

THE
FIELDSTON  POLITICAL JOURNAL



EDITOR'S NOTE:

Dear Readers,

Thank you for continuing to read and support
The Fieldston Political Journal!

As a publication dedicated to discourse around often contentious topics, we present a variety of issues, from cultural angst to existential threats, that compel our attention. Each subject is a flashpoint. We feel a further obligation to include articles discussing recent events in the Middle East. We understand discussion of these issues may be hard for some, so we've tried to approach these articles with added sensitivity. We have asked two writers to be very brave; to be ambassadors to **respectful dialogue** and bridge building. In order to maintain a diversity of articles, we have created a special feature within this edition: Two articles, each discussing the Conflict with alternative perspectives, will face each other on the page. **Despite their analytical sweep, these articles represent the perspective of merely two students on the Israel-Palestinian Conflict.** We recognize that **there is a wide array of opinions held about this nuanced conflict, and we hope that these articles are just the beginning of a greater conversation in the Fieldston community.** Everyone at FPJ stands behind the intellectual forays made by the authors in an expository form.

For this edition, we are allowing readers to send letters to us that respond to an article(s) in this edition. We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to create respectful dialogue surrounding important political issues. If there is a letter that we particularly like, we may publish it in the next edition of the FPJ (with the author's permission).

You can email these letters to 24twsullivan@ecfs.org and 24tswaxman@ecfs.org.

We are equally excited to announce a new collaboration between the FPJ and Fieldston Environmental Club! A number of Environmental Club members have contributed articles covering the increasingly relevant intersection between politics and the environment. A special thanks to the leaders of the club for helping to organize the collaboration, as well as club members who have volunteered to write!

We hope you enjoy the 2023-2024 Winter Edition!

Sincerely,

Theo Sullivan and Tatia Waxman



A (REAL) PEACE AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

BY TOM KIRKPATRICK

I often hear Americans say that there was a “peace” between Israel and the Palestinians before October 7th, and that Hamas single-handedly shattered that peace. When Hamas did the unthinkable and attacked Israel they did so knowing they were provoking a massacre of Gazan civilians and Hamas members alike. Without any right to, Hamas risked the lives of two million Gazans. It was a *fait accompli*. They carried out the attack despite the costs, because they felt they had no alternative. For the Palestinian people, the “peace” which preceded October 7th was never peaceful. It was what military strategists like Carl Von Clausewitz have called “war by other means.” Under the internationally recognised laws of war, killing civilians intentionally or indiscriminately is never justified. However, It is important to understand what motivates these brutal attacks in order to prevent them from happening again. If there is no understanding of what motivates attacks like the one on October 7th, then they will continue long after Hamas, or even Gaza, is eradicated.

When Hamas’ Qassam Brigades crossed the Israeli border at the Kissufim/Al-Karara on October 7 – killing, kidnapping and brutalizing Israeli soldiers and civilians alike – the group reportedly did it to intentionally spark a greater conflict. Taher El-Nounou, a Hamas media adviser, told the New York Times, “I hope that the state of war with Israel will become permanent on all the borders, and that the Arab world will stand with us.” Hamas appears to have seen the attack as a kind of collective suicide, designed to provoke a degree of retaliation from Israel that would outrage the Arab world and make martyrs of Gaza.

I

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

BY TALIA WAXMAN

Hamas’s invasion of Israel on October 7th of last year was the result of years of meticulous planning. It took Israel’s storied intelligence establishment by surprise and resulted in the deadliest day for Israeli civilians. (Reports were circulating about a year ago but not all intelligence reports are acted upon.) Not only were over 1400 Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, Bedouins, and foreign Thai workers killed, women were gang-raped, babies were beheaded, and nearly 240 hostages were taken back to Gaza. The barbaric form of attack was a wake-up call to Israel and its political leadership’s assumption, under Benjamin Netanyahu, that Hamas could somehow be tamed by the flow of hundreds of millions of dollars of aid into Gaza. Sadly this was a mistaken assumption.



Kibbutz Be'eri following October 7th (IsraelGives, 2023)

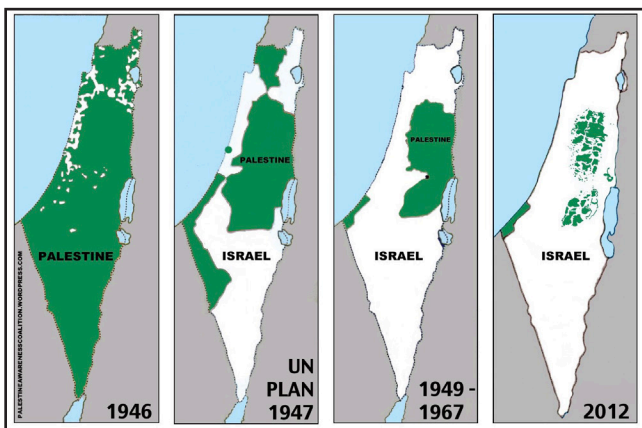
To put the Hamas invasion in its context, the number of deaths on October 7th, as a proportion of Israel’s population, is equivalent to around 40,000 Americans on 9/11. Unlike the case of 9/11, when Al Qaeda was 3,000 miles from the United States, the Hamas terror organization sits less than a mile across Israel’s border.

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By TOM KIRKPATRICK

They were aware that the much larger and better funded Israeli military would respond with vastly disproportionate force and they were not dissuaded. By provoking that retaliation, Hamas knew the response would be excessive and apocalyptic. They hoped that it would provoke a humanitarian crisis that would lead the world to condemn Israel and would recalibrate the politics of the Middle East by risking a much larger series of wars with regional players. The attack was a knowingly costly move – a last resort.

Although critics have called the attack an expression of a religious fundamentalist ideology, rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood and linked to Iran, it was a desperate and pragmatic move, born within the circumstances of a 75 year occupation with no clear way out.



A map of Palestinian lands lost to Israel, 1946-2012 (Juan Cole, 2018)

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In the case of the United States, the response against Al-Qaeda was swift, as President Bush quickly dispatched military units to take out Al-Qaeda and its sponsor the Taliban, also making it clear that their supporters would also be considered enemies of the United States. Israel, also a democracy, has an overriding obligation to protect its citizens. Although people residing in the United States often view Israel as a country with one of the strongest militaries in the world and therefore does not need to take such great lengths to defend itself, its very existence is precarious. Israel is a tiny country that is vastly outnumbered by the Arab countries surrounding it. Many of these countries are now backing Hamas most notably Qatar and Iran which is supporting Islamic Jihad and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

It is important to note that the evidence of sexual violence against Israeli men and women is overwhelming in terms of eyewitness and victim accounts, videos showing the violence, and forensic evidence. Yet it took almost two months for the UN to even acknowledge the sexual violence against Jewish men and women, leading some to question whether there is a bias against the testimony of Jewish victims. Even now, after the New York Times published a detailed article documenting the horrific nature of the sexual assault, people continue to deny that Israelis were actually victims.

Before going into detail about the current status of the war, it is worthwhile to set the context of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In many ways, the roots of the conflict lie in the clashing beliefs of two sets of people.

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A (REAL) PEACE AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

By TOM KIRKPATRICK

BACKGROUND

To understand these circumstances, you must understand the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The territory once known as Palestine had, under British and Ottoman rule, been a multi-ethnic and multicultural home to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike. But in 1947 the United Nations, an incredibly young organization with only a quarter of its current members, voted to partition Palestine, giving the majority of the land to the Jewish minority (now swollen by Jewish Holocaust refugees fleeing Europe). Moreover, the UN assured the creation of an Israeli state but not a Palestinian state next to it. Neighboring Arab nations attacked the young nation of Israel, arguing that the displacement of half of Palestine violated the UN charter and article 49 of the Geneva convention. Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon failed; Israel defeated its neighbors. By the end of the war, Israel had expelled 700,000 Palestinians from their homes and killed 15,000 more who failed to evacuate their homes fast enough. Those displaced became refugees, the majority of which re-settled in Gazan refugee camps or dispersed across Jordan and Lebanon. Today, more than five million Palestinian refugees are still scattered across the Middle East with neither a permanent home nor citizenship.

In 1967, Israel attacked its Arab neighbors in a pre-emptive strike against an anticipated attack. In only six days, Israel captured Gaza and the Sinai peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan heights from Syria. They then held on to those territories, expanding far beyond the 1947 UN partition plan.

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

By TALIA WAXMAN

For Jews, who were conquered and then ejected from the land of Palestine by the Romans under Emperor Titus and Vespasian (commemorated in the Arch of Titus that still stands in Rome today) in the second century AD, there has always been a connection with the land of Israel. We would now classify this as a form of ethnic cleansing before the term was invented. Even though some Jews were exiled under the Roman Emperors, Jews have maintained a constant presence in Palestine for the past four thousand years. Almost six hundred of those years were under the rule of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, which collapsed in 1918, at the end of the First World War. The period that marks a “return” for Jews takes place between the 1880s and 1918 under Ottoman governance. Those who call Jews “colonialists,” would do well to note the difference in this respect between Jews in Israel and say the British who came to the United States, with absolutely no connection with the land, and then proceeded to destroy the birthright of Native Americans. The desire to return to Israel after the Roman exile is in fact written into the Jewish Daily Prayer book.

Not only is the Jewish desire for a homeland in Israel rooted in Jewish religious beliefs, but it is also a necessity. By 1946, the Nazis had murdered six million Jews, and the Jewish population in Europe was decimated. Survivors of the Nazi killing machine had nowhere to go. Literally. American immigration policies placed quotas on the number of immigrants allowed in from each country. For example, in 1939 while Jews from Germany, Poland, and other countries in Europe were being taken from their homes and sent to death camps, over 300,000 Germans applied for visas to the US. Most of those applicants were Jews desperate for safety from Hitler’s death squads and only 20,000 visas were granted.

A (REAL) PEACE AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

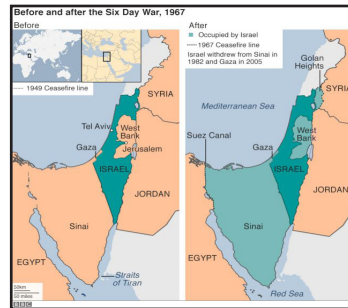
By TOM KIRKPATRICK

In 1973, Egypt recaptured the Sinai in a surprise attack. In the following armistice negotiations, The Camp David Accords of 1978-79, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat agreed to recognize Israel.

In return, Israel, under Menachem Begin, agreed to establish a Palestinian state. Only Egypt kept up their end of the agreement.

The Palestinians not displaced from Israeli-controlled territory were left living under an Israeli military occupation on the West Bank of the Jordan River or in the Gaza Strip – a pocket of territory along the Mediterranean and next to the Egyptian Sinai. They were subjected to different laws than Jewish Israelis, meeting the legal definition of apartheid. They faced onerous and often humiliating restrictions on their movements, curtailment of their rights, destruction of their property and restrictions of their business activities. Unlike their Jewish neighbors, they could not bring near or extended family to live with them in Israeli occupied territory. And all the while, more and more Palestinians were displaced from their homes as more and more Jewish settlers moved into the occupied territories, at that time including both the West Bank and Gaza. The ever-expanding and illegal settlements made a contiguous Palestinian state impossible, steadily crushing any hope of Palestinian self-determination.

In 1987 – twenty years after Israel captured the West Bank – Palestinian frustration at the military occupation erupted in what is now known as the First Intifada, a long period of riots characterized by stone throwing in a David and Goliath-esque gesture against Israeli rule.



A map of Israel before/after the 6 Day War, 1967 (BBC, 2017)

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A majority of the 280,000 Jews whose visas were denied were murdered by the Nazis. In addition, in 1939, the US Congress rejected a bill to give safe-haven to 20,000 Jewish children most of whom were killed in the Nazi concentration camps. The United States also denied visas to immigrants who are “likely to become a public charge.” This law applied to Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi persecution with absolutely nothing to their name because the Nazis had stolen everything that belonged to them. The United States also turned down boats, such as the St. Louis, which contained Jewish refugees who had qualified for US visas. In 1942, FDR refused to change immigration laws to allow more refugees into the country. So where did this leave European Jews?

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, Jews living in Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa for over 2,000 years were expelled. Before expulsion, these Jews were subject to discrimination and were not considered equal to their Muslim counterparts. Although almost a million Jews once lived in Arab nations before 1948, only 3,000 Jews now live in the Arab world with 2,000 of the 3,000 being Jews from Morocco, a country that recognizes the State of Israel.

For Palestinians, the belief in the desire for a state is equally strong. Palestinians too have lived in the land that is now Israel for thousands of years under Roman, Ottoman, and British occupation. Today, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are living outside of their native land in various other Arab states, such as Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Many of them still live in refugee camps without citizenship often as one of the most oppressed people in their respective countries. They want to return to their ancestral homeland, but they have no sovereign state of their own. Therein lies the tragedy. Two people and one land. What should be done?

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By TOM KIRKPATRICK

During the First Intifada, Palestinian attacks killed 100 Israelis and 60 soldiers, while Israel killed more than 1,000 Palestinians and many more were severely beaten. More than 20 Palestinians were killed before the first Israeli death.

Hamas emerged in the context of the intifada, initially dedicating itself to the complete eradication of Israel. The group, whose Arabic name means the Islamic Resistance Movement, was an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. As such, they also engaged in missionary and charitable work, extending deep roots into Palestinian society.

The First Intifada ended in the early 1990s with the Oslo Accords between Israel and the main Palestinian political leadership at the time, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (a group which Israel had previously denounced as anti-Jewish terrorists). Under the Accords, the PLO agreed to relinquish their claims to 78 percent of historic Palestine, and, in exchange, Israel agreed to eventually recognize Palestinian self-rule in the remaining area, mainly the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas's opposition to the deal came to define the movement. Hamas leaders argued that Oslo was a one-sided surrender to Israel with no guarantees for Palestinians, and with the failure of the deal Hamas leaders today claim vindication.

In 2006, under heavy international pressure, Israel withdrew 14,000 settlers and held an election in Gaza. To their surprise, Hamas won a narrow victory.

When Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Israel and the PA refused to accept the results. After a battle between the Palestinian factions, Hamas kicked the Palestinian Authority out of Gaza. Israel, in turn, tightened their blockade around Gaza, citing security concerns and claiming that Gaza was now Hamas' sole responsibility.

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The United Nations called for the Partition of Palestine, after the departure of the British, in 1947, that would result in the creation of two states: a Jewish state of Israel, and a Palestinian state of Palestine. This partition plan was accepted by many Jewish leaders at the time, who declared their statehood. This partition plan was not accepted, however, by the surrounding Arab nations, (at the time that would have been Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, all newly emerged as nations after WWII) who were opposed to the presence of a Jewish state, alongside a Palestinian state. Consequently, the Arab governments and their armies made the decision to invade Palestine, and the Jews prevailed in the ensuing conflict in 1948, and the modern state of Israel was born. For Palestinians who had fled or were displaced by the war, the experience was called the "Nakba," or, "disaster."

Israel was a country that, at that time, did not include Jerusalem or the West Bank, which then were part of Transjordan. Israel was formed as the only democracy in the Middle East, with the vote given to everyone within its border, including Arabs, Druze, Bedouins, etc. Racially, the country is very diverse with only 30% of the population being of European descent. As Rabbi Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom puts it: "Jewish communities under threat have been rescued, including those like the Jews of Ethiopia who had little contact with other Jews for centuries. Jews have come to Israel from over a hundred countries, representing the entire lexicon of cultural diversity. A desolate landscape has bloomed again... Economically, politically, socially, and culturally, Israel's achievements are unmatched by any country of its age and size." Israel, once a desolate desert, is now a country responsible for some of the greatest technological inventions, from the USB flash drive to FaceID.

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By TOM KIRKPATRICK

Since their electoral victory, Hamas has tried to organize government services including ministries of health, education, and internal security, all under difficult circumstances and with mixed results.



