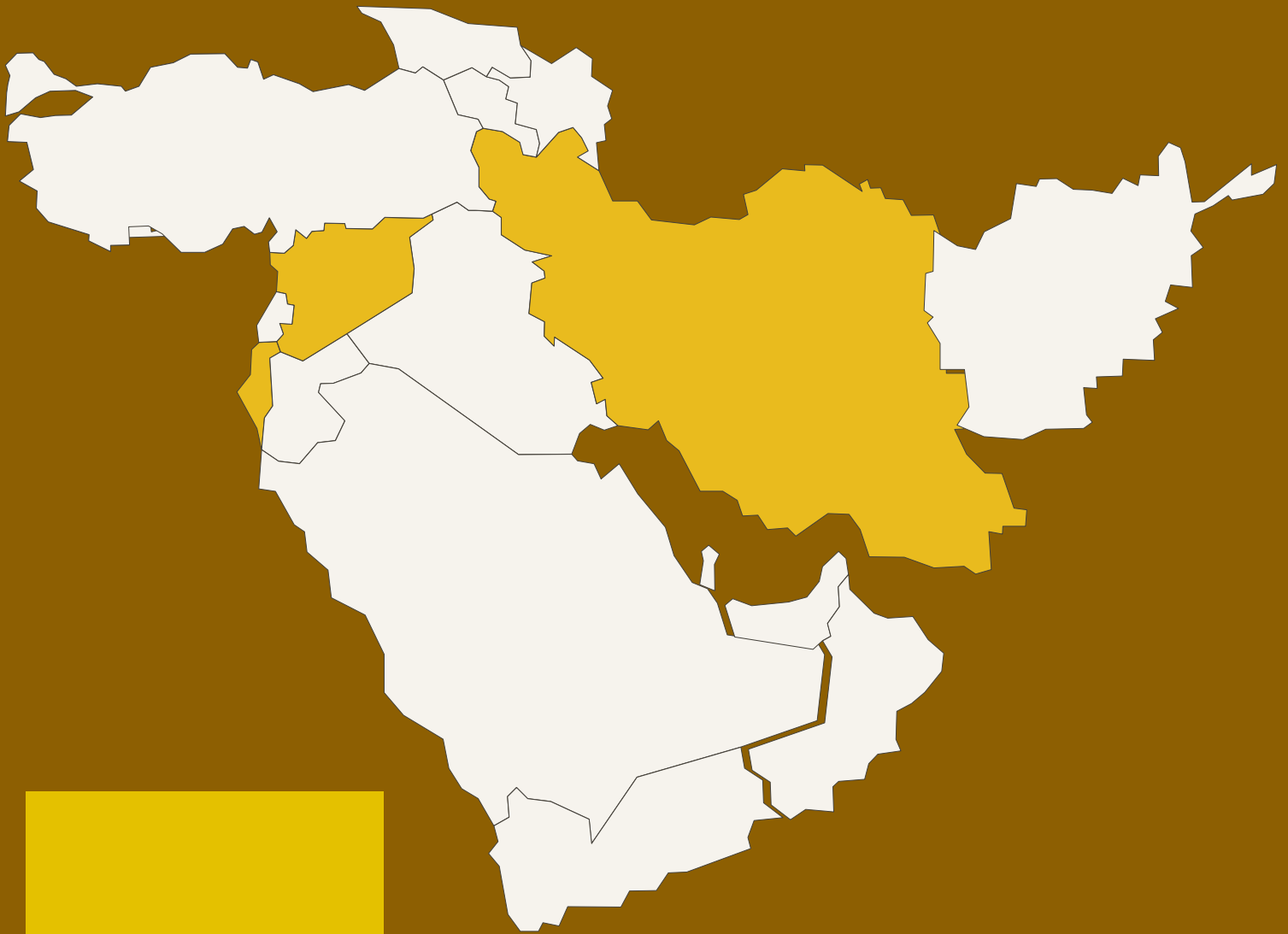
Although increased funding is one possible solution to the NHS’s crisis, healthcare spending alone is not always successful. For example, Britons, on average, generally enjoy better health outcomes (on measures including infant mortality, maternal mortality, preventable mortality, and life expectancy) than Americans. That reality is not necessarily reflective of a lack of sufficient healthcare spending in the United States, but of a lack of efficient use of available funds. According to the OECD, the U.S. spends significantly more on healthcare than other high-income countries — both on a per capita basis and as a share of total GDP. In 2019, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. spent nearly 17 percent of GDP on healthcare. That figure was far above the OECD average, and much higher than the spending of the other G7 countries, which ranged from 8.7 percent in Italy to 11.7 percent in Germany. The UK, meanwhile, spent only 10 percent of GDP on healthcare in 2019. Per capita spending on healthcare in the U.S. is more than double that of the UK. Wealthy countries that spend a comparable percentage of GDP on healthcare to the UK, such as Norway, the Netherlands, and Australia, enjoy better healthcare outcomes than Britain. As such, the NHS not only needs increased funding, but also more efficient administration and allocation of resources.