Gazans campaign for Hamsa, Khan Younis, January 28th, 2005 (The Intercept, 2021)

ARGUMENT

In many ways, the obligations of governance changed Hamas. In 2017, the group adopted a new, more moderate charter, contradicting long standing anti-Jewish language about “our battle with Jews” and replacing it with less divisive language such as “Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine.” Even if we might suspect Hamas’ professed moderation was mere subterfuge, their actions displayed some willingness to cooperate with the Jewish state and Netanyahu’s government. Hamas has sat out clashes between Islamic Jihad, another militant group present in Gaza, and the IDF, leading some to believe that Hamas was taking a less militant stance.

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

By TALIA WAXMAN

Early on, the importance of a strong military capability was impressed upon Israelis by the constant attacks on Israel from across its many borders.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), in its early days, was committed to the destruction of Israel and sponsored terrorist attacks, like that at the Munich Olympics in 1972, which resulted in multiple civilian deaths. Successive wars were also launched by Israel’s neighbors, each one won ultimately by Israel. As a result of these military victories, the borders of Israel were extended to include the Sinai Desert, Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank of the Jordan River. The occupation of the West Bank after the ‘67 war is often seen as the flashpoint for the agonies of Modern Israel. Some Palestinians reject the mere existence of Israel, but for others the Six-Day War is the point where the UN guidelines and map got side-stepped, paving the way for violence and mistreatment of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Israel, despite extending its borders, sought on multiple occasions to return the lands it had occupied. Prime Minister Begin and Egypt’s President Sadat at Camp David signed the first such agreement between Israel and an Arab nation when Israel gave back the Sinai Desert that it had won during the 1967 war. The cold peace agreement with Egypt has been held ever since. Eventually, PLO Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Rabin also came to the negotiating table and signed the Oslo Accords. In signing these accords, Arafat and the PLO came to accept and recognize, for the first time, the legitimacy of the State of Israel. The Palestinian Authority was born as the intended precursor to a Palestinian state.

Unfortunately, the path to peace was paved with difficulty. On Israel’s side, Rabin was assassinated at a peace rally by an Israeli religious zealot and far-right nationalist, Yigal Amir.

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Working through intermediaries, Hamas successfully negotiated an agreement with Israel that expanded the number of Gazans permitted to work in Israel and increased the amount of Qatari humanitarian aid allowed through Israel's blockade. By negotiating with Israel, Hamas is effectively recognizing its existence, even if they don't recognize Israel on paper. And in 2021, Hamas reached a deal to become part of the Palestinian Authority, which would have required accepting the goal of two states – one Jewish, one Palestinian. (Israel, though, blocked the Palestinian elections required for the deal, and the current leaders of the Palestinian Authority used that as an excuse to scrap it). Hamas has certainly grown more pragmatic since its creation.

So why did the group suddenly pivot to a self-destructive attack on October 7th?

Because, to many Palestinians, Palestine is forced to choose between slow, quiet eradication or martyrdom. The internationally recognized and peaceful Palestinian Authority, once promised to be the nucleus of a Palestinian state, had long ago lost any legitimacy in the eyes of Palestinians. They remained complacent for thirty years as the situation deteriorated for everyday Palestinians. For better or worse, because of the October 7th attack and Israel's devastating response, Hamas has now upstaged the Palestinian Authority or any other faction as the standard bearer of Palestinian nationalism and resistance.

Even before Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Israel had already created prison-like conditions in Gaza. Israel prevented many Palestinians from working outside of Gaza and built concrete walls around the strip to prevent Gazans from traveling to the West Bank, splitting families and clearly violating the Oslo Accords.

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

By TALIA WAXMAN

On the Palestinian side, the Second Intifada, in the early 2000s, which included the suicide bombings of multiple buses in Jerusalem and the deaths of over a thousand Israeli soldiers and civilians, and thousands of Palestinian militants and civilians, was launched after a firm offer for a Palestinian state that incorporated parts of Jerusalem. However, it did not include the right of return of millions of Palestinians, which was subject to further negotiations, so it was rejected by Arafat. Ultimately, Israel retreated both from Gaza and the West Bank, without a firm peace agreement.

It was at this time, in the early 2000s, that peace activists on both Israelis' and Palestinians' sides started to lose credibility, and more hawkish views came to the forefront. The once-strong Israeli Left, characterized by politicians like Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak, who preached peace and the two-state solution, has lost ground to increasingly right-wing politicians and parties, who favored more and more settlements that were a fusion of extreme religious and nationalistic beliefs in the West Bank. The once-governing Labour Party of Rabin and Peres was reduced to 4 seats in the election of 2022 a historical low point. Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Israeli Prime Minister, is one of these right-wing extremists, who has served a total of sixteen years. He has publicly stated that he is "open" to negotiations about a two-state solution as long as the Palestinian state has no military or security power. Essentially, he is not willing to negotiate for a Palestinian state with Palestinian sovereignty. Netanyahu has also legalized dozens of illegally built outposts and occupied territory in the West Bank. It is important to note that a majority of Israelis disagree with Netanyahu's policies, although he does have a significant number of supporters.

A (REAL) PEACE AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

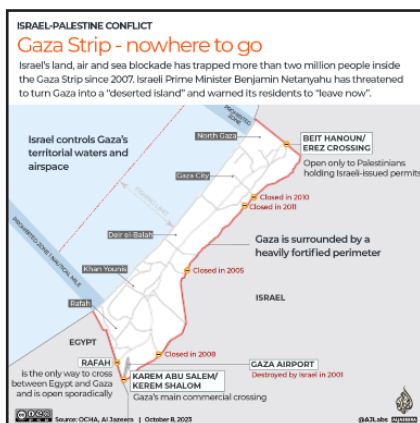
By TOM KIRKPATRICK

In 2001, Israel bombed and destroyed the only Gazan airport, further imprisoning the civilians of Gaza. Since 2007, the year Gaza became a more independent, though circumscribed territory, Israel and the Israeli-allied government in Egypt have enforced a draconian blockade of Gaza, limiting vital imports and exports to below their 2007 levels. The population of Gaza has grown by 50% over that period, meaning half of current Gaza residents are children. Israel even restricts Gazan fishing rights, not allowing Gazan fishermen more than six kilometers from shore. Because of this long-term siege on Gaza, 61% of Gazans require food assistance and 46% are unemployed. 78% of piped water in Gaza is considered unfit for human consumption. To put all this in context, Gaza is roughly the size and population of Queens.

Gazans are no more free than a prisoner in a cell, free to move about within four walls so long as their captor remains sympathetic enough to allow food and water in.

Although Israel disclaimed responsibility for Gaza after 2007, the United Nations still calls Gaza an occupation.

For Palestinians in the West Bank, living under the governance of the Israeli-recognized and peaceful Palestinian Authority, prospects are no better. The West Bank faces “creeping annexation,” as former United States Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer called it.



A map of the Gaza strip detailing Israel's 20-year-long blockade (Al Jazeera, 2023)

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

By TALIA WAXMAN

On the Palestinian side, Hamas displaced the PLO in Gaza, by winning both elections in 2006 with a majority of votes (44%) and following that, a brutal civil war in Gaza. Hamas did not win a majority of votes in any district in Gaza and has not held an election since the one in 2007. Children make up about half of Gaza's population so only a small fraction of Gaza's population actually voted for Hamas.

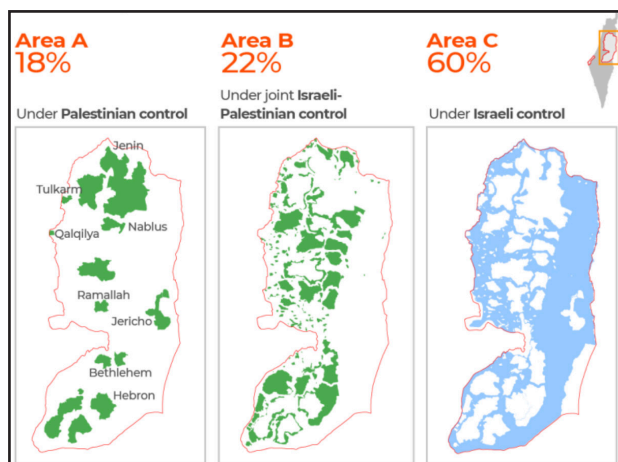
So what is Hamas?

While the PLO was originally a Marxist, left-wing secular resistance movement. Hamas, originally the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, is a completely different political animal. It was founded in 1987 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a Palestinian Muslim cleric committed to Islamic Resistance. Hamas published its covenant in 1988. Article 3 of the 1988 Covenant states that “the basic structure of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) consists of Muslims who have given their allegiance to Allah whom they truly worship”. Article 6 states that, “it strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine,” Article 13 goes on to reject the very idea of negotiated peace, “There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors.” Article 31 states, “it is the duty of the followers of other religions to stop disputing the sovereignty of Islam in this region.” Article 32, states, that, “The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” This document was a fabrication by anti-semitic Czarists in the early 1900s that created the idea of a Zionist conspiracy to rule the modern world.

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There are now 700,000 Israelis living in 150 settlements and 128 outposts in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, many of them attracted by the low cost of living. 60% of land in the West Bank is under illegal Israeli control. Palestinians are only allowed to build on 18% of the land, divided up into an archipelago of enclaves without hope of becoming a contiguous state. Netanyahu has only increased settlement construction since he first took power in 1996. Palestinians need to apply for Israeli permits to live and farm on whatever land the settlers do not yet control. On top of this, settler violence has risen, often unpunished by the Israeli government or supposedly independent Palestinian Authority. This year, before October 7th, Israeli settlers and soldiers killed more than 200 West Bank Palestinians. 150 more were killed in the first month following October 7th. Settlers, under the protection of the Israeli Defense Force, routinely uproot native olive trees and harass Palestinians. At this very moment Palestinians in the West Bank with no connection to Hamas are losing their homes to extremist settlers.



A map of the three administrative areas of the West Bank (Al Jazeera, 2023)

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By TALIA WAXMAN

It is clear then, that Hamas is not looking for peaceful co-existence with other religions within Palestine. And its use of the long-debunked anti-semitic lies in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is proof if further proof were needed that Hamas has a bedrock opposition to the Jewish religion and a complete misunderstanding of Jewish ethics and intentions in the region. Far from seeking to expand its borders, per the claim of the Covenant, as we discussed, Israel has made concerted efforts to trade land for peace.

Hamas issued a 2017 Charter, that detailed its policies on a number of points, but the original Covenant was not repudiated and remains in effect, alongside the new Charter. In the new Charter, "Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea. However, without compromising its rejection of the Zionist entity and without relinquishing any Palestinian rights, Hamas considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4th of June 1967, with the return of the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, to be a formula of national consensus." In other words, Hamas declares itself open to a state within the 1967 borders, but only as an interim step leading to the full liberation of Palestine.

When Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, it was not inevitable that an entity like Hamas would assume leadership in that territory, but Hamas' rule has been a disaster for Palestinians in Gaza. Hamas has diverted millions of dollars of aid to the building of a war machine that could take on Israel. Hamas uses its funds to build tunnels which are almost half as long as the New York City Subway station. As of 2014, the cost of the tunnels was estimated to be 30 to 90 million dollars.

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THE LONG SHADOW OF OSLO

Palestinians once hoped that they could improve their conditions through negotiation. All these hopes rode on the Oslo Accords of the 1990s. The Accords began a process of negotiations, over five years, based on agreed upon and clearly stated principles. These principles, detailed within the Accords, included adherence to UN Security Council resolution 242, which called for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” and “political independence of every State in the area.” The Accords also clearly state that “negotiations on the permanent status [of Palestine] will lead to implementation of Security Council Resolution 242.”

Though the Oslo Accords were never meant to be a final agreement, they made it clear that before 1998 Israel would have to begin withdrawing its settlements some way or another and return to the 1967 borders. In return, the Palestinian Liberation Organization renounced their claim to 78% of historic Palestine, recognized Israel and renounced violence against their Israeli occupiers. All that just to begin negotiations that were supposed to result in basic adherence to Geneva Convention Article 49 and the United Nations – something Palestinians should not have to negotiate for in the first place.

Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the Oslo Accords, was assassinated by an Israeli opponent of the Accords. We’ll never know if he could have actually negotiated a peaceful partition.

With Rabin – the main proponent of actual peace – dead, Benjamin Netanyahu shortly became Prime Minister. He promised to “prevent a Palestinian state” while on the campaign trail and after assuming office.

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Since there has been significant expansion since that time, it is likely that the resources expended are certainly much higher. Hamas does not provide its citizens with basic infrastructure such as wells and water treatment. As such, around 12% of children’s deaths in Gaza are due to contaminated water.

It was also surely not in Israel’s interests to build walls. Gaza lies next to the Mediterranean and has been going through a booming population growth. Israel would have much preferred to see the growth of a dynamic Palestinian economy on its borders. Instead, it has a neighbor led by an organization with a medieval ideology that sees no room for compromise or negotiation. Countless attacks have been launched against Israel, which has had to take measures to defend itself, and October 7th is only the latest, albeit deadliest, of such episodes. Israel’s defense machine, the Iron Dome, shuts down about 90% of rockets by Hamas. Unlike in other democracies where the enemy does not view civilians as legitimate targets (see, e.g., the various intifadas), Israel’s enemies do. Thus, the development of the Iron Dome which functions essentially to protect civilians was absolutely essential. And, of course, the Iron Dome does not protect against land attacks such as October 7. In addition, though the civilian death toll in Israel is far, far lower than in Gaza, Israeli forces do not hide among their own civilians. It serves Hamas’s political advantage for Palestinians to die so they do nothing to protect their civilians. In fact, they intentionally put civilians in harm’s way.

Hamas launched its invasion on October 7th, knowing that it would provoke a response from Israel. A deadly response, and one that would inevitably result in civilian casualties in Gaza. Why? Because countries have a duty to protect their citizens and because Hamas operatives place themselves in the midst of Palestinian civilians, whether in apartment blocks or below hospitals.

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He succeeded in doing so. At the end of the Accords' five-year window there were 50,000 more settlers living in the West Bank than before. The PLO meanwhile had upheld their commitment against violence. The group is still peaceful to this day. Other groups carried out violence against Israel after 1993 – not the PLO. To this day, Netanyahu brags that, "I'm proud that I prevented the establishment of a Palestinian state."

In 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak started the Camp David summit by declaring that Resolution 242 does not apply to the West Bank, effectively proclaiming the Oslo Accords dead, even to liberal Israelis. Since then, the illegal and militarily-enforced Israeli presence in the West Bank has tripled. No wonder some in Gaza are skeptical of the "peace process."

Indeed, one could argue the unilateral failure of the Oslo Accords handed Gaza to Hamas. When the Accords left the West Bank defenseless, Hamas got to say "we told you so." Their popularity in the 2006 Palestinian election marked an extreme ideological shift among Palestinians in the occupied territories, most of whom believed in the Oslo Accords thirteen

HAMAS' PARTIAL VICTORY

Make no mistake about it – Hamas is ruthless, cagey and opportunistic. All this comes as Saudi Arabia is preparing to recognize Israel, further legitimizing and cementing their occupation. Saudi Arabia would be the sixth Arab nation to recognize Israel, signaling to Palestinians the abandonment of their cause by the Arab rulers who once promised to protect them.

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

By TALIA WAXMAN

Now the question is how can Israel minimize civilian deaths in a situation where the enemy hides out among civilians. First, Israel has taken concrete steps to protect civilians from unnecessary deaths. It has tried to provide warnings and provide safe passage between different parts of Gaza, as well as evacuation zones. There is absolutely no intention on the part of Israel to attack civilians as an objective in itself in the way that Hamas did. Palestinian civilians are dying, very sadly, because Hamas uses them as human shields. According to the Health Ministry in Gaza which is run by Hamas (and not verified by an outside source), around 20,000 Palestinians have been killed. The IDF reported (also not verified) that for every two civilians killed, one Hamas terrorist is killed. If Hamas's number is to be believed, that would indicate around 13,000 innocent Palestinian civilians have been killed.