The NHS has lost thousands of hospital beds in its decade-long drive for efficiency. 6.8 million people in the UK are on NHS waiting lists for everything from routine checkups to necessary surgeries, up from 4.2 million before the pandemic. The NHS is Europe’s largest employer with roughly 1.3 million employees, but now boasts only 2.9 doctors per thousand people compared to the European average of 3.7). Public satisfaction in the NHS has plummeted as wards have filled and people have to wait hours for ambulances or to receive basic care. By one estimate, delays in treatment are causing the premature deaths of between 300 and 500 people a week. The NHS has said that it hopes to cut the

average time a heart attack sufferer waits for an ambulance. Many Britons are literally dying from ailments that should rarely prove fatal in a country as wealthy as the UK.

The one-size-fits-all nature of the NHS prioritizes equality of access over freedom of choice or quality of care. A privatized healthcare system, or at least more private options besides the NHS, would allow British patients to have greater leeway over where they are treated and what treatments they receive. Of course, a completely privatized healthcare system risks limiting access to treatment to the wealthy, and there are rural areas of Britain in which competition would be less feasible, but many Britons value a degree of choice over their healthcare. Privatization is also the most practical way to reduce the backlog and bloated waiting lists of the NHS. There are already limited private alternatives to the NHS, but those are often inaccessible or unaffordable for poor or rural British people. One proposed option would be to offer NHS patients the opportunity to choose private healthcare, funded through local health budgets, if the NHS is unable to provide service within a reasonable time. The controversial Health and Care Act 2022 provided for the establishment of transparent independent oversight boards, which would be staffed by a combination of doctors, NHS officials, and representatives of private healthcare providers to ensure NHS accountability and provide recommendations. Such legislation is a step in the right direction for British patients and the NHS.

The NHS, in its current state, inhabits an unenviable position among the healthcare systems of the developed world. For the past decade, healthcare funding in the UK has simply not kept pace with demand. The UK is not unique in experiencing an aging population and increased demand because of COVID-19. However, the NHS is nowhere near as efficient as it once was. The NHS would benefit from British healthcare either being massively funded to the same extent as elsewhere in Europe, or, perhaps more plausibly, from some aspects of the system being denationalized and opened to private competition.



MIDDLE EAST

A need for (Mach) speed: The power and perils behind Iran's race for hypersonic weaponry

Sophie Clark

In November 2022, Iranian officials announced that the country had successfully tested a hypersonic missile. This feat would place Iran alongside China and Russia—the only other countries in the world known to have developed this indomitable capability. Though public sources have failed to corroborate the state's claim, this development in Iran's campaign for advanced weaponry underscores a concerning trend of Chinese and Russian influence in the Middle East. Amid alarming reports of near weapons-grade uranium enrichment and a slew of international weapons agreements, Iran's quest for hypersonic missiles signals a potentially devastating shift in the Middle East's precarious balance of power.