Even one civilian death is far too many. Military experts are divided on the best approach to rooting out an enemy hiding among civilians. Of course, more has to be done to protect the innocent. The number of childhood deaths, the inconstancy and unpredictability of the war, the lack of shelter, and the scale of destruction in Gaza are frightening. Leaked audio of a meeting with the hostage's family and Netanyahu reveals that even they believe that Israel's bombardment of Gaza is too much. In addition, there were even some hostages killed by Israeli soldiers indicating that rules of engagement need to be clarified. Fortunately, Israel recently announced that it will be scaling down its attack on Gaza. They will move from large-scale ground and air attacks to a more targeted approach in which a smaller group of Israeli soldiers will "move in and out of population centers in the Gaza Strip to find and kill Hamas leaders,

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If nothing else, the October 7th attack has succeeded in postponing Saudi Arabia's negotiations with Israel, which some in Hamas would consider a success. Khalil Al-Hayya, deputy head of Hamas's Gaza politburo, said in an interview with the New York Times that "We succeeded in putting the Palestinian issue back on the table, and now no one in the region is experiencing calm."

In politics and war, timing is everything. A Fieldston history teacher commented that "The attack also followed an unprecedented period of turmoil and division within Israeli society. As a result of Netanyahu's policies in the West Bank, as a result of his attempts to subvert Israel's Supreme Court, his many attempts to duck or tamp down the criminal charges against him, civil society seemed to be on the brink of civil war last spring. Massive demonstrations, hundreds of thousands of protestors, took to the streets for months. Military reservists, critical of Netanyahu and the extreme religious right and settler movements, were talking about refusing to fight in the next war if Israeli democracy was destroyed. To Israel's enemies, this domestic calamity represented the perfect

THE PATH TO REAL PEACE

Hamas has made it clear that they are willing to face annihilation because the alternative is so bleak. Hamas and their supporters believe, with some evidence, that Israel was never serious about peace. Complacency means accepting the slow annexation of the West Bank and the slow starvation of Gaza.

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rescue hostages and destroy tunnels." I can only hope that this method will lead to lower innocent civilian deaths whilst achieving Israeli war objectives.

A critical part of Hamas's war effort is to enlist public opinion and when it publishes the daily list of dead Palestinian civilians to do so, there is no opportunity to check or verify the numbers released. In a famous case, at the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital, Hamas was so quick to tell people that Israel had just struck and killed hundreds of people in an attack on the hospital, that they didn't bother to check that the deaths were the result of a misfired Islamic Jihad rocket. It was too late, however, because worldwide people were already rallying against the so-called Israeli action which turned out not to be Israeli action at all.

Of course, if Israel orders evacuations it is blamed for transferring population, and if it attacks Hamas without evacuations, it is condemned for killing civilians. Israel is damned either way. It is imperative to mention that Israel is not perfect, nor is any other nation. There is evidence of their use of US-supplied illegal white phosphorus for their attack against Lebanon. They have also provided Gazans with safe zones in the South, which they later bombed only because, according to Israeli intelligence, Hamas was firing rockets from these safe zones. In addition, some people may argue that Israel should have sent in targeted special force units rather than a larger ground force. While this would undoubtedly have led to greater risk for those Israeli soldiers, standard military strategy means that if and when you launch an attack using ground forces, whether in the time of Napoleon or the Gulf War, one needs to provide your troops with covering fire. Part of that cover is addressed by the use of bombs. It is hardly Israel's fault that Hamas launched a brutal attack from a densely populated area.

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Although Hamas has no qualms with violent action, if Palestinians had a plausible path to a complete, independent, and thriving state – if Israel took steps to withdraw their settlers, end the blockade of Gaza, and strengthen rather than undermine the fledgling institutions of Palestinian self-governance – the equation would be different. Palestinians would have a third option, besides slow deterioration or martyrdom.

I believe – and official American policy has held for 50 years – that is how a lasting peace can be achieved. Israel does not need to wait for a “peace partner” or gradual negotiations just to follow international laws that they should have followed to begin with. If Israel withdrew its settlements and ended its blockade, Hamas’ rhetoric that Israel has never wanted peace would collapse entirely.

The path to peace requires Israel to quit stalling and begin complying with international law (Geneva Convention Article 49 and UNSC resolution 242). The path to peace does not require or include the destruction of the most popular governing body of Palestinians: Hamas.

Even if Israel does somehow destroy Hamas, the idea of Hamas, the idea that armed resistance is the only way for Palestinians to defend themselves and their aspirations for self-determination, is growing more popular among Arabs and Palestinians every day the war rages on. Even in Gaza, their approval holds strong in the few polls that have been conducted. Hamas flags are flying across the West Bank. Even Biden declared that Israel is “starting to lose that support by the indiscriminate bombing that takes place.” Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has denounced Netanyahu’s war on Gaza.

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Israel’s ground operations took around three weeks to prepare. Israel had to react quickly to Hamas and therefore began their attack by dropping bombs. They did this for two reasons. One, to hit back from where Hamas was firing rockets at an alarming rate. Two to free up that area to invade during ground operations and move the population out.

I think we can all agree the loss of human life in Gaza is heartbreaking and the destruction of whole neighborhoods, including homes has caused a humanitarian disaster. Innocent children and women, who hold no responsibility for the actions taken by Hamas, are being killed. Ironically, the leaders of Hamas and the orchestrators of the October 7th attack are hiding out in Qatar. The top three Hamas leaders together are worth 11 billion dollars while their civilians are suffering in Gaza often with limited access to food, clean water, and proper medical care.

And things did not have to be this way. As a Middle East Expert and New York Times foreign correspondent, Tom Friedman argued: that after Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, the Palestinians could have followed the model in United Arab Emirates model, where an economically prosperous state was built, but instead the ruling party Hamas diverted economic aid to its war machine, and even worse, to its own corrupt officers: “Had Hamas embraced Oslo and chosen to build its own Dubai, not only would the world have lined up to aid and invest in it; it would have been the most powerful springboard conceivable for a Palestinian state in the West Bank, in the heart of the Palestinian ancestral homeland. Palestinians would have proved to themselves, to Israelis, and to the world what they could do when they had their own territory. But Hamas decided instead to make Gaza a springboard for destroying Israel.”

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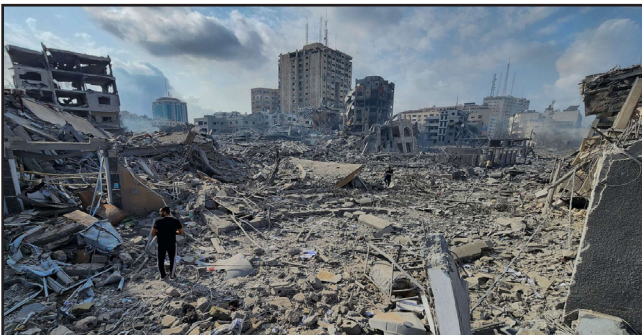
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Israel's devastating response has made the idea of armed resistance more powerful among Palestinians and across the Arab world than it was on October 6th.

Those who believe the plight of Gaza is an entirely religious conflict say that the only path to peace is the destruction of Hamas, regardless of civilian cost. Many have similarly espoused the belief that Israel has a right to perpetually escalate in the name of self-defense. In this spirit, Israel has displaced 80% of Gazans, destroyed half of the homes in Gaza and killed over 20,000 people, 70% of which are women and children. Describing the situation Israel has created in Gaza, the head of the world food program said, "In my life, I've never seen anything like this in terms of severity, in terms of scale, and then in terms of speed." Netanyahu has even declared that Israel will remain in Gaza even after the war is over.

What if Hamas, or a similar armed group, rises from the ashes of Gaza, their numbers bolstered by the thousands of orphans and refugees created in the recent war, and wants to exercise their right to self-defense? Would it be Israel's right to then destroy Gaza so that no more terrorists may spawn? What if some of the millions of Palestinians in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and the West Bank want to avenge their Gazan brothers? Should Israel destroy them all too? A "peace" built on this level of destruction and fear is not a peace to aspire towards.



The aftermath of Israeli bombing in civilian areas, October 10th, 2023 (ABC News, 2023)

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Indeed, through its actions, Hamas has proven it is more concerned about destroying Israel than creating a safe and prosperous state for the people it purports to represent. Of course, the Israeli expansion of settlements in the West Bank is another major obstacle to peace and serves to further antagonize and suppress Palestinians living in the West Bank.

Since the war, support for Hamas has waned in Gaza but has increased from West Bank Palestinians. Khalil Shikaki, director of the think tank and a professor in Ramallah, said "Gaza, which usually gives Hamas greater support, is showing more criticism of Hamas than the West Bank. There is more questioning of the decision to go to war." Gazans are beginning to blame Hamas for their harrowing condition. On October 7th, according to poll data by the AFP, "many Gazans were hostile to Hamas ahead of the group's brutal Oct. 7 attack on Israel, with some describing its rule as a second occupation." Alternatively, West Bank Palestinians, who have never actually experienced life under Hamas's government support them.

Ultimately, I am optimistic that peace will eventually be made that will result in a democratic, Palestinian state sitting alongside a democratic Israel with both states providing rights to all religions and minorities within their respective borders. This can only be achieved once Israel and Palestinians have leaders who are truly committed to peace and respect the sovereignty of the other side. The invasion by Hamas, on October 7th, however, was not calculated to bring peace but to obstruct peace. One has to hope that the forces for peace on both sides can recover from this blow and make strides toward that solution in the long term. In the short term, one has to hope that Israel's military operation can be concluded as rapidly as possible, with as few civilian deaths as possible, that the hostages can be returned safely, and that Israel can secure protection for its citizens from ongoing brutal attacks from an implacable enemy.

THE CASE FOR CHINA

BY THEO SULLIVAN

On September 21st, 1949, revolutionary leader Mao Zedong proclaimed that “the Chinese people have stood up!” The declaration came following the Chinese “Century of Humiliation,” during which China suffered through European imperialism, a brutal occupation by the Japanese Empire, and over two decades of civil war between Nationalists and Communists. More than 70 years later, the West has begun to fear the potential implications of a new, united, and increasingly powerful China. Across the political spectrum represented in mainstream American politics, and amidst an increasingly divisive political climate, opposition to China seems near-entirely uncontested; both Republicans and Democrats have nothing but contempt for the rising power, and view China as a threat to US hegemony on the global stage.

But is American hegemony something we as Americans ought to maintain? In this article, I argue that China’s rise brings with it not only improved living conditions for Chinese citizens, but also a stabilizing force to geopolitics.

THE SUCCESSES OF CHINESE POLICY

On the most pressing contemporary issues, Chinese policy is leagues more progressive than the policy of the United States. One of the greatest issues facing the global community today is climate change, an area where China is making significant progress. In recent years, American policy on the issue has been lacking. From President Donald Trump withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2017, to “progressive” President Joe Biden’s approving the Willow Project, a massive oil drilling operation in Alaska, in early 2023, it is clear that American leaders view the issue with little concern.

China, though, is making incredible progress in reducing their impact on global warming. Chinese President Xi Jinping has made vocal his commitment to attaining net-zero carbon emissions by 2060, an astounding goal for a nation home to nearly 20% of Earth’s population. In the short term, the country aims to achieve roughly one-third of its energy from renewable sources.

These aren’t just empty promises. Last year China accounted for more than half of the world’s investment in green energy, investing \$546 billion into solar, wind, and electric vehicle production.



An electric bullet train in Tibet, Southwest China (China Daily, 2021)

China has rethought the automobile paradigm. One of the greatest contributors to global CO2 levels is road-faring vehicles, which account for roughly 16 percent of such emissions worldwide. About half of these emissions are produced by privately owned passenger vehicles, meaning transitioning away from car commutes is an imperative step in tackling global warming. In recent years, America has looked to renewable energy-fueled transit buses to help tackle record-high emissions, and today 60% of buses on American roads make use of green energy.

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China has likewise invested heavily into this sector, leading to 77% of Chinese buses being categorized as “new energy vehicles” – a statistic made all the more impressive when one considers the higher ridership and route coverage of Chinese bus transit.

The almost unanimously agreed upon alternative to car transit, though, is rail, which is not only much more environmentally friendly, but also more cost effective for consumers. In America, commuter rail transit is simply unfeasible over long distances, and while railways do cover vast interlocking parts of America, the US boasts not a single mile of the coveted high-speed rail developed nations from France to Japan are increasingly investing in.*

To illustrate the issue, let’s compare a rail commute between two major American and Chinese cities. If you wanted to catch a train from New York to Chicago, a distance of 712 miles, the journey would take an average of 23 hours. A similarly far journey in China, from Beijing to Shanghai (684 miles), would take an average of 5 hours – and cost one-third the price. And while American commuter rail infrastructure has changed little in the past decade, China’s rail coverage is expanding at an astonishing rate.

*Since this article was written in December 2023, domestic high speed rail projects have received \$6 billion in funding. Construction however is estimated to take years.

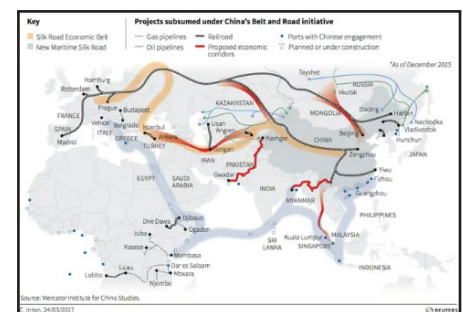
But the myriad benefits of Chinese influence are not limited to the country itself.

Chinese investment in the Third World worries many in the West. The phenomena of the “Chinese debt trap,” a supposed process by which China grants costly loans to developing states, imports experts, workers, and resources, and constructs infrastructure vital to the host nation’s development all as a means of bringing the debited county under Chinese soft power would undoubtedly be worrying. But while some analysts have made bold claims regarding the so-called “Chinese debt trap,” African governments, in fact, owe three times more debt to Western banks and asset managers than they do to China. Accordingly, China has been dubbed by some to be a “global leader of last resort,” providing over \$240 billion in economic relief to countries suffering from – primarily Western – debt, a figure that has jumped 55% in the past 12 years.

Also relevant to Chinese foreign policy is the country’s preferred method of investment. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is focused on building exactly what its name suggests: roads, railways, and other big public works and infrastructure projects that will continue to benefit host countries long after debt is repaid. Over 150 nations have already signed on, many of them in Africa.

Kenya has benefited from a Chinese-led expansion of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which connects the Kenyan capital Nairobi to port city and import hub Mombasa. While jointly funded by both the Kenyan and Chinese governments, Beijing agreed to foot 90% of the bill for the project. The SGR upgrade provided more than 30,000 jobs for Kenyans, and in its first year of operation transported 5.4 million passengers. All this has left Kenya – a heavy borrower from Beijing – with little risk of credit fault, especially when compared to its East African neighbors. On Africa’s other coast, China has played a leading role in Nigerian infrastructure projects, helping fund the Kaduna-Kano railway line (\$1.7 billion), the Lagos-Kano line (\$6.7 billion), and the Lagos-Ibadan line (\$1.5 billion), in addition to numerous airports. It should perhaps come as no surprise then that so many African leaders espouse little but praise for the rising power.

Those critical of China’s role in the Third World scarcely extend the same animosity towards France, Britain, or America, all of which have had far bloodier, far more exploitative legacies in the global South.



A map of both realised and proposed Chinese Belt and Road Initiative projects (Reuters, 2017)

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But the Chinese government's positive impact on the developing world is not limited to economic investment. Diplomatically, the rising power has worked to resolve regional conflicts, positioning itself as the neutral, "non-judgmental", sensible, and law-abiding voice in the room of international relations. When war broke out in Ukraine in early 2022, many assumed China, a longtime Russian ally and trade partner, would publicly support Putin's conquest. The Chinese government's response, however, swung far more to the side of Kiev, with Beijing ending Russian weapons sales and in their official release called for a ceasefire, civilian aid, and respect for Ukrainian sovereignty, stating that "All countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community."

In April of 2023, China arranged talks between longtime regional and religious rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran in an attempt to bring security to the frequently-volatile Middle East.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (center) standing with Iran's Supreme National Security Council member Ali Shamkhani (right) and Saudi Arabia's Minister of State, Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban (left)

Perhaps surprisingly to some, the diplomatic discussions proved to be an outstanding success, normalizing Iran-Saudi relations, with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi remarking that China hopes to "continue to support countries in the Middle East in exploring a development path that suits their own national conditions, strengthening communication and dialogue, adhering to unity and self-improvement, and realizing good-neighborliness and friendship."

Any Chinese gains in the Middle East can almost always be attributed to the American government's failure to uphold promises and maintain alliances; Saudi Arabia, for example, cited frustrations with the US's unwillingness to aid in resolving security concerns during the Chinese-mediated talks. Furthermore, China's stated position on the conflict in Palestine has been similarly encouraging, as the Chinese government has expressed strong support for full UN membership for the country. It is clear to see why the Chinese motto of "win-win" foreign policy is increasingly appealing to the long list of nations which have suffered at the hand of American intervention, both military and economic, in their recent history.

THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

But despite the overwhelming success of Chinese policy, many still remain unconvinced that the country's rise spells good news for the international community. Critics point to China's political system, which many see as authoritarian. Many have rightly raised concerns regarding Xi Jinping's recent abolition of term limits for the position of president, and China is by any account a one party state (though the country does host eight other parties which together hold roughly 1/3 of the seats in the Chinese National Congress, more parties than America's two, and on rare occasions in our history three or four, political parties with federal political representation). That being said, within the seemingly uniform Chinese Communist Party, a number of unofficial cliques have come to lobby for a variety of at-odds political ambitions. Most notable of these groups is the Shanghai clique, also known as the Shanghai gang or Jiang faction, named after former president and heir to Deng Xiaoping's political legacy of economic privatization Jiang Zemin. In 2003 power was wrestled from the Shanghai clique by president Hu Jintao, Xi's predecessor, who during his time in office sought to further develop China's rural interior – a line of policy staunchly opposed by the Jiang clique, backed by the nation's well-connected, coastal rich.

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When Xi Jinping rose to the position of president in 2013, among his first major actions in office was a crackdown on political corruption rampant in the Shanghai clique.

It is undeniable that China ascribes to a political system very different from what Americans are used to, but the idea that Chinese governance is ideologically uniform or absent of political debate is untrue; disagreements between CPC officials are no less pronounced than disagreements between American political parties. If China's political system produces positive results for the country's citizens, then perhaps it deserves less criticism than much of our media is so keen to make out.

WHERE CHINA STUMBLES

This is not to say that Chinese policy is a wholly positive force. The ongoing forced assimilation of Xinjiang has seen thousands imprisoned in harsh camps, in addition to the widespread suppression of Muslim religious practice. Human rights violations in said camps are frequently reported, though the Chinese government vehemently denies such allegations.

Despite accusations of cultural genocide, the Uygur population has increased from 2.2 million to nearly 12 million in the past 60 years, and life expectancy for Uygurs has jumped from an average 30 to 75 years since the Chinese government regained control of the area in 1949. Still though, birth rates in Uyghur communities are decreasing at an alarming rate, even according to state-reported figures. The Chinese government claims that their actions in Xinjiang are a response to terrorist activity in the region (an argument Americans ought to be familiar with), however the very real impact the Chinese response has had on civilian life and cultural practice is worthy of much condemnation.

And despite the innumerable benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative, some of its projects have fallen victim to poor planning or less than desirable results. The previously mentioned expansion of the Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway received criticism from young Kenyans, who complained that SGR jobs offered were low-skill and underpaid. And while rail greatly benefits developed nations, its historic unprofitability in the developing world means the SGR has proven far less economically beneficial than initially anticipated. And any large-scale government investment coming out of notoriously corrupt governments like many in sub-Saharan Africa is worthy of speculation.

For an ostensibly Marxist-Leninist state, China has begun to pursue increasingly imperialist ambitions, especially in the South China Sea. As a nation surrounded by US-friendly states, the Chinese government has worked to ensure its naval security and shipping rights are safeguarded in preparation for potential sanctions. The result of this has been the artificial expansion of patches of land in the Pacific, claiming they are a part of Chinese territory, and extending exclusive Chinese shipping rights well beyond naturally occurring Chinese territory. In 2023, in an even greater departure from their supposedly Communist ideology, China offered the Philippines \$14 million worth of arms and equipment to help combat the, somewhat ironically, Maoist revolutionaries especially active on Mindanao and in rural regions of Luzon. The deal is expected to be finalized later this year, and spells bad news for the Philippine Communist Party, a group working to improve the wellbeing of Filipinos.

CONCLUSION

To be sure, China is by no means a wholly ethical actor, but on key issues the country has proven itself capable of addressing the needs of the international community, from climate change to regional instability to economic development in the Third World.

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And despite the Chinese government stressing a desire to work with, not against, America, if the world does in fact need a global hegemon, I'd prefer it to be Beijing, not Washington. In the three decades following the illegal dissolution* of the Soviet Union, America has enjoyed power unparalleled by any other nation in all of human history. And in that same span of time, the country has directly killed more than 850,000 civilians in 18 wars, almost all of them unjust, with hundreds of thousands more dead at the hands of indirect American intervention. Perhaps what the US needs is a counterweight on the global scale, however inconvenient it may be to the interests of America's leaders.

The unfortunate reality of geopolitics is that, almost always, no power is "in the right." Competition between big players has defined the global order for centuries, and in bids to help facilitate their rise, nations often make an effort to present themselves as relatively moral. The American Empire has proven to be more ethical than the British, and it looks like China might continue the trend.

**On March 17th, 1991, the USSR held a national referendum in order to put the issue of dissolution to popular vote. The Soviet people voted overwhelmingly against the prospect, with over 80% of Soviets (across the USSR, from Ukraine to Turkmenistan) supporting maintaining the then-present Communist government. In acting against a legally-binding referendum, Boris Yeltsin acted illegally. In 2009, Pew Research polling of former-Soviet states indicated that the public broadly maintained support for Communist government, preferring it to capitalist "democracy."*

The nation's rise, then, should be viewed not as a threat to a global order supposedly built on democratic values, but as yet another link in the long and storied chain of imperial and neo-imperial projects, each more hospitable than the last.

BELARUS IN THE CROSSFIRE: THE UNDERESTIMATED POWER PLAYER IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

By NOAH LEVINE

The emerging conflict in the Middle East has relegated the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war into the shadows. Yet the battles rage on. Although the fog of war can conceal many details, focusing on the role of a single player can often shed new light on the broader tapestry of the conflict. Recently, Belarus has come into focus for its notable role in aiding Russia.

Yet, somewhat surprisingly, Sergei Aleinik, the Foreign Minister of Belarus, claimed that he could not envision a situation in which his country would formally enter the war on Russia's side. His statement is dubious in light of recent events. For example, prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, President Lukashenko allowed Russian military forces to station themselves in Belarus.

Not only has this strategic decision offered Russia a significant advantage, enabling them to launch attacks from various directions, but it also demonstrates Lukashenko's aid and support of Putin's agenda.

Lukashenko frequently takes public positions that advance Putin's goals. In October of 2023, Lukashenko told BelTA, the state-owned Belarussian news agency, that Ukraine needs to come to terms with Russia's territorial gains: "There are enough problems on both sides and in general the situation is now seriously stalemate: no one can do anything and substantively strengthen or advance their position."

Over the summer, Russia declared its plans to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus, a development that not only further threatens the security of Ukraine, but also poses a significant threat to neighboring NATO countries – raising the stakes for all parties.



Lukashenko (left) meeting with Vladimir Putin (right) (Bloomberg, 2022)

The alliance between Belarus and Russia has long been recognized, yet the complexities of their relationship are frequently glossed over.

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Lukashenko is often portrayed as merely Putin's puppet, but he too reaps great advantages. With Belarus serving as a vital military ally to Russia, a certain level of dependency has developed on Moscow's part. This dependency, in turn, enables Lukashenko to gain considerable influence over Russian affairs. Over the past year, Belarus has benefited from extensive Russian economic support, primarily through financial aid in the form of loans, facilitated access to Russian ports, and discounted gas prices. Last September, Lukashenko boosted his international profile when he was invited by Putin to a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

That being said, Lukashenko's objectives often differ from Putin's. He is likely to favor a prolonged conflict, however inconvenient it may be to Russia's military goals, as this scenario preserves his influence and delivers the most benefit for Belarus. Russian and Belarusian interests, though aligned against the West, do not entirely align with each other. As we seek new information in this continuing war, Belarus bears watching.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK 2024: CAN THE U.S. AVOID A RECESSION?

By JACKSON WANG

Over the past few months, investors have battled over the likelihood of a recession, defined as two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth. Some assert that a recession is inevitable, while others argue that the US could instead achieve a soft landing through which a recession is avoided and inflation is tamed. Nevertheless, the economy is in a tricky place and there is no correct economic outlook for next year. According to the New York Federal Reserve, the odds of a recession in the next 12 months have decreased from last quarter's forecast of 69% to 56%. However, the situation could still swing either way.

The concerns over a recession have emerged primarily due to inflation. The US witnessed its highest inflation since the start of the 21st century, reaching a peak of 9.1% in June 2022, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Although the current inflation rate has declined to a level of 3.7%, it has yet to return to the Federal Reserve's 2% target. The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), a branch of the Federal Reserve, has since announced 11 interest rate hikes, starting in March 2022, that sought to combat inflation.

Interest rates play a role in reducing inflation by increasing the cost of borrowing, thereby decreasing demand, increasing supply, and lowering prices. The latest rate hike in July 2023 brought the rate to 5.50%, the highest in 22 years. The Fed has since decided to pause rate hikes. While this suggests that the Fed has been able to decrease inflation, many believe that the rapid rate hikes have yet to reveal their full impact on the US economy and could potentially push the US into a recession.



Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell (Liu Jie/Xinhua via Getty Images)

As previously mentioned, a high interest rate environment suppresses inflation but leads to less demand and thus, slower economic growth. This can lead to a decline in a country's GDP, potentially causing a recession. For instance, interest rate pressures in Europe have caused the eurozone's GDP to contract 0.1% in the third quarter and is predicted to fall yet again in the fourth quarter. On the other hand, the United States, contrary to expectations, is undergoing robust GDP growth, evident in the 4.9% increase in the third quarter.

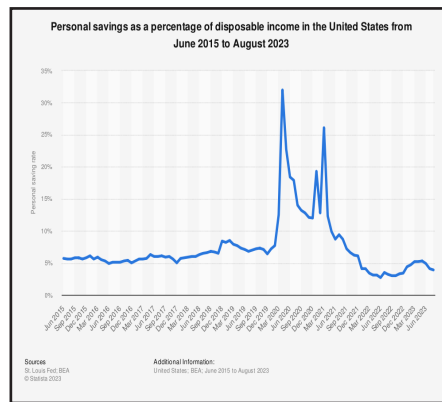
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According to Rob Haworth, senior investment strategy director at U.S. Bank Wealth Management, “GDP growth keeps surprising us regardless of mixed signals from other economic measures.” This unexpected growth has compelled experts to revise their initial estimates of when a recession might occur.

The economy’s summer growth could be a result of cooling inflation and wage increases. Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, estimates that inflation-adjusted incomes after taxes rose at an annualized rate of 7%. The rise in income pushed the household savings rate to 5.3% in May from 3.4% last December. This signifies increased purchasing power for consumers, potentially leading to higher inflation. The improved economic growth may also be a result of reduced supply shortages and bottlenecks, positively impacting economic development. However, there is a possibility that the recent GDP growth may be short-lived. But if it persists, the economy could face inflationary pressures as increased GDP growth generally implies increased demand and, therefore, increased prices.

This could potentially prompt the Federal Reserve to implement another rate hike, a move that would likely push the United States into a recession. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has indicated a willingness to consider another rate hike if inflation pressures escalate.



Personal savings as a percentage of disposable income, 2015-2023 (Statista, 2023)

Furthermore, examining unemployment rates and wage levels is crucial for understanding the current economic landscape. As of October, the United States has experienced a rise in its unemployment rate, reaching 3.9% and surpassing the 3.4% rate observed in April. This increase could signal economic recession tendencies, given that higher unemployment typically correlates with reduced economic activity. The uptick in unemployment, however, has helped in decreasing inflation. Striking the right balance to decrease inflation without pushing the economy into a recession becomes a critical challenge. On a positive note, September saw the addition of 336,000 jobs, a promising sign that the US is able to keep unemployment rates in check despite inflation and high interest rates.

In terms of wages, the US average hourly earnings is at \$34.00, 4.1% up from last year. While this may suggest enhanced purchasing power, it could be counterbalanced by a potential reduction in working hours. Furthermore, year-over-year weekly wages in September declined 0.2%. This indicates a potential pullback in household spending which represents another recession risk.

Despite the decrease in inflation, the growth in GDP and the recent surge in job additions indicate that the Federal Reserve’s interest rate hikes have not yet exerted their intended cooling effect to the fullest extent. According to Powell, this could be a result of the fact that many individuals and businesses locked in on low-interest rate loans during the pandemic. What this means is that, with higher interest rates, people are disinclined to take out loans and mortgages, instead locking in on their previous rates established when the Fed’s short-term rate target was near zero. However, there is a looming concern among investors that the swift rate hikes could eventually impact the economy significantly, potentially pushing the US into a recession as economic activity diminishes. This is an entirely possible scenario considering the high-interest rate environment will likely stay elevated for the foreseeable future until inflation achieves the Fed’s 2% target.

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ECONOMIC OUTLOOK 2024: CAN THE U.S. AVOID A RECESSION?

By JACKSON WANG

Given the current circumstances, the Federal Reserve finds itself in a position where the most prudent course of action is to observe and assess the economy's reaction to interest rates, gauging whether it might precipitate a recession. Recently, the US economy has experienced a rise in GDP growth as a result of cooling inflation and greater purchasing power amongst consumers. While sustained GDP growth implies heightened inflationary pressures, potentially prompting the Fed to implement another rate hike that could, in turn, lead to a recession, it also suggests the overall resilience of the U.S. economy in coping with elevated rates. The recent uptick in unemployment, which typically contributes to lowering inflation, could signal recessionary risks if not managed effectively. However, the September jobs report presents an alternative scenario, hinting at the potential for a soft landing. Consequently, the economy currently exists in a nebulous state, making it challenging to predict a recession definitively, as there are compelling indicators on both sides of the debate.

Regardless of whether a recession comes or not, the Federal Reserve will consistently monitor economic indicators such as consumer purchasing power, influenced by job and wage growth, as well as inflation, affected by interest rates, among other factors. Looking at these key metrics will enable the US to decide the next steps in avoiding a recession.

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON, TWO-PARTY POLITICS, AND THE SAD STATE OF THE AMERICAN LEFT

By ZEKE TESLER

It's easy to get discouraged by the state of left-leaning politics in the United States. As of late, President Biden has consistently and unsurprisingly not lived up to the demands of progressives and leftists throughout his term. On climate change, the Inflation Reduction Act increased investment in renewable energy projects and represented a good first step, but Biden followed that up by approving an oil drilling project in Alaska. Despite at one point claiming that he had declared a climate emergency, which would open up essential paths to combat climate change, Biden has not done so despite pleas from many climate activists. As his presidency has gone on, his progressive economic positions have retreated and he has backed away from more ambitious proposals like creating new Medicare benefits.

Most recently, many leftists believe that Biden has taken the worst possible approach with recent developments in Israel and Palestine by supporting the Israeli military despite its use of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. With this backdrop, it's easy to see why progressives with Democratic affiliations and leftists have looked outwards towards other options for the 2024 Presidential election. Unfortunately, a wide array of issues with these options, whether they be personal or political, candidate-based or systemic, highlight the frustrating nature of the two-party American political system and help explain the sad state of the American left.