Over the past two years, collaboration between the three nations—dubbed the “Triple Axis”—has assumed a startling pace. This was most recently on display during trilateral military exercises in the Gulf of Oman on the heels of Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow—and mere days before the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin. In the first quarter of 2023 alone, Iran and Russia advanced at least three notable defense collaborations, including one that promises to boost Iran's advanced missile development program in exchange for military aid. Another agreement, primarily aimed at helping Tehran gain advanced digital surveillance capabilities, has opened the door for the country to secure high-level digital-offensive capabilities—an exchange that, not long ago, would have been quickly struck down by Moscow. The invasion of Ukraine has revealed weaknesses in Russia's defensive capabilities, and Putin's desperation for military dominance has left him willing to make trades previously off the table. Though concerning, Russian-Iranian collaboration alone will not be the tipping point that pushes Middle Eastern stability over the edge.

China's contemporary foreign policy approach is not a secret to any competitor. As the country's economic and military powers have grown, its international strategy has morphed into a campaign to overturn US influence in key strategic areas—including the Middle East. In March 2023, the same week as the trilateral military exercises, China mediated historic peace talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, ending a decades-long proxy war between the two major powers. Capitalizing on Saudi's loss of trust in the US as a partner—and a general decline in US regional influence—

China has turned Saudi away from alignment with the US and toward the Triple Axis, placing the region one step closer to a dangerous upset of stability; this strategy of mediation may soon be adopted by Russia as it seeks to replicate this success through a Türkiye-Syria rapprochement. In conjunction with the 2021 400 billion USD investment-for-oil exchange between Iran and China and the collection of weapons collaborations between all three powers, these diplomatic deals cement the threat of a shift in power from all directions. The dangers of this clear rise in Chinese and Russian involvement in the Middle East is epitomized in the shift of Iran's defense ambitions toward those of its newfound partners.

Similar to ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons fly at speeds of at least Mach 5 (and up to Mach 10), either as a hypersonic glide vehicle—which is launched from a rocket and separates to glide toward its target—or a hypersonic cruise missile—which is powered by high-speed, air-breathing engines. However, in contrast to the set trajectories of ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons are highly maneuverable, allowing operators to change the weapon's course at a moment's notice. This combination of speed and maneuverability allows these weapons to evade just about every air defense system currently in place, granting any country with this technology a considerable advantage. For now, this upper-hand position belongs to China, which seeks to bolster its already record-holding arsenal with nuclear-armed hypersonics. And, indeed, Russia is not too far behind. On its own, Iran likely lacks the capacity to develop such systems, but between the country's hypersonic aspirations and its growing collaboration with the leading producers of these weapons, the case of Iranian hypersonic development is well within the realm of possibility. And, with the country's nuclear capabilities nearing a critical point, Iran's development of these systems has become a pressing threat.

In February 2023, a UN inspection of Iran's nuclear facilities uncovered traces of uranium enriched to 84%—just 6% shy of weapons-grade concentrations. The agency's report also revealed that the country's stockpile of 60% uranium—which it has been producing for years—grew by over a third in the three months prior. Though fears of a nuclear-armed Iran are nothing new, these revelations have garnered a new

level of concern abroad. Following the IAEA's report, CIA Director William Burns stated that the Iranian nuclear program has advanced “to the point where it would only be a matter of weeks before they can enrich to 90%,” placing the country closer than ever before to amassing a nuclear arsenal. In the shadows of Iran's hypersonic ambitions and ever-growing ties to the Russian and Chinese militaries, the world may very well be faced with a Mach 10 nuclear threat in the near future.

The likelihood that Iran both develops and uses any new-age nuclear weapons against other major powers is slim. The country's regime may be bold, but its leaders are not naive, and the prospect of being leveled by the US nuclear arsenal provides sufficient deterrence to hold Iran at bay—for now. That being said, the shifting geopolitics generated from this newfound collaboration will almost certainly complicate the US's ability to counter threats from Iran as it becomes increasingly backed by the US's two greatest competitors—particularly in light of the US's own failed hypersonic tests. This is not to say that US influence and involvement in the Middle East is categorically beneficial, but the replacement of democratic-backed influence with authoritarian partnerships supported by indefeasible arsenals is not necessarily a favorable trade. And, in the not-so-unlikely case Tehran adopts the same brash political attitudes as Beijing and Moscow, any country that dares stand in its way faces the prospect of a grim future.