Working from within the Democratic party, the most mainstream option is Marianne Williamson. Williamson has gained a fair amount of traction with young progressives, and her social media team has certainly been putting in the work; her TikTok account has almost 600,000 followers and frequently posts snappy, personalized content that has a definite appeal to young voters. Her platform is promising; she talks about how the system fails most Americans, is happy to criticize the innumerable failings of trickle-down economics, and rightly calls out establishment politics for its corporate corruption.

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MARIANNE WILLIAMSON, TWO-PARTY POLITICS, AND THE SAD STATE OF THE AMERICAN LEFT

By Zeke Tesler

She supports reparations, wants to put into place plans to introduce 100% renewable energy while also ending all new oil and gas leases on federal land, supports a holistic (if still police-supportive) crime prevention plan, and wants to reform immigration policy to create an affordable and available path to citizenship to all who pass criminal background checks. In a lot of ways, her platform is exciting. While Biden may have co-opted many progressive ideas during his campaign after winning the Democratic nomination to satisfy progressive detractors, a lot has stalled or been left to the wayside. Williamson, on the other hand, makes big promises from the start, and comes across as highly passionate.

Unfortunately, Marianne Williamson is not the progressive messiah she appears to be at face value. There are little clues sprinkled throughout her campaign website that all is not what it seems, and occasional self-helpy turns of phrase and hints of spiritual rhetoric are only the beginning of the Marianne Williamson rabbit hole.

Moments like when she tweeted about how “the power of the mind” could stop Hurricane Dorian from hitting the U.S. in 2019 and her saying that she would “harness love” to defeat Trump that same year during a debate make her come across as some sort of pseudo-spiritual hack-and predictably, her past confirms the harmful route this rhetoric can take. The deeper you go into Williamson’s history, the stranger and more alarming things get. She considers herself a spiritual guru, and has written many books over the past few decades, including 1992’s *A Return to Love*, which included a section saying that all illness was an illusion and all in the mind. Particularly mystifying are her comments on AIDS, which are numerous and concerning, at one point saying “Imagine the AIDS virus as Darth Vader, and then unzip his suit to allow an angel to emerge.” While she has since claimed a pro-science and pro-medicine stance, it’s hard to trust that statement in the face of so much evidence to the contrary. Despite her progressive platform, Marianne Williamson is a laughingstock to the general public, and she should be to progressives as well.

It’s telling that this is the most mainstream progressive presidential option: a 71-year-old spiritual self-help author-turned-attempted politician running as a Democrat despite there being no possibility that she can win the nomination.

The case of Marianne Williamson encompasses a lot of problems with the American left in 2023; like Williamson, it has issues building a base due to confused messaging, it’s in a constant state of struggle to exist, and it has no support from the political establishment.

Technically, there are other left-leaning candidates running campaigns. First of the two major players is Dr. Cornel West; a well-respected leftist political activist and philosopher, West is running as an independent. He has no strange backstory to bring up, but his independent candidacy is enough to eliminate any chance of presidential victory. Unlike the Democratic establishment, he understands that “People are hungry for change”, but there is no world where he will be the one to bring it. West’s ideas are strong and sure to resonate with many American leftists-and there’s no doubt that him running a campaign could draw attention to leftist ideology and push American political debate to the left-but he simply does not have enough mainstream support to get anywhere near the presidency.



Dr. Cornel West gives keynote address at the “#BLM Turns 10 People’s Justice Festival,” 2023 * (CNN, 2024)

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Second is Claudia De la Cruz, candidate for the the Party for Socialism and Liberation. De la Cruz is an organizer and educator and is running on a truly leftist platform the likes of which mainstream United States politics never see, promising to “End Capitalism Before it Ends Us.” It’s exciting stuff, but once again, the two-party system will inevitably crush any chance of her gaining substantial political traction.



Socialist candidate Claudia De La Cruz (left) alongside her running mate Karina Garcia (right) (Tag24, 2024)

Leftist politics, and even less radical progressive politics in the United States Federal Government are hard to pinpoint. There is no true leftist representation, and even the progressive wing of the largely moderate Democratic party (call them Democratic Socialists or some other right-of-socialism but left-of-center name) feels weak.

Many of their policy ideas are hugely popular, yet they get little representation in our government due to fearmongering about socialism and backlash from the more moderate Democratic establishment. Representatives like those in the “Squad” (original members Reps. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rahida Tahib, and Ayanna Pressley; subsequent members Reps. Cori Bush and Jamaal Bowman) had their time in the sun a few years ago when they were new in Congress, but as time goes on and nothing changes, they feel less and less important. They may represent popular ideas and the hopes of many young progressives, but if their major proposals (think Green New Deal) never seem to go anywhere, what’s the point?

Throughout American history, leftist movements have continually failed to gain substantial and long-lasting traction, while also being met with state-sanctioned repression and violence. In the early 20th century, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded on principles of overthrowing the capitalist system through “One Big Union” that focused on solidarity between all workers regardless of identity and type of labor. While members had success with many short term goals, they were consistently met with repression, violence, and imprisonment by the state and employers backed by the state.

Within the IWW, there was conflict over whether political action was even effective, similar to many conversations in leftist circles today. Leftist organizations were deeply affected by the Russian Revolution, which split many groups like the IWW between support for Communism and other leftist ideologies. Policies of the Communist International (Comintern) led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union dictated the beliefs of American Communists. In the 1930s, this led to deep divisions and aversion to collaboration with other leftist groups in the U.S. when the Comintern shifted ultra-left. The most extreme example of government repression was with McCarthyism and the Red Scare during the Cold War, where those with links to the Communist Party were targeted, blacklisted, and imprisoned by the government out of fear of Soviet danger to American safety. These are just some examples of the failures of strong collective leftist movements in the United States, but a common theme has been destruction by the state or by internal disagreement.

The problem is that our two-party, comparatively right-leaning political system barely allows progressive policy to happen. Most other so-called “developed nations” have at least one political party that is either leftist or much more progressive than the relatively moderate Democratic party, but the United States’ historical lack of strong leftist movements with political aspirations has made that impossible.

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It's no wonder there's so much fatalism around voting in leftist circles: we're told that if we don't vote, things will get worse, but there's not much motivation or inspiration in that. People want real change—this is what causes them to cling to the false hope that Marianne Williamson represents despite her past, and the exciting but ultimately futile ambitions of a Cornel West or Claudia De la Cruz figure. We live under the illusion of choice; in the end we only have two options, and the lines between them can blur quickly when thinking about the scope of the issues the country faces.

The most left-leaning major party in the United States, the Democratic party, is too moderate and stuck in its ways to support progressive policy. Because the two-party system makes the Democratic party the only feasible pathway to the presidency or Congress for progressive candidates, this refusal of support stifles left-leaning politics in the Federal Government completely. Even in terms of messaging, the Democratic party utterly fails at presenting progressive change, choosing instead to emphasize compromise and unity in contrast to Republicans who have utterly abandoned moderation and turned towards blatant extremism.

Many in the Democratic establishment cry out that progressive candidates are too dangerous and won't win elections. This is constantly disproven when progressives get a fair chance; in 2020, all three of the new House Democrats that ousted incumbents in primaries were much more progressive than their predecessors. Similar trends occurred in 2018. Nonetheless, establishment Democrats do all they can to make people coalesce around more moderate candidates, as evident with Biden in 2020; and it's hard to see that changing anytime soon. The fact that it has been proven time and time again that progressives can win elections given the right opportunity raises an important question: how much of this establishment fear is based on reality, and how much of it instead creates backlash against progressive candidates by perpetuating fear?

There's no easy answer to the complicated question of how to approach the ballot as a more progressive or leftist voter in these conditions. Some will argue that those who don't vote for Biden are essentially voting for the Republican nominee. Others will argue that the dangers that Republicans apparently represent are already realities for many, and that moderate Democrats who refuse to enact substantial and necessary change don't deserve their support.

The Biden stance on Israel-Palistine is a great example of this dilemma; the hundreds of thousands of Americans with family or connections in Gaza will have a hard to impossible time voting for Biden because he's a "better alternative".

National politics are a losing battleground for leftists and often progressives. Fearmongering both within the Democratic party itself and from external sources drives establishment and constituent support away from popular ideas and good candidates. In today's political climate, substantial progressive policy enactment at the federal level feels like an impossible wish. There's no easy solution, but some solace may be found in state and local politics, which present different ballparks that allow for much more political choice. New York is a great example: there are currently eight Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) members serving in the New York State Senate and Assembly, and they have been able to enact actual change across the state. One example is Julia Salazar—elected in 2018 from North Brooklyn—who was an essential part of a huge expansion of tenants' rights in 2019. This DSA-wing also won a group victory in 2021 on a grassroots Tax the Rich campaign that was able to save many public services from cuts.

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The New York City Council has a long history of leftist members, and that historical precedent has made somewhat of a comeback recently, with the Council currently including three DSA members as well as many that are much more progressive than the national Democratic party. It's an imperfect and unsatisfying answer to a complicated question; the truth is that while local and state politics are essential, they can't solve wide-reaching national and geopolitical issues. But until moderates age out or the system changes, it might be all there is.

THE DEADLY SERIES OF EARTHQUAKES IN AFGHANISTAN

By VIKI ZLOTCHENKO

The word "seismic" has filled the media since October 7, 2023. The Israel-Hamas War, which has affected millions of Israeli and Palestinian people, represents one kind of "seismic shift" shaking the order of the world. It is all about the use of a seismological term as metaphor. The consequences of that shift are tragic. There is another kind of seismic shift, one in the natural world, which is more literal, and

And that eruption of earth and disruption of human affairs can be seen in the Afghanistan earthquake.



A boy crouches in rubble, Afghanistan, 2023 (Reuters, 2023)

On October 7th, near the city of Herat, the first two earthquakes hit. The city was first hit with an earthquake of magnitude of 6.3; eight minutes later it was followed by one of 5.5. Then came another with a magnitude of 6.3 on October 11th and a final 6.3 quake on the 15th. These weren't aftershocks; they were whole order earthquakes. The earthquake struck during what some have called "an ongoing humanitarian crisis" following the takeover by the Taliban back in 2021. The Taliban are a prickly group of zealous Islamic fundamentalist revolutionaries who ousted the Americans and who are busy remaking Afghan society along puritanical religious lines. They are suspicious, resentful and defiant in the face of the international community. Due to the newly established theocratic government, existing international aid and rescue groups did not have proper funds before the earthquake hit.

Agencies like UNICEF and the Red Cross scrambled for emergency donations. Hospitals were overcrowded by the magnitude of injuries and deaths and were soon overwhelmed. As the country enters winter, thousands of citizens are homeless living in a kind of political limbo. The aid groups can't help them because the Taliban won't help them. If you are not part of the Taliban inner circle, you are expendable.

Afghanistan is located between the Arabian Plate, the Indian Plate and the Eurasian Plate. The United States Geological Survey reported that all four earthquakes were due to a shallow thrust faulting, which is when a fault plane has a very shallow dip - usually less than 45 degrees. This creates an earthquake because when two slabs of rock are pressed against each other the pressure exceeds the friction holding them in place. The fault plane solution showed that there was a rupture striking east-west with a north or south dip causing the dangerous earthquakes.



A man moves through remains of building, Zenda Jan district of Herat Province, Western Afghanistan (Al Jazeera, 2023)

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Mohammad Yawar, a writer for Reuters, wrote that The Taliban has claimed that the earthquakes were “the deadliest tremors to rock the quake-prone mountainous country in years.” Global aid groups and rescue teams have said that the country is facing another humanitarian crisis on top of Afghanistan’s collapsing economy. Recovery is looking to be more troubling as over fifteen villages have been reduced to debris. There is little to no funding to repair this damage and global awareness has faded because access to the devastated regions has been restricted..

It is a tale of wreckage. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 1,482 deaths and is continuing to rise to more than 2,000. In addition WHO had said that 90% of the casualties were women and children. The Taliban implemented a rule that denies basic rights of education, and work to women and girls. They are forced to stay home thus they die because their homes had collapsed on them. Janan Sayeeq, the spokesman for the Ministry of Disasters, had reported 9,240 injuries with 1,320 homes damaged or completely destroyed. A large percentage of houses were constructed out of mud and the earthquake hit those the hardest. The United Nations estimated 114,000 people are in need of relief.

Due to the country’s struggle to cope with the aftermath of war, internal purgings and years-long droughts, assistance from international organizations has significantly decreased. The World Health Organization sent twelve ambulances to the district of Zinda Jan to transport injured people to hospitals. Five medical tents were constructed to assist patients and the Afghan Red Crescent Society was assisting people coming from at least eight other areas. The humanitarian organization was supplying tarpaulins, water, kitchen appliances, blankets and other necessities for survival. UNICEF distributed 10,000 hygiene kits, 5,000 family kits, 1,500 winter essentials including clothes and blankets, 1,000 tarpaulins, and basic household resources that would benefit families. The World Food Program distributed ready food packers for 20,000 people which would be sufficient for a month for a family of seven.

We’ve learned in our Fieldston science survey classes that earthquakes are a natural phenomenon of the Earth and occur when the tectonic plants that form the outer layer of the planet move. The plates are rigid shells that have to move to allow the Earth to give off its internal heat. They are constantly having slow motion crashes as they carry the continents and oceans.

In the 1950s, a global seismic network was established to monitor nuclear tests which in turn led to a discovery that earthquakes occur along narrow bands that either surround the edges of the ocean basins, the Pacific, or cut down the middle of basins, the Atlantic. Afghanistan lies on numerous tectonic plates between India and Eurasia, with a fault line running directly through the site of the most recent earthquake in Herat. Due to Afghanistan’s location, it had experienced 276 earthquakes in the last year alone varying in severity. The recent major earthquakes occurred because of “thrust faulting” near the far-western end of the Hindu Kush mountain area. Afghanistan is prone to shallow earthquakes due to the frequent slipping and scraping of the region’s tectonic plates past one another as opposed to colliding directly. The recent quakes weren’t fender benders; they were more like high speed crashes.

Due to the immense damage the earthquakes caused, communication has been blocked and destroyed roads have made it difficult for rescue missions to be completed. People were using their bare hands to carry people out of rubble and supporting each other through this anxiety and fear-inducing time. Around 2,100 people were displaced and have fled to Herat leaving their families and what is left of their homes behind. Hospitals are overwhelmed with patients not only due to injury but because the patients’ homes are unlivable.

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The Taliban, in an act of public relations posturing, announced that they would construct new houses for the people who survived before the winter season became unbearable. However, the Taliban is not reliable and the people of Afghanistan need humanitarian aid immediately.

The International Rescue Committee is closely monitoring the aftermath of the earthquake. The IRC has mobilized nine emergency response teams, prioritizing medical care to help address the health needs. The Taliban largely controls how the aid is delivered and to whom. Organizations and agencies have experienced a decreasing amount of “humanitarian space) and the freedom to operate independently which is leading to donors questioning if their resources will reach the most vulnerable people. Donors are being aggravated by the Taliban’s interference and opposition to universal norms for women’s employment and girls’ education.

The Taliban are channeling resources to their security forces leaving almost nothing for the civilian population. In other words, in this triage, the Taliban are siphoning off funds like a well oiled kleptocracy.

Simultaneously, the Taliban is driving thousands of Afghans to migrate, dodging the border, and taking their chances in the Iranian labor market or risking further dangers as they attempt to get to Europe. In other words, the Taliban are ruthlessly trying to collapse and stress and distress all of the non-Taliban world.