In the days following the issuance of the ICC's arrest warrant, former Russian leader and current Security Council official Dmitry Medvedev threatened to launch hypersonics on the court in retaliation. The country has also deployed these weapons in its war against Ukraine, using them to destroy weapons stores in response to US and NATO defense support. With Iran's history of revenge plots and the deliberate choice of Russia to employ hypersonics as a counter to external pressure, these new capabilities and political precedents do not bode well for the future of the Middle East—or any lesser competitor, for that matter. Between rising alliances with great powers and the country's high-speed ambitions, Iran is closer than ever to the finish line in the race for hypersonics, and as the country approaches victory, the Middle East's balance of power faces a perilous upset.

The United States must permanently lift all of its sanctions on Syria.

Ammar Ahmad

The ongoing economic crisis in Syria is an unfortunate reminder of the devastating consequences of war and political corruption. The country's inflation rate has soared to unprecedented levels—reaching over 300 percent in 2021 alone—leaving the majority of Syrians struggling to afford basic necessities. This has perpetuated the dissolution of the middle class, especially in the cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, culminating in the uprising of radical groups and the foreign incursion of Syrian land. The root of the economic crisis can be traced back to the outbreak of civil war in 2011. As rebel groups emerged to fight against government forces for dominance over cities, towns, and rural areas, the level of violence heightened, ultimately leading to a civil war. The prolonged conflict has decimated the country's infrastructure, and the government has not achieved any meaningful economic recovery since. This instability has led to the displacement of millions of Syrians, further exacerbating the economic turmoil and causing Syria's GDP to drop by more than 50 percent from 2010 to 2020.

Under President Bashar al-Assad's leadership, the government has relied on printing more money to finance its expenses instead of implementing constructive policies to stimulate growth and create jobs. Rather than stimulating the economy, this move has only led to a rapid increase in money supply, causing prices to skyrocket and essentially eroding the value of the Syrian pound. The government's mismanagement of the economy has also caused widespread corruption. The black market is flourishing: individuals and businesses have hoarded essential goods and profited from scarcity. Though the economy is suffering, the most devastating impact of the economic crisis has been felt by the general Syrian population. The inflation rate has made it nearly impossible for people to afford basic necessities, including food and water. As a direct result, up to 90 percent of Syrians now live in poverty, and some 60 percent are at risk of going hungry.

While internal corruption is a major systemic issue, Western sanctions and embargoes have dealt a fatal blow to the Syrian economy. The U.S. has levied sanctions against Syria since 1979, when it designated the Assad regime as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism." However, the U.S. imposed the most devastating sanctions on Syria in two, later waves. The first, imposed in 2004, was a supposed response to Syrian support for terrorism and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction—which, ironically enough, was an unfounded accusation made by the Bush administration. The second phase of sanctions started in 2011 and was a condemnation of the repression of the Syrian people by the Assad regime. The European Union quickly followed the U.S. and imposed sanctions as Syria's civil war broke out, severing Syria's economic ties with the West.

After years of economic turmoil, the most brutal sanctions hit Syria in 2019. The sanctions in question are classified under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019—an act that punishes Bashar al-Assad's regime for its war crimes against the Syrian people. This act was signed into law by President Trump in 2019,



taking effect in June 2020 after an anonymous Syrian military police photographer reportedly provided American intelligence with 53,000 pictures of victims of torture by the regime of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad.

These harsh sanctions have limited the Syrian government's ability to access international markets and obtain foreign currency. Under mild examination, it becomes obvious that the sanctions have not hurt the Syrian regime as much as they have hurt the very people they were supposed to protect. These sanctions have allowed Bashar al-Assad to remain in power while simultaneously impairing the Syrian people. With no apparent change in administrative behavior, these sanctions have proved to be futile and ineffective. Although the sanctions have allowed for humanitarian aid to the country, temporary donations will not rebuild the country. In order for Syrians to thrive, they need a stable economy.

On a larger geopolitical scale, the sanctions also serve as a proxy-war pawn against Russian and Iranian influence on the Syrian regime. The U.S., along with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, has worked to undermine the regime by empowering rebel groups. On the other hand, Russia and Iran have provided the Syrian government with military support in order to maintain order. With that in mind, it's critical to remember that the U.S.'s interest in Syria is in large part influenced by its antagonism against Russia and Iran.

Further, in the wake of the historic earthquakes that devastated Turkey and Syria and killed more than 34,000 civilians, the U.S. has reluctantly lifted its sanctions on Syria for 180 days. This move only came after international outrage and numerous public appeals, most prominently by China, which moved in just four days after the earthquakes to provide medical aid. But, what the U.S. fails to recognize is that the damage of the four large-magnitude earthquakes will not be resolved in a mere six-month period. And while some Western countries have provided humanitarian earthquake relief to the Syrian people, it is imperative for them to acknowledge the problems that predate the earthquake.

Without this recognition, this relief is purely performative and meant to stifle the temporary international outcry for the Syrian people. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, and economic instability, the Syrian people will need aid for more than just six months.

As the Syrian population continues to experience an unprecedented oil shortage, the U.S. has moved in to exploit the land's natural resources in Kurdish areas in northeastern Syria, amounting to 66,000 barrels retrieved daily by American forces in 2022. This was corroborated by former U.S. President Donald Trump's statement at a 2019 conference in Chicago, where he stated "We want to keep the oil, \$45 million a month. Keep the oil. We have secured the oil." Meanwhile, blackouts and brutal winters have been integrated into the Syrian daily routine as a result of a fuel crisis. And just after the earthquakes in 2023, the U.S. army resumed its theft of Syrian oil under illegal occupation in the country's northeastern region, even sending a top U.S. general to the military base—an act which is not authorized by the Syrian government.

This economic devastation—perpetuated by American sanctions—demands a meaningful long-term response from the international community. A substantial step towards such a goal would include lifting Western sanctions to ensure that Syria is on a road of economic and political progress. The West must realize that these sanctions are not hurting the alleged war criminal Bashar al-Assad; they are hurting the Syrian people.

Ultimately, the crisis in Syria is a dire reminder of the devastating consequences of war and political mismanagement. The Syrian government's inability to address the crisis, along with widespread corruption and the imposition of sanctions from abroad, has led to unprecedented inflation rates and economic distress for the Syrian people. In order to help heal this broken land, the international community must address this crisis and provide meaningful aid to the Syrian people instead of imprisoning their economy.

The Fight for Artistic Freedom in Iran: Jafar Panahi's Legacy and Iranian New Wave Cinema

Josephine Ness

"I will remain in this state until perhaps my lifeless body is freed from prison," said Jafar Panahi during his dry hunger strike in February 2023.

Panahi, an internationally-renowned filmmaker and outspoken critic of the Iranian regime, has had a contentious relationship with authorities for decades. In July 2023, he was arrested and sentenced to six years in prison for "propaganda against the system," an offense related to the content of his films that openly criticize the government's authority and violate the government's strict content restrictions. These restrictions disallow anything that goes against the government's Islamic values, including women depicted without veils. Panahi's multiple imprisonments have only elevated his status as a symbol of resistance against the regime's authoritarianism. By continuing to make films despite government censorship and harassment, Panahi has become a potent symbol of dissent and a beacon of hope for Iranians seeking to challenge the status quo.

Panahi's experience with censorship and wrongful imprisonment is not unique in Iran. Since the 1978 Revolution, the Iranian regime has aggressively restricted all cinema that does not adhere to its Islamic values. The authorities often arrest, silence, and abuse those who publicly speak out against it. Nevertheless, Iranian filmmakers like Panahi have continued to push boundaries and create films that reflect evolving social values and challenge cultural norms.

Panahi's work stands out as a masterpiece in the realm of Iran's New Wave films, a genre marked by extremely low budgets, non-professional actors, and the fusion of fiction with reality to pro-

vide social and cultural commentary. Notably, Panahi's film "Offside" is a poignant portrayal of Iranian women defying societal norms by attempting to sneak into a football stadium to watch a World Cup Qualifying Match between Iran and Bahrain. The film was shot during the actual match, using real-life events to enhance its message. Through its gripping storyline, the film highlights the profound frustration felt by Iranian women who are denied even the most basic of freedoms—the right to attend a sports match. It brings into focus the wider implications of this restriction and prompts us to consider other ways in which Iranian women are deprived of their fundamental rights.