THE WAR ON AMERICAN SANCTIONS

By FELIX STEELE

In 432 B.C., Pericles’ mighty Athenian Empire instituted the Megarian Decree – the first recorded instance of economic sanctions and a boycott as a foreign policy tool. As the Greek city-state world became more divided between the powers of Sparta and Athens, Athens banned Megara, a rival city-state, from doing business with it or any of its allies. Arguably, the Megarian Decree directly precipitated the Peloponnesian War, having forced Megara to choose between direct conflict with Athens and slow economic strangulation. Athens might have been a democracy, but it was ruthless in its pursuit of self-interest. In the 2,455 years since, dominant economic powers have frequently leveraged their trade relations with allies to punish enemies on the individual or national level. None, however, has more exuberantly translated economic into political influence than the United States.

Since the 1990s, the United States has imposed sanctions on more than twenty countries, as well as tens of thousands of politically or criminally involved individuals. These nations span every continent bar Antarctica, and account for one-fifth of global GDP. Increasingly, they are aligning to circumvent economic sanctions and engineer the erosion of the rules-based Western world order which has maintained global stability for nearly eight decades.

Easily the most important player on America’s blacklist is China. Although China isn’t a pariah state sanctioned to the same extent as Iran, Syria, or North Korea, severe restrictions have been, in my view, rightly imposed on scores of that country’s officials, businessmen, and military leaders. The restrictions on Chinese business activity are being steadily ratcheted up by Western governments. Notably, President Biden recently banned China from purchasing cutting-edge computer chips and manufacturing equipment, in a bid to arrest Chinese development of AI. The ban will severely impair the Chinese economy’s ability to leverage these cutting-edge technologies for military or economic gain. China, cognizant of the impact of U.S. sanctions, is coordinating efforts between nonaligned or U.S.-sanctioned countries to undermine the impact of Western sanctions.

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China's Cross-Border Interbank Payments System (CIPS) suite of technologies, for instance, is a riposte to SWIFT, the established system through which banks send money internationally. America, which monitors SWIFT, uses the system to measure compliance with sanctions, track dirty money, and enforce its economic policy. Most notably, major Russian banks were locked out of SWIFT in 2022 following its invasion of Ukraine. Since, many have reportedly set up secure communications with Chinese banks. China uses its own banking network to buy oil, gas, and other natural resources from sanctioned nations such as Venezuela, Iran, Russia, and Syria, bankrolling those regimes' abuses. It also pays less for these resources: The crude oil of the Russian Urals sells at a \$15/barrel discount to Brent crude, the standard.

China isn't only seeking to undermine America's control between banks. It is also attempting to subvert the dominance of the dollar as the world's reserve currency. China's central bank is subsidizing access to renminbi by bypassing the greenback in conversions to that currency.

It is telling that, despite having more international than Chinese customers, CIPS accounts are denominated in renminbi rather than dollars. State media claims that CIPS is growing at 75% per year: if even 1/3rd of that rate is true, CIPS could boast more customers (if lower-value ones) than SWIFT by the mid-2030s.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (left) shakes hands with Russian president Vladimir Putin (right) (Reuters, 2023)

The Russian economic ministry has even proposed formally integrating the banking systems of China and Russia, giving rubles and renminbi equal standing within the CIPS system. BRICS, a loose economic confederation of eleven semi-developed and developing countries (some of which, like Iran and Russia, are heavily sanctioned), has also floated the idea of a common currency. While the technical and political divergences between the BRICS nations makes such an initiative unlikely (especially given the election in Argentina, a new BRICS member, of Javier Milei, a libertarian who has described China as leading a global socialist conspiracy), that it has been floated at all is indicative of an increasing backlash against the dollar-denominated world economy.

Regardless of whether a BRICS or Russian-Chinese currency will ever come to fruition, the most potent threat to American dominance is already playing out as autocratic nations collaborate to subvert American sanctions.

North Korea, for instance, has dispatched 100,000 forced laborers to Russia, China, and the Gulf to bankroll its nuclear weapons program, an operation which brings in a reported \$500 million per annum. North Korea is also involved in arms-dealing between authoritarian governments. In 2007, the Israeli and American militaries destroyed a site in Syria where North Korean and Syrian technicians were collaborating to develop nuclear technologies. More recently, North Korea has supplied Russia with 1000 containers of armaments for use in Ukraine, for which Russia is thought to have traded ballistic-missile technology. Iran has in turn supplied Russia with Shahed-136 loitering munitions, drones that explode as they fly into their targets. On November 25th, more than 70 such drones struck Kyiv. China is also complicit. Li Fangwei (whose Western name is Karl Lee), a shadowy arms dealer who has the dubious honor of being one of the few Chinese on the FBI's most wanted list, is accused of exporting missile parts to Iran (China's government gigglingly insists that Li is a "charcoal entrepreneur"). Finally, Russia's Wagner mercenary group props up African regimes in exchange for foreign exchange and gold reserves.

THE WAR ON AMERICAN SANCTIONS

By FELIX STEELE

Increasingly, autocratic regimes are seeking, through covert dealings with one another and willing partners in the world-at-large, to build a parallel global economy whose transactions are invisible to the West. Further impositions of sanctions by the West – much-beloved for their low cost and – are unlikely to help. Restricting financial participation in the global economy by villainous regimes like North Korea, Iran and Russia is a must. But ultimately, too heavy-handed an application of sanctions threatens to further sow the instability and resentment of global institutions of which Russia and China are so adept at taking advantage. Western governments must not fall into the trap of overexerting their influence: if they seek to most effectively damage criminal regimes, they should take aim at their accomplices – the shell companies, exchanges, and oil freight companies which make trade between autocracies possible – as well as the currencies in which they are increasingly doing business.

THE REAL VICTORY: WOMEN'S WORLD CUP BATTLES ON AND OFF THE FIELD

By ADIA STOKES

On August 21, 2023, the Spanish Women's National Soccer Team won an electric World Cup Final match against England. The game closed out a tournament that broke all kinds of records, from attendance to viewers to the price of broadcasting. However, much of the world does not remember it for these records, instead seeing and hearing about the scandal within the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), where Luis Rubiales, the head of RFEF, kissed a player without consent on live television. This sparked international discourse about the historical treatment of female athletes, particularly in soccer, leading many to wonder why it took a scandal of this magnitude to instigate these discussions.

Acknowledging RFEF's history of misogyny is essential to understanding the significance of this moment. The assault is far from the first controversy that RFEF has been involved in in recent years. It is not even the only dispute between the women's team and the federation in the past two years.

In the months leading up to the 2023 Women's World Cup, fifteen players decided to put their entire livelihoods on the line and challenge the conditions that RFEF forced. As Rory Smith of the New York Times described, the protest "was rooted in a desire to force the federation to change. The team wanted better facilities, a proper support staff, a professionalized environment, [and] a coach who did not track their every move." The players were forced to leave hotel bedroom doors open, were checked to make sure they were in bed, and players were even told by a former head coach that "what you really need is a good man and a big penis."



The Spanish National team, February 2023 (The Athletic, 2023)

Just imagine being told this so bluntly by a person who you cannot speak back to, especially when it could be taken as a threat. In soccer, the coach and the general manager hold almost all of the power on the team. They are often the same person. If a player reported him or even spoke back, there is a good chance that she would not be called back up to the team, regardless of skill.

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No player is safe because, for female soccer players, most club teams do not compensate them enough to maintain a decent lifestyle, meaning that the players rely in large part on their national team salaries to support themselves. The Spanish Federation knows this and knows that they hold complete power over the players, meaning that they had little choice but to go along with the terrible conditions.

Hopes were high when a new coach was hired. Jorge Vilda was supposed to herald in a new period of equality, or at least, an improvement from the old guard. However, that notion was quickly put to rest when Vilda continued using the “outdated methods and controlling behavior” that had become synonymous with the team’s culture. Fifteen players were brave and desperate enough to revolt against their federation and announce their resignation from the national team. In doing so, they gained the support of the world while losing that of their country.

Vilda responded that this mutiny was unacceptable, releasing to the public that he would require all fifteen players to write a lengthy apology and warned that the players would “face bans of between two and five years for what [RFEF] described as a ‘very serious infraction’”. RFEF also released a statement that the players “will only return to the discipline of the national team in the future if they accept their mistake and apologize.” This handling of the situation is hugely problematic because it continues the exact system of patriarchy and public humiliation that these players attempted to change.

Queue the 2023 Women’s World Cup. Spain was seen as a contender, but less so than other giants such as the US, Germany, or Brazil, since they came into the tournament with a very young roster. Of the fifteen players that resigned, only three were called back up to the tournament, meaning that Vilda had to replace twelve valuable players. He did this by calling up players from Spain’s U-21 National Team, a group that had shown their quality by winning the U-20 Women’s World Cup in 2020. It is usual for a World Cup team to have a few young players to bring energy to the team, but it is also typical to bring many veterans, particularly on a historically winning team. The average age of the Spanish Women’s National Team was 25.2 years old, the youngest of any team in the tournament.

Spain’s route to the final was not clear-cut, suffering a 4-0 defeat to Japan in the group stage, but despite that blunder, the team quickly rallied to defeat some of the highest-level teams in the world, including Sweden and the Netherlands before facing England. Reaching this point was monumental in its own right, but the fact that the team reached the final of the most prestigious tournament in soccer is just a testament to their grit and skill. They won so many games in spite of the leadership and coaching, not because of or due to.

Functioning in a toxic environment is so unbelievably difficult, yet the 23 players on the roster were able to maintain their dignity while also playing some of the most beautiful soccer seen in recent history. The chemistry between the players is visible in their possession-based form of football, where each player relies on all 10 other players on the field. Off the field, even the players who did not or could not participate in the early protest against RFEF showed their support online and in person, demanding better conditions for themselves and future players.

Spoiler alert: Spain wins the final, and what should have been the brightest, most celebratory time in any of the players’ lives is eclipsed by assault. After the final of any World Cup is played, the winning team is honored individually with medals handed to them, often by the head of their federation, as was the case here.

THE REAL VICTORY: WOMEN'S WORLD CUP BATTLES ON AND OFF THE FIELD

BY ADIA STOKES

Everything was in place for one of the most beautiful ceremonies yet: a beautiful stage set up, high-profile leaders and former players in attendance, and the joy of people who have withstood so many obstacles, survived so much inequality, and have finally proven their excellence.

Yet an odd thing occurred when the medals were being handed out: Luis Rubiales seemed to be getting very touchy with the players. Hugs and handshakes are normal, even expected, but lifting players up and kissing them aggressively on the cheek? Absolutely not. Especially with the history of the protests, the average age of the players, and the clear fact that the players were anything but comfortable with this. This kind of behavior is deeply inexcusable and shows the depth to which the men in charge of the women's team believe they can reap the rewards of these players while treating them like dirt. When Jenni Hermoso, a veteran and star on the team, was called up to receive her medal, Luis Rubiales performs his worst transgression yet: as she approaches him, he grabs her head and, after a few words, kisses her directly on the lips.

Following huge public backlash from the international community and from Spain, Rubiales maintained his position that the kiss was consensual, that the agreement was formed during those couple of words exchanged. While there is a case to be made for both sides, the truth is still that his actions took the spotlight that should have been shone on the players and instead directed the attention to himself and his victim.



Spanish Soccer Federation President Luis Rubiales grabbing player's head (NBC News, 2023)

The backlash against Rubiales was swift and brutal from the press, the public, and his own prime minister. Pedro Sanchez denounced Rubiales during a speech at the Spanish presidential palace, saying his actions were “unacceptable”, his lack of apology “not sufficient [and] ... inappropriate”. Despite the overwhelming criticism from the world, Rubiales held an RFEF meeting, where he declared his intention to continue his tenure as FA president, repeating the words “I’m not going to resign, I’m not going to resign, I’m not going to resign.” He finished his speech to tremendous applause, from Vilda and others in the room after maintaining that the kiss was consensual.

There is a case to be made for this statement. Although there is no video or audio evidence, Rubiales claims that during their short conversation, (which he likens to that between a father and daughter) Hermoso called him “a crack” (an endearing jab) which led to Rubiales asking for “a little peck”. Additionally, video has emerged of the celebrations on the bus after the game where the players, including Hermoso, are seen and heard joking about the incident. Hermoso is pictured comparing herself and Rubiales to a teammate and her partner while laughing and drinking out of a bottle of some alcoholic drink (as is custom after winning such a large tournament) as her teammates laugh and cheer. Rubiales and his supporters use this video as evidence that the kiss was not as serious as Hermoso and others have said.

It’s not a great look for Hermoso to seem to change tact so quickly to speak against the event, but as professionals at Reachout Australia point out, trauma, and especially sexual assault, oftentimes does not process until later and even then the victim may try to downplay the effects. They wrote: “Sexual assault is a form of trauma, and confronting that trauma can be really tough... Everyone’s responses to trauma can look totally different.”

THE REAL VICTORY: WOMEN'S WORLD CUP BATTLES ON AND OFF THE FIELD

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While Hermoso may have been laughing about the situation mere hours after it took place, while also under the influence of alcohol, that doesn't mean she had the time or ability to process what happened to her. Reachout also writes that victims may "feel unable to accept what actually happened... might deny that what happened to [them] was sexual assault because it's too awful or scary to think about."

From Hermoso's perspective, one of the most powerful people in her life just assaulted her on international television after the biggest match of her life. That's terrifying in of itself but then add on the fact that this is a man who, mere months earlier, decided that more than half of the team was expendable because they refused to cooperate with his actions. Hermoso risked her career and livelihood to bring the truth to light and hold this man accountable for actions that people like him have gotten away with for far too long.

Rubiales has remained adamant that his relationship with Hermoso has always been "the same as...one of my daughters". He said that he has "a great relationship with all the players and we have experienced very affectionate moments in this camp."

Many of these players are less than half his age. Hermoso herself is 13 years younger, at 46 and 33 years respectively, so the idea that he would treat them as daughters may have held up if it weren't for two things. The first being that you don't kiss your daughters on the lips. The second being the protest months earlier. There is too much tension and fear within this federation to have that close of a relationship with a man who deemed many of your teammates and friends disposable, discarding their careers and fame as though they were nothing but thorns in his side.

In an environment like that, fear permeates the climate more than a father-daughter relationship ever could. Rachel Chaundler of the New York Times released an article in September of 2023 detailing the conditions that the women working in Spanish soccer endure every day. Chaundler got the perspective of more than 12 women, all with a similar consensus: they are seen as inferior to the men and constantly pushed out of their positions, whether forcefully or by the onslaught of misogyny they faced.

The sports section of BBC News reported that 81 Spanish players, past and present, male and female, announced a strike of their respective national teams until Rubiales was gone, spurring his eventual resignation. Of those 81 players, 39 of them continued their strike, demanding further progress since getting rid of one person cannot solve the decades of misogyny built into the system.

The outcome of this entire situation is not all bad, despite the tumultuous journey to get there. In the aftermath of the scandal, both the world and members of RFEF agreed that both Rubiales and Vilda had crossed many lines, resulting in Vilda's termination and the reinstatement of the first female coach to ever be in charge of the Spanish Women's National Team, Montse Tomé. Rubiales is being investigated for sexual assault in Spain and has been banned from holding office of any kind in soccer for three years. This may not seem like a lot, but the world's response and outcry were enough to ensure that any federation looking to hire Rubiales in the future will have to contend with the consequences of his past. Jorge Vilda has been hired as head coach of the Moroccan Women's National Team, a move that was heavily criticized by many around the world.

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THE REAL VICTORY: WOMEN'S WORLD CUP BATTLES ON AND OFF THE FIELD

By ADIA STOKES

The women of the Spanish National Team have not gotten their complete “happy ever after” yet - Hermoso herself has declared that “nothing has changed”. Although I do not completely agree with this, the continued imbalance of power is evidenced by the fact that many of the players who continued the strike after Rubiales’ resignation were then forced to attend the next training camp and matches after the World Cup via threats of large fines and suspensions. Reuters reports that under Spain’s Sports Act if the players refused the call-up, they “could face a fine of up to 30,000 euros (\$32,000) and suspension...for two to 15 years”.