Iranian filmmakers suffer from severe censorship of their work—so much so that Panahi addressed this censorship by making a film after he was banned from making films back in 2010. He cleverly titled the piece "This Is Not A Film" and smuggled it out of the country in a flash drive hidden inside a birthday cake. The film was an abstract commentary on the censorship of Iranian cinema itself. It depicted a day in Panahi's life while confined to his house awaiting an appeal on charges he incurred due to creating films that the government deemed as a threat. While in his living room, he walks through the plot of a movie that the government denied him permission to create. "This Is Not A Film" has no plot, no script, and the video was partially captured on an iPhone. The New York Times called it "a masterpiece in a form that does not yet exist" and it gained international recognition due to its striking representation of artists' frustration over the Iranian government's censorship measures.

Panahi's defiance of censorship and imprisonment has inspired a new generation of Iranian filmmakers to continue the fight

for artistic freedom. In recent years, a wave of young filmmakers has emerged, creating films that challenge cultural norms and societal conventions. These filmmakers, including female filmmakers Narges Abyar and Maryam Moghaddam, are using their work to challenge cultural norms and societal conventions and explore important social issues in Iran. Narges Abyar is a talented director, screenwriter, and novelist who has gained recognition for her poignant and socially relevant films that often focus on the experiences of women and children in Iran and tackle issues such as war, poverty, and discrimination. Her film "Breath" (2016), which explores the impact of the Iran-Iraq War on a family, won multiple awards at international film festivals. Likewise, Maryam Moghaddam is an emerging filmmaker who has gained attention for her debut feature film "Ebad" (2020). The film tells the story of Nobel Prize-winning human rights activist Shirin Ebadi and explores her struggle for justice and freedom in Iran. "Ebad" premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival and was well-received by critics for its powerful storytelling and striking visuals.

Abyar and Moghaddam, along with other emerging filmmakers in Iran, are part of a new wave of artists who are using their work to challenge the status quo and push for change. Their films are not only expanding the boundaries of Iranian cinema but also providing a voice for those who have long been marginalized in Iranian society. Through their work, these filmmakers are continuing the legacy of Panahi and other trailblazers who have fought for artistic freedom and social change in Iran.

This crackdown on artistic expression has had a significant impact on Iranian cinema and society. Filmmakers and artists are often the first to publicly challenge societal conventions and expose injustices, making them a crucial force for social change. By silencing these voices, the government is not only suppressing artistic expression but also limiting the potential for social progress and political reform. This repression creates a climate of fear, in which artists are hesitant to take risks or express dissenting views, limiting the range of voices and ideas in Iranian society.

Dissenting cinema in Iran is a revolution on film that reflects evolving values in Iranian society and exposes the government's oppression of the Iranian people. It is a threat to the regime not only because it gives people a voice to express their discontent about society, but also because it exposes and validates feelings of injustice in society on an international platform. The future of Iranian cinema is uncertain, but the legacy of filmmakers like Panahi will continue to inspire Iranians and the world to challenge authoritarianism and fight for freedom of expression.



A Tough Road Ahead: Traffic Congestion in Cairo Drives Deeper Economic and Social Issues

Anna Tuohey

Cairo is one of the largest cities in Africa, and treasured as a historical gem that holds some of the world's greatest geologic and ancient wonders. Yet, in order to navigate the city, tourists and locals alike must brave a modern danger: erratic and seemingly lawless traffic patterns that clog the roads for miles, pose a danger to pedestrians, and emit exhaust fumes into the air. The issue is deeply complex, rooted in cultural

norms, economic factors, and Cairo's long history as a bustling city. In an effort to modernize the city and improve accessibility, the Egyptian government must take a multifaceted approach that reforms infrastructure, technology, and social practices.

The city of Cairo is home to over 22 million people, a number that has been steadily increasing by around three to four percent annually since 1950. But

as the population has grown, the infrastructure has not. The city's layout remains indicative of its slow, haphazard expansion spanning hundreds of years. Housing is increasingly scarce, and large informal settlements have emerged everywhere from alleyways to graveyards. Battered mattresses are crammed in between centuries old tombstones and families sleep side by side on rooftops. Despite

widening economic divides with these settlements just blocks away from wealthier residents' sprawling homes, traffic jams remain a common denominator plaguing both the rich and the poor. Streets are cracked and filled with potholes, there are few working traffic lights, and sidewalks are rare and uneven. Tight, often illegal parking leaves cars with dents and scrapes. Pedestrians are often denied the right of



way, having to forcibly inch their way through oncoming traffic.