This is a huge amount of time for many of them to survive financially without the stipends that come with playing for the national team, not to mention the hefty fines.

The biggest name left off the roster was one Jenni Hermoso, who, Tomé said, was left off “to protect her”, despite Hermoso’s response asking, “from whom?” he has been called up to subsequent camps and matches and has regained her standing as a leader on the team.

Although there is still progress to be made, it is important to acknowledge everything the players have done to create the change that was so badly needed within the federation. Although it took an international scandal to do so, the progress is still palpable and will impact women’s soccer everywhere. This sets a precedent, especially when women’s soccer is getting so much more publicity than ever before, that this kind of treatment will not stand.

NOT TO WORRY, AMERICA

By CONSTANTINE SVORONOS

You may often hear on the news or in daily conversation words of pessimism about American power on the world stage. Many claim that the days of democratic American hegemony, an idea some critics of the United States would consider oxymoron, are dwindling, with a new autocratic international entente, lead by China, filling the void. Often the cynical view of America’s future is backed by emphasis on our country’s intense polarization and growing political radicalism, among other things. This is then contrasted with the growth of China and that nation’s deepening economic ties all around the world. But is this projection accurate? Is it really backed by any data?

Historically, the power of the United States has been defined by a wide range of things, but most typically it is set apart from the rest of the world by the nation’s superiority of economic, military, and cultural influence. Thirty years ago, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States easily stood above every country in the world in all three of these categories, being the world’s only true superpower. Since then, however, things have changed, and dramatically so. It is no longer clear that America is a peerless superpower, with some suggesting that sooner or later America may not be a superpower at all.

Our country and its people certainly do face some obstacles to their livelihoods and prosperity. In terms of domestic challenges (some may even say threats), there are a good number. As previously mentioned, strong political division has been an enormous issue for a number of years. According to a 2022 Pew Research poll, 88% of Americans polled said they believed that there were strong/very strong political divisions between Americans who disagree. The same poll also revealed that many countries, even countries that are themselves politically divided, see the United States as being especially divided.

NOT TO WORRY, AMERICA

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Another 2022 Pew Research poll highlighted the views Americans have on the health of our democracy. This poll revealed that 58% of Americans were unsatisfied with the way our democracy is working, an unacceptable result.

These internal difficulties are not to mention the challenges the United States faces on the world stage. For one, what we do on the world stage is itself a cause for some of the division plaguing the nation. Our deep internal disagreements can lead to uncertainty amongst our allies about whether or not we will always be there for them. While most of our nation's politicians are united when it comes to supporting Israel amid its crisis, there is much less consensus around Ukraine and defending it. Plenty of Republicans in Congress as well as former, and potentially future, President Trump are skeptical of supporting Ukraine. We can already see that American support is largely what is keeping Ukraine alive as the war remains mostly a stalemate. For Ukraine to lose its U.S. support would potentially mean its fall to Russia, or at least a substantial loss of land and self-determination.

This would be a huge Russian victory, bringing President Putin, who has become more and more insistent that his country will not stop short of victory, one step closer to his vast long term goals, and would greatly shift the international balance of power. In Asia, Latin America, and Africa, China's influence continues to grow, posing a potential threat to the United States. China has surpassed the United States as the top trading partner of many countries of the aforementioned regions, something that some would say is a harbinger of diminishing American dominance. By removing these countries from America's sphere of influence, China is grasping the power out of our hands and putting it in the hands of their Communist and autocratic dictatorship.

All of these issues may paint a bleak picture for the United States, but there is still plenty for Americans to celebrate: namely, our economy. The American economy is by far the world's largest (by Gross Domestic Product), but that isn't what makes it so special. Our economy is distinctly diversified, with a number of different industries contributing greatly to it. Additionally, the United States is arguably the most innovative country in the world, with 9 out of the top 10 largest companies in the world by market capitalization being American.

Our GDP per capita is one of the highest in the world, being the greatest of any country with a population over 10 million, according to the World Bank. According to the IMF, the United States also has a respectable and steady (but not excessively high) GDP growth rate of around 2%, with that number projected to remain the same for the next few years.

While the overall strong economy is one thing, the United States has an additional unique economic advantage over China and all other competitors: the world's primary reserve currency is our currency, the U.S. Dollar. From this position we derive immense power. Whenever the United States wants to borrow money, it is particularly cheap for us, due to the high demand for the U.S. Dollar. It also gives the United States the substantial power of levying particularly hard-hitting sanctions on countries doing things we "don't like." A perfect example is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Following Russia's illegal act of aggression, the United States sanctioned Russia. These sanctions became so strong that Russia defaulted on its debts for the first time in more than a century, largely because we hold the world's reserve currency.

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The United States is itself extremely powerful, but with our allies, we are something even greater, particularly from an economic standpoint. The only real competitor for the U.S. Dollar on global markets is the Euro. Even if the Euro somehow did surpass the U.S. Dollar in global influence, it would be far from a death sentence to the United States, given that our ambitions are frequently aligned with those of the Europeans. It is extremely unlikely, however, that the Europeans are actively attempting to dethrone the United States economically, or in any way for that matter, especially given that the vast majority of Eurozone countries are almost entirely dependent upon the United States for their security through NATO and are some of our closest allies. It is also because of our military protection of our allies that they frequently vote alongside us or abstain from voting against our position in the UN. This is not only because they often agree with us, but also because they need us for their protection, as stated above.

Through alliances our robust military defends many of the world's most economically influential nations, and in this way earns us an even greater advantage in the game of international relations. As long as our armed forces stand above all others, this leverage is likely to remain in our hands, no matter what may happen on the world stage.



American aircraft carrier, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, at sea (Wikipedia, 2020)

“But what does all this matter if our democracy is soon to go?” you may ask. To this I tell you that the democracy and government of this country have stood for centuries and have passed the test of time. We have certainly been more divided before. Through a civil war we survived and even grew as a nation. Remember that the authors of our Constitution built it to last, and last it has. There may be a wide array of external threats, but the United States still exceeds all other countries economically and militarily. We have plenty of advantages and exceptional allies also working to keep up ahead. There is no need for the widespread pessimism our country faces. We will survive and we will remain strong through it all.

MONTANA'S LANDMARK CLIMATE LEGAL VICTORY

By FREYALISE MATASAR

This summer, for the first time in the history of the United States, a group of young climate activists successfully sued the government for its failure to protect them from climate change. As Montana is the fifth largest coal producing state in the country, the ruling from the state court in Montana was all the more meaningful. Climate activists are hopeful that the ruling will help pave the way for related cases working their way through state courts nationwide.

On August 14th, a Montana state court ruled in favor of 16 Montanans, ages 5-22, who alleged that the state's promotion of fossil fuels violated a provision in the Montana state constitution guaranteeing its citizens the right to a “clean and healthful environment,” as well as a provision that decrees that the state of Montana and its residents must maintain and improve the environment “for present and future generations.”



Montanans protest for ecological protection (Youthv.Gov, 2023)

MONTANA'S LANDMARK CLIMATE LEGAL VICTORY

By FREYALISE MATASAR

The case, *Held v. Montana*, was brought by Our Children's Trust, a non-profit law firm. Julia Olson, the executive director of the organization, declared the victory "a huge win for Montana, for youth, for democracy and for our nation."



Julia Olson, executive director of Our Children's Trust (CNN, 2016)

The state began and rested its defense on the same day, bringing the trial to an unexpectedly early conclusion. In a pivot from its expected defense disputing the climate science behind the plaintiff's case, the state focused instead on arguing that the legislature should weigh in on the contested law, not the judiciary.

The decision overturned the state's provision blocking officials from considering "actual or potential impacts that are regional, national, or global in nature" when performing inspections on the environmental impact of large projects, as well as when issuing permits.

This past May, the provision was changed to be clearer, preventing the state from "an evaluation of greenhouse gas emissions and corresponding impacts to the climate in the state or beyond the state's borders" when approving new projects.

This case is significant for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the precedent that it sets for similar legal battles nationwide. In her decision, Judge Kathy Seeley provided an important acknowledgement of the link between state practices and ongoing negative impact on climate change. Judge Seeley concluded that "Youth plaintiffs have experienced past and ongoing injuries resulting from the state's failure to consider [greenhouse gas emissions] and climate change." Seeley pointed out that the injuries were extensive, ranging from "their physical and mental health" to "homes and property, recreational, spiritual, and aesthetic interests, tribal and cultural traditions, economic security, and happiness." She also noted that "Every additional ton of greenhouse gas emissions exacerbates Plaintiff's injuries and risks locking in irreversible climate injuries."

As a result of the decision, officials in Montana will now have to consider the impact of greenhouse gas emissions when deciding on new projects related to fossil fuels, where state law previously forbade them from doing so.

Notably, Montana is a significant supplier of energy to the rest of the nation. According to the Energy Information Administration, it's the fourth largest coal producing state, with the largest estimated recoverable coal reserves in the nation.

Montana officials and opponents of the case were quick to deride the decision and expressed doubts that it would either stand or serve as a precedent for similar cases. According to local news reports, the attorney general's office immediately said they'd appeal Seeley's order. A spokeswoman for Attorney General Austin Knudsen, said in a statement "This ruling is absurd, but not surprising from a judge who let the plaintiff's attorneys put on a weeklong taxpayer-funded publicity stunt that was supposed to be a trial. Montanans can't be blamed for changing the climate." Opponents of the ruling also warned that it would have a negative impact on state finances. Alan Olson, executive director of the Montana Petroleum Association warned that if "this decision stands, it will cause great economic harm to the state of Montana."



Spring Creek coal mine, Montana (Montana Free Press, 2021)

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MONTANA'S LANDMARK CLIMATE LEGAL VICTORY

By FREYALISE MATASAR

Though it remains uncertain if Judge Seeley's decision will stand as the appeal works its way to the Montana Supreme Court, Phil Gregory, one of the plaintiff's attorneys, said that the Held vs. Montana verdict could inspire youths elsewhere to bring similar cases to court. In an interview with the Billings Gazette, Michael Gerrard, director of the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia Law School, said that "It's one of the strongest judicial decisions ever rendered on climate change, and it will be helpful to litigants around the world." As some legal analysts have noted, regardless of the outcome of the appeals in Montana and in other pending cases, Held v. Montana is an important and symbolic victory in the fight to use the courts to help tackle climate change.

And even if further legal victories are unsure, failure in the courts doesn't necessarily mean failure for climate activists' efforts to generate change. While a climate advocacy case spearheaded by Our Children's Trust was dismissed in Florida in 2021, a petition made by the plaintiff's unrelated to the case passed a state law that set renewable energy goals for Florida's electric utilities, aiming for 100% renewable energy by 2050.

This victory, if it survives the appeal, could serve as a precedent for future climate progress. There are five other states with clauses in their constitutions similar to the one in Montana's state constitution - New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Hawaii. The effects of the decision in Montana could soon be seen in the case *Nava-hine F. v. Hawai'i Department of Transportation*, also organized by Our Children's Trust. The plaintiff's claim that their state's Department of Transportation is violating the rights granted to them by their state constitution - namely, that "The State shall have the power to promote and maintain a healthful environment." They argue that, due to the large quantity of greenhouse gasses emitted by public transportation, the Hawai'ian DOT is violating this clause. The case is set to go to trial from June 24 to July 12, 2024.

HOLLYWOOD AND SHIFTS IN POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

By ISHAAN AKILESWAR

In 1887, a rancher, farmer, real estate speculator and temperance movement leader named Harvey Wilcox laid out the subdivision for the canyons and orchards east of Los Angeles, which his wife named "Hollywood," a place now famous around the world for being synonymous with film and stardom.

Since the early 20th century, Hollywood has been that unique merger of commerce and art; a place that nurtured an entirely new art form and a new type of technology for filmmakers to express themselves through cinema (from the Greek *kine*, which means motion; motion pictures, moving pictures) in the varied terrain of downtown Los Angeles. Hollywood had cheap land, cheap labor, was far from Broadway, and had abundant and beautiful light for long days of filming. The name itself has a cache that invites tribute: Hollywood (American Cinema) spawned Bollywood (Indian Cinema) and Nollywood (Nigerian Cinema). The iteration is endless. Etching itself into the global media market, Hollywood houses one of the most influential groups and industries, due to its ability to tell stories with identifiable actors and to spin dreams within the American dream. With this stardom and influence through media, comes Hollywood's impact on politics, and ability to shape social movements.

Hollywood took all of the independent movie making that was going on in America and concentrated it in one place with fiercely competitive studios. Bootleggers like Joe Kennedy gained a little legitimacy through in motion pictures. Immigrants and outcasts could reinvent themselves, Gatsby-like, in Hollywood. Hollywood could also be of use to the government as it became embroiled in World War I.

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Wartime propaganda was finely distilled through images on the big screen. This can be traced back to World War I, when Jack Warner, co-founder of Warner Bros., released *My Four Years in Germany*. The silent film depicted the real experiences of the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, James W. Gerald, and attempted to portray the causes leading up to Germany's heinous reasoning for war upon the world. To paraphrase Irving Berlin, Hollywood was "so natural that you want to go to war."

Even in the early stages of Hollywood, when film was silent, many films often had political agendas or social agendas to them, using film as a way for studio narratives. Warner's anti-German sentiment in the film was a hit success, and resonated in the U.S., placing Warner Brothers as one of the top producers in Hollywood. Film historian Kevin Brownlow recounts in his book, *Behind The Mask*, that early American motion pictures touched upon themes that we would now see as progressive: immigration, identity, race, prostitution, alcohol and drug addiction, class struggles, industrial and farm labor issues, urban issues and the dangers of urban life, alienation, and women's issues.

But as Hollywood grew in power and influence, some of those issues became "sanitized" or "marginalized" or wholly "neglected." "Keep in mind," cautions Bob Montera, who teaches Film and Literature, "Hollywood was born in Jim Crow America, and American cinema, Hollywood studios, were part of that cultural segregation. Black film-makers, like Oscar Micheaux, worked outside the studio system as 'independent' directors and producers. If D.W. Griffith made 'Birth of a Nation' in Hollywood, Micheaux's response to it, 'Within Our Gates', was made in places like Metropolis, Illinois or Charlotte, North Carolina, where he received support from Black middle class investors and patrons of the arts."



Early Hollywoodland residents, 1923 (ABC10, 2022)

Then during World War II, Hollywood became a key player in war efforts; they promoted patriotism, boosted morale, and raised funds for war bonds.

At the same time in the '30s and '40s – when anti-Communism politics were emerging, along with the independent trade guilds such as the Screenwriters Guild (WGA), the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) – the Hollywood community was in tight internal debate over the its role in the political landscape of America. This debate has stayed present even up until the present day.

Media and academics alike have argued and analyzed Hollywood's political activism and narratives for decades, saying that it used to be conservative before switching to a more liberal ideology in the late 1970s. Screenwriter and playwright Jonathan R. Reynolds told the *New York Times* in 1992 that "...Hollywood today is as fascistic toward conservatives as the 1940s and '50s were liberals... And that goes for the movies and television shows produced." Reynolds had been a writer since 1975, and had seen the shift in Hollywood's political landscape firsthand. When talking about the New York theater community he said: "Any play that suggests that racism is a two-way street or that socialism is degrading simply won't be produced... I defy you to name any plays produced in the last 10 years that intelligently espouse conservative ideas. Make that 20 years."

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This idea that Hollywood, a place founded by activists and radicals who commended artistic expression and speech, who would be contradicting its mission by constricting such expression is unbelievable. Right?

Well, even going back to the '30s, such blacklisting was true, only it was the other way around. It used to be considered un-American to sympathize with the Soviets, which translated over to Hollywood film and activity; this led to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate Hollywood sympathizers about their "communist activities." Even Jack Warner was brought to testify as a witness, and pointed others out for their liberal-pandering scripts. This finger pointing led to former Soviet sympathizers like Edward G. Robinson and Sterling Hayden to do the same, keeping themselves out of trouble. This doesn't mean that Hollywood and American media don't have conservative-pandering films, however many major studios shy away from producing those narratives due to an overwhelming amount of scrutiny on "non-woke" media. I simply think that it is important to understand why the majority of media is more leftist in this day and age, and how Hollywood's history has made it so.