While traffic control may appear to be no more than an afterthought in the tumultuous political and social context that is modern Cairo, its inadequacy has a ripple effect that extends well beyond the roads, impacting the economy and general quality of life. High levels of fatal road accidents, particularly those involving foreigners, threaten to impact the tourism industry that is so vital to Cairo's economy. Long commuting times reduce efficiency of the workforce, and deter local business investment. Data indicates that the Egyptian economy loses 50 billion EGP (1.6 billion USD) annually due to traffic congestion via air pollution, unnecessary fuel consumption, and high rates of injuries in automobile accidents. Increased time on the roads reduces the durability of cars, adding another expense to the financially strapped majority of the population.

Existing public transportation options are insufficient, with outdated buses crammed with passengers inching their way through the packed roads. Due to its unreliability, there is little incentive for Egyptians to switch to public transport. This is an especially unsuitable option for women and children, with reports of harassment so high that a female-only bus system with women drivers was created in 2017 to offer a safe transport option around the city. Due to budget constraints these buses

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have limited operation and thus only serve a small population of women. While promising, the system as it currently operates fails to mitigate large scale transportation issues and provides only minimal reprieve from harassment. Violence against women, including on public transportation, consistently makes headlines in Cairo.

Further compounding dependence on cars in recent years is Egypt's policy of subsidizing fuel in an effort to keep consumer prices low and soften the impact of high unemployment rates. Since 2014, government spending on this program has reached the billions. However, following global inflation and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on gas prices, the government reduced its fuel subsidy budget to seventeen billion EGP (1.09 billion USD) down from a high of 128 billion EGP (4.1 billion USD), thus opening the potential for a diversion of funds towards improving local infrastructure.

This is not to say that the Egyptian government hasn't attempted to address the debilitating traffic

problem in the past. Funds have been devoted to mitigating the congestion of roads and expanding public transportation options in recent years, reaching up to 300 EGP billion (9.7 billion USD). However, road improvements themselves do not mitigate the human impacts of driver behavior and poor traffic control. Therefore, these expansion projects remain insufficient and have resulted in marginal improvements in the safety and accessibility of the city.

Cairo's metro system, built in 1987 as the first in Africa, serves hundreds of millions of riders each year, but reaches only limited areas of the city. Ongoing and future plans to expand the metro system appear promising, with project goals including the reduction of traffic congestion and connection between poorer areas and the city center. Yet, even the most robust public transportation will not fully replace the convenience of personal vehicle ownership. Thus this

must be only one step in a multifaceted approach to reduce traffic congestion. In tandem with continued development of the metro system in both modernization of technology and expansion of city access points, the Egyptian government must prioritize the revitalization of Cairo's streets and sidewalks to bolster the city's economy, reduce pollution and gas consumption, and minimize traffic related injuries. Furthermore, additional resources must be devoted to the tightening of traffic control and enforcement of driving laws so as to change behavioral patterns of drivers and make the roads safe for everyone from local children to foreign visitors.

While a complex and deeply rooted issue that has steadily worsened in recent decades, Cairo's traffic issue also presents a unique and potentially transformative opportunity to revitalize the city's technology and infrastructure, and create more jobs for the millions of people living below the poverty line.

The Nabka Continues: Dispossession in Palestine

Omar Malik

The Palestinian existence is one characterized by violence, fear, dispossession, and catastrophe. Their identity exists almost entirely within the context of what is defined, often by the West, as the Arab-Israeli conflict or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Of the 14 million Palestinians worldwide, 5.3 million live in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, 1.7 million live in the territories allocated in the infamous 1948 White Paper, and seven million elsewhere as part of the Palestinian diaspora. This diaspora was created by conflict and by the historic, systematic dispossession and displacement of the Palestinian population that continues to the present. The Palestinian identity is historically defined by a series of regional wars and by the Nakba—Arabic for “catastrophe”—in 1948. The Nakba brought the destruction of over 530 Palestinian villages and the massacre of its residents. By the end, 15,000 Palestinians were dead and 750,000 had been permanently displaced. Seventy-five years later, the dispossession of Palestinians continues to make way for both the creation of settlements in the occupied territory of the West Bank and the displacement of Palestinians from historic neighborhoods in Jerusalem. From Masafer Yatta to Silwan dispossession is present in every corner of Palestine.