THE UNITED STATES OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM: MIKE JOHNSON AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

By ZEKE TESLER

On October 25th, 2023, Representative Mike Johnson became Speaker of the House. His sudden rise to power came as a shock to most; Johnson is relatively unknown and currently only serving his fourth House term, making him the most junior Speaker since 1883. The circumstances leading up to his appointment are no doubt indicative of the turmoil eroding the security of a Republican Party caught between extremism and more extreme extremism; Kevin McCarthy's speakership played out like an unfunny episode of Veep and his removal from office says a lot about who holds power in the Party. It's easy to focus on that story, but more insidious and important is the bigger picture that Mike Johnson's speakership represents. His anonymity, inexperience and the toppling of McCarthy are only small parts of a wider issue. It's time to recognize just how far Christian extremism has penetrated into the heart of the United States political system.

Mike Johnson is both a religious bigot and a Christian nationalist. His Christian nationalism is no secret; he blatantly believes that the country was founded on Christian values and should be run according to them.

He ran a seminar entitled "Answers for Our Times: Government, Culture, and Christianity" that was explicitly premised on the idea of the U.S. as a Christian nation. He has frequently lamented the destructive force of atheism, railed against homosexuality and queer identities, and fought against abortion. Many of these views are par for the course for the Republican Party, but Johnson spews everything with an extra bit of religious fervor.

Johnson's ascension is a reminder that the U.S. is not the secular nation many maintain it is. Johnson, second in line to the President, has said outright that the idea of separation of church and state is a misunderstanding because it is not enshrined in the Constitution, but rather only mentioned in a letter by Thomas Jefferson. This is incredibly misleading; though the words "separation of church and state" are not written in the Constitution, the establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment explicitly say that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." It's clear that the Founding Fathers did not believe in a connection between state and religion from both the letters and founding documents they wrote, despite how much Mike Johnson may want to infuse his politics with conservative Christian values.

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Speaker of the House Mike Johnson being sworn in, 2023 (The New Yorker, 2023)

Unfortunately, this view is not unique to Johnson; his background highlights the influence of Christianity on the United States political system as a whole. Before venturing into politics, Johnson was an attorney for Alliance Defending Freedom (f.k.a. Alliance Defense Fund), a conservative Christian legal interest hate group that has connections to many Republicans throughout American politics. The ADF seeks to expand Christian values and influence in government institutions and schools. They use those “Christian values” to fight against queer people and abortion, to name a few of their most pressing concerns. Some other prominent people associated with the ADF include Amy Coney Barrett, Mike Pence, Josh Hawley, and Jeff Sessions, who while serving as attorney general in 2017, attended an ADF summit and thanked them for their work. The ADF is a concerning presence on its own, but it is only one piece (albeit a large one) of the wider quilt of the Christian Right made up of extremist Christian politicians, lawyers, judges, and advocacy groups. The Christian Right has substantial power in our government, and Mike Johnson is just the latest to emerge from its depths.

Religious influence in government by individuals and organizations is not a new phenomenon. The modern Christian Right mainly developed almost 50 years ago as a response to the counterculture and secularism of the 1960s and the presidency of Jimmy Carter, led by televangelist Reverend Jerry Falwell and his political organization Moral Majority. In the mid-1970s, Falwell embarked on a series of rallies to gain recognition and garner support for this new organization that would usher in a new era of Evangelism and Christian influence in conservative politics. Moral Majority quickly became heavily involved and influential in national and local politics. In the 1980 presidential election, mainly because of many Evangelicals’ disappointment with President Carter’s refusal to blend religion with statecraft, Moral Majority spent millions of dollars supporting Ronald Reagan and running smear campaigns against Carter. They played a key role in shifting Evangelical voters towards Reagan and the Republican Party, and went on to heavily influence the Republican platform during his time in office.

While Moral Majority lost a lot of its power in the following years, this was largely because their influence had already drastically shifted the conservative vision of America; their purpose was fulfilled rather than abandoned. The post-Moral Majority Republican Party has been consistently filled with the name of the Christian Right game: moral panic. From Moral Majority to the ADF and other comparable organizations, rhetoric of the Christian Right has always centered on ideas of cultural decency, protecting the family, and Christian morality. Proponents use fear of the other, the unknown, or God himself to spread hate and advocate against values they find sinful and by extent, anti-American. This has taken shape in everything from using fear around sexual deviancy and protecting children to fight against queer rights to the idea of the “God-given right” to own assault weapons.

In recent history, the Christian Right’s influence has reached a fever pitch. The Evangelical makeup of the Republican constituency has only grown since the 70s; 38 percent of Republicans were evangelical in the 2010s, and 99% of Republicans in Congress are Christian. While that in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, it highlights the way that Christianity has and still does play a large part in conservative messaging and policy.

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THE UNITED STATES OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM: MIKE JOHNSON AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

BY ZEKE TESLER

Politicians on the Right carry on the rhetoric and tactics of the Christian Right from the 1970s; even though the wider American populace may be shifting away from religion, Evangelicals and their associated religious rhetoric are still ingrained in the Republican Party. The Christian Right has more power and influence than ever; over the last decade and a half, they have steadily replaced more moderate and centrist Republicans, with Evangelical districts replacing a historical number of House Republicans in primary elections since 2010. Republicans disproportionately represent Evangelical districts by a wide margin, and are also comparably more safely entrenched. Aside from individual politicians, the idea of Christian nationalism has become increasingly popular with Republican voters, with 54% agreeing or overwhelmingly agreeing with statements including “The U.S. government should declare America a Christian Nation”, “U.S. laws should be based on Christian values” and “Being Christian is an important part of being truly American” in a poll conducted by Public Religion Research Institute.

It’s impossible not to mention the influence that Donald Trump has had in this extreme shift. Christian nationalists, with their wide reach through extensive church networks, Christian broadcasting channels, and Evangelical organizations, have been able to co-opt MAGA and spread their extreme messaging through the increasingly far-right Republican Party. Despite the seemingly incongruous conflicts between Donald Trump’s history and conservative “Christian values”, the two have increasingly gone hand and hand; it’s no surprise nor coincidence that Mike Johnson was a prominent 2020 election denier. This brings up another important point: these politicians use religion as a backdrop to hide behind and garner support from, but their actions are often incompatible with what they say they believe in. In the end, it’s all about power; Trump and Evangelical leaders were able to use each other to ascend to new heights, and “men of God” like Mike Johnson chose to look past the antithesis of the Christian ethos that Trump’s behavior represented to take advantage of the situation.

While the Christian Right’s influence has been around for a while, its direct presence in government and extreme nature is clearer than ever.

Rather than seeing Johnson’s rise to power as a strange anomaly or an extreme case, it’s essential to recognize that he is largely representative of the reality of the Republican Party and constituency today. The Party is inseparable from the Christian Right; in 2023, Christian nationalism is a core American conservative value rather than a peripheral fringe ideology. Although secular ideals are written into this country’s founding documents, if people in power and those supporting them don’t conform and instead turn to religious nationalism, it’s hard to pretend those words mean much.

COP28: TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

BY MALAIKA SINGH

Conference of the Parties (COP) refers to meetings held under treaties in International Environmental Law. COP28 was a global climate meeting held by the United Nations about environmental treaties. The countries that attended COP28 are participants of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was negotiated in 1992. Since then, there have been annual meetings, each time at a different location. One of the most famous products of the UNFCCC is the Paris Agreement, negotiated at COP15.

COP28, or the 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties under the creation of the UNFCCC, was held in Dubai from November 30th to December 12th to further discussions on climate change. This COP has taken place every year since 1992, and every year it has proven imperative to continue. Global warming is a serious problem – and it has become more pressing as the world continues to emit more carbon dioxide (created through the burning of fossil fuels and other natural gases) – which heats the Earth’s atmosphere, causing global warming.

Think of it as a blanket coating the earth, preventing hot air from escaping. If Earth’s temperature rises above 2° Celsius (35.6° F) from the temperatures during the pre-industrial era (1800s), it will have disastrous effects on the world – for example, it can destroy all our coral reefs. Scientists want to keep temperature change below 1.5°C, but we are already at 1.3° and the Earth is heating extremely rapidly.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) publishes a report periodically, based on the research of nearly 800 scientists all over the world. In the most recent report of the IPCC, there was a call for a sharp decrease in the use of fossil fuels to stay within the 1.5°C temperature increase but also acknowledged that countries have “continued to increase their consumption in fossil fuels.” The report realistically called for more adaptation (i.e. reacting or adapting to the effects of climate change) rather than mitigation (reducing the use of fossil fuels).

As the state of our world worsens due to climate change, with melting glaciers increasing sea levels, more frequent flooding, and droughts, it is imperative that countries become focused on reducing emissions.

Unfortunately, the location of COP this year was not a good start: the UAE is a major oil producer. This meant that reducing fossil fuels did not benefit their economy and was therefore not in their best interests. COP28 President Sultan al-Jabar had to backtrack on earlier statements about the “[lack of] science” behind the phase-out of fossil fuels. It did not help that he is also the head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. Further, the last two days of COP28 coincided with the Arab Energy Summit, run by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) which took place a six-hour drive, or an hour plane ride, from COP28. The presence of oil-producing nations greatly impacted the final statement from COP28 (which drives the agenda for COP29). Countries disagreed about how to refer to the usage of fossil fuels that are mined for a major profit. While many realized the impact this has on global warming, others continue to drill and base their economies on their resources. This implies countries that have major gas supplies are in positions of power.

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Putin's war on Ukraine, for example, has shown how Europe is vulnerable to Russia's oil and has incentivized countries to research other sources of energy including renewable energy. John Kerry, the US Climate Envoy, said that "by virtue of what [Putin has] done in Ukraine, his presence may encourage people to do what Europe has done, which is the most rapid move to a different kind of fuel."

In the final days of COP28, more than 100 countries, both developed and developing, said that they would support a phase-out of fossil fuels. However, this would mean a shift away from fossil fuels and their usage, while a phase-down only reduces their usage. The division between countries led to a less successful agreement than anticipated. The final draft was released nearly a day after COP finished and while it was late, it included language on how to reduce the use of fossil fuels. This was a reflection of the intense public criticism of the first draft – which contained no language on the usage of fossil fuels. The final report contained language and references to reduce fossil fuels as used in energy systems, triple renewable energy sources, and double energy efficiency. That being said, there were many loopholes – likely due to fossil fuel-producing countries. One such example is the pro-fossil-fuel language found in the text.

In addition, to the disappointment of developing countries, there were few mentions of adaptation finance (helping countries reduce the impacts faced by climate change hazards, such as droughts or storms) – crucial for countries who now live with the impact of climate change caused by fossil fuel emissions from other countries. Al Gore describes the agreement made at COP as the "bare minimum," with many of the solutions being "long overdue."

However, all is not lost. While the agreement is lacking in many ways, there were breakthroughs at COP28. This was the first time fossil fuels were explicitly mentioned in the agreement. According to EU Commissioner for Climate Action Wopke Hoekstra, the "tremendous amount of diplomacy... deployed [by developed countries]" combined with the "bridge building" done with those in developing countries helped achieve the final agreement. Secondly, the first-ever health day was created at COP28. The focus was to educate others about climate change in the form of excessive heat, flooding, and droughts – and how they can harm human health. Climate change causes asthma, cancer, and strokes, and increases one's risk of Parkinson's. Third, there was the creation of a loss and damage fund to help the most vulnerable countries live in a world of climate change (island states, for example, are facing increasing hurricanes and rising sea levels).

Finally, there were many side deals during the event, including a focus on helping developing countries transition from dirty to clean energy and the need to focus on protecting forests and biodiversity in the form of carbon credits (a credit would be given to you if you did not cut down a forest). These were extremely important first steps to take to unite countries and to help reduce the impacts of climate change.



OP28 President Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber (center) surrounded by world climate leaders, Dubai, December 5th 2023 (Reuters, 2023)

At the end of the day, while COP28 was not as groundbreaking as needed, it created a few stepping stones to get to our goal of stopping climate change. Climate change is not something that can be immediately solved – rather, it's an issue conquered in steps. The public wanted COP28 to take two steps forward in the breakthroughs made. However, the end result of COP28 was really one step back from the public's hope. We have made some progress and still hold hope for future COPs. Now, our generation should ask: how soon will we take two steps forward, and no steps back?

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A (BRIEF) HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

BY KARINA TAYLOR AND STELLA BROTHERS

To protect the environment and conserve natural resources, environmental policy in the United States involves governmental actions taken at the federal, state, and local levels. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was one of the first laws to protect our environment. Included in NEPA are which address air pollution, chemical and oil spills, smog, drinking water quality, land conservation and management, as well as wildlife preservation.

Some of the first occurrences in which policies targeted environmental protection were sewers, first constructed in Mohenjo-daro and ancient Rome – civilizations that date back more than 4,000 years. In another example of early environmental practice, ancient Greece had laws that governed forest harvesting, and European societies established hunting preserves. Paris also advanced Europe's first large-scale sewer system during the 17th century.

Environmental legislation only became an explicit focus of governments in the 1950s-60s, as awareness of the use of chemicals and the harmful effects of emissions became more widespread, with diseases spreading resulting from mercury discharges. One pivotal moment came as Rachel Carson, an American biologist, published an environmental science book highlighting the dangers of pollution. *Silent Spring* received critical acclaim, ultimately leading to a greater spread of knowledge regarding environmental issues. This also led to many systems of regulations in industrialized countries. In the U.S., these included the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Toxic Substances Control Act, all of which were intended to reduce pollution.

The Clean Air Act is a law signed by the federal government in 1970 to control and reduce air pollution from automobiles and industrial facilities. The first federal legislation relating to air pollution that predated the CAA was the Air Pollution Control Act, passed in 1955. However, the CAA, enacted in 1970, gave much more power to federal authorities to control carbon emissions and air quality. The CAA was created to decrease air pollution and improve the health of American citizens. Consequently, in the first twenty years after the Act was passed, 200,000 lives were saved from premature death, and close to 700,000 cases of chronic respiratory illnesses were prevented. Another necessary amendment of the CAA was enacted in 1990, further diminishing emissions of toxic pollutants into the atmosphere, curbing acid rain, and causing dramatic improvement in air quality well into our own century.



President Richard Nixon signs the Clean Air Act in to law, 1970 (Automotive News, 2011)

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In 1972, another critical environment law was passed, the Clean Water Act. Similar to the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act was not the first federal law put in place to control water pollution. In 1948, the federal government passed the Water Pollution Act to address the increasing water contamination. However, in 1972, significant changes to that law led to the creation of the Clean Water Act. The CWA established standards that control the disposal of contaminants into the nation's waters. Furthermore, the Act created a permit system for households and facilities requiring wastewater treatments before discharging liquids into the environment.

For the past 50 years, the Clean Water Act prevented the disposal of 700 billion pounds of contaminants and pollutants into the waters yearly. It significantly improved the quality of drinking water, benefiting the health of millions of Americans.

A third law to control pollution was passed by the federal government in 1976, the Toxic Substance Control Act, authorizing the government with the right to regulate the production and import of chemical substances into the U.S. Some of the chemicals, such as food, drugs, cosmetics, and pesticides are exempt from the TSCA, but many toxic substances and their disposal are under the control of the TSCA to protect the health of Americans.

It is vital to abide by and understand the utility of environmental legislation as it is the basis of the system that protects the environment and preserves human health for generations to come. For 50 years, the U.S. has come a long way in reducing and controlling pollution. However, there is a lot more to be done for us to safely continue to our universal home, planet Earth.



Two protests lead by Clean Water Action, one (left) in 1972, one (right) in 2022 (CleanWaterAction, 2022)

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