The tools of Israeli dispossession operate under several guises that mask the continued displacement of Palestinians. In Masafer Yatta, it exists in the invented firing zones that prohibit civilian populations to live within them. In Silwan, archaeology and settler colonialism are synonymous with one another, and Israeli archaeological projects seek not to uncover history but to destroy the present.

The establishment of Israeli control in the Palestinian West Bank, as defined by the Oslo Accords, has oppressed

the Palestinian population in Area C. The Oslo Accords are a pair of agreements between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Israeli government that, in short, divided the Palestinian West Bank into three areas with various degrees of Israeli administrative and military control. Area C is physically the largest of the three, covering 60 percent of the West Bank and primarily rural Palestinian villages, all under total Israeli control and Israeli settlements. 18 percent of Area C has been declared firing zones since the 1970s; firing zones serve exclusively as Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) training grounds in which civilians are prohibited. It is within Firing Zone 918, established in 1981 by the then agricultural minister Ariel Sharon, that the village of Masafer Yatta precariously exists.

The creation of this zone cannot be mistaken for anything other than an explicit attempt to force Palestinians from their homes and, as former Israeli Deputy Military Secretary Shaul Arieli stated, to “prevent the Palestinian population from seeping into Israel”. The Israeli government had little difficulty making this a reality and since 1999 the population of Masafer Yatta has had to fight for its

survival. A fight inherently geared towards the Israeli government’s cause. Since 2006, 75 building permits have been granted to Palestinians in Area C while 20,500 have been given to Israeli settlers. The crux of this struggle came in May of 2022 when the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in the two-decade-old case decisively in favor of the IDF, arguing that the residents of Masafer Yatta were not permanent residents in the village at the time of establishment in 1981. Despite testimony and literature evidence of the inhabitation of the region by Palestinians far earlier than the 1980s. A week later, Mohammed Ayoub and 17 members of his extended family were homeless and forced to live in a single tent. What had been a decades-long struggle by the Palestinians of Masafer Yatta was ended by the Israeli court system’s indifference—or even malice—toward Palestinians. The Israeli system of governance is just that, Israeli. Avenues available to Palestinians to fight the stories of dispossession in every corner of their land are nothing more than endless tunnels known for their tales of despair and loss.

In Silwan, the Israeli tool of oppression is archaeology rather than firing zones, but the end result of dispossession remains. The City of David tourism project in Silwan’s Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in occupied East Jerusalem has resulted in damage to and the destruction of Palestinian homes. The 50 members of the Abu Rmeleh family live in fear as a result. The jagged cracks that mar their walls serve as a reminder of the threat to their homes. The ground beneath them weakens and the threat of

collapse has forced members to leave the homes that have been in their families for generations. Excavations in the form of tunnels beneath the area began in 2000 in search of the location of the original city of Jerusalem. Yet the excavation’s credibility is at its essence disputed with the existence of the city being questioned entirely by archaeologists. The lack of access to data produced by the excavations has done little to quell the notion that the project itself is not yet another form of dispossession. The project is funded almost entirely by the settler organization Elad and it seems clear that the project serves only one purpose: dispossession. The Elad organization has created an imagined historic reality built on manufactured evidence that allows for the destruction of Palestinian homes in the Silwan area.

The Israeli state exhausts its efforts in an attempt to remove Palestinians from Palestinian land. From the Nakba to the present day the state has been clear in its intention to not occupy but to transform the occupied territories. Dispossession is not simply about property. It is about the eradication of Palestinian civil society. It is about the removal of the Palestinian identity from the land which Palestinians call home. It is about not maintaining but furthering the status quo. From Palestinian flag bans to Israeli land grabs, the Nakba continues and the world watches. It is not that the guises for dispossession are successful, it is that there is an indifference to the Palestinian struggle.



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