The Diplomatic Envoy

NAVALNY ARREST SPARKS MASS PROTESTS IN RUSSIA

Joshua Powanda
Staff Writer

CNBC reports that Russian opposition leader and Russian critic Alexei Navalny has been sentenced to nearly three years in prison following his return to Russia in January. Navalny has been on a wanted list since 2014 for allegedly violating the terms of a suspended sentence. Upon his arrival at the airport in Moscow, Russian authorities arrested him before he could even get his passport stamped. The news of Navalny’s politically-motivated arrest sparked widespread protests throughout Russia. According to NBC News, protesters were met with violent response from the security forces, resulting in the arrest of more than 5,000 people, including journalists covering the event. In addition to mass arrests, there have been reports of the use of tear gas, tearers, and batons to crack down on the protesters. BBC News reports that the arrest follows Navalny’s return from Germany, where he underwent treatment after being poisoned with Novichok, a Soviet-era nerve agent. Navalny has accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of orchestrating the attack on his life through the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor agency to the Committee for State Security (KGB). Although Putin denied these claims, he has stated that if the FSB were behind the attack, they would have finished the job.

NPR reports that the research group, Bellingcat, Russian media outlet, The Insider, and German weekly, Der Spiegel, carried out by research conducted on the event. In the light of the findings, the FSB’s involvement is confirmed, which called out the abuse of the FSB’s involvement. Navalny has allegedly uncovered mounting evidence that implicates the highest levels of the Russian Government. In a phone call with his phone number to appear, Navalny survived the poisoning was due to the quick landing of the airplane he was flying on at the time. Kudryavtsev described not only details of how the nerve agent was applied, but also the lengthy effort to erase any trace. Local police in Omsk, the location where the airplane swiftly landed, removed Navalny’s clothes and belongings and later provided them to federal agents. While the FSB has denied the validity of these claims, the Russian Government has attempted to blame western governments and foreign intelligence services for their role in the events. These unverified claims have cost international backlash for the arrest, as western nations call for Navalny’s immediate release. According to The Guardian, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union have called on the regime to release Navalny. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the U.S. is “deeply concerned” with Navalny’s arrest and has been working with its allies to discuss punitive options, according to NBC News. The New York Times explains that earlier examples of this malign Russian behavior can be seen with the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei Skripal, as well as his daughter Yulia, who were targeted for their opposition to Putin and the Russian Government. Despite the attack on his life, Navalny has remained steadfast in his opposition to Putin’s regime. According to NBC News, Navalny believes Putin’s legacy will forever be sealed, saying that while “he can pretend to be a great politician, he will go down in history as a poisoner.”

Turbulent Takeoff: COVID-19 Immunization Efforts Finally Roll Out in South Africa

Timothy Sandram
Staff Writer

After a turbulent takeoff, the South African government has finally started vaccinating its people against the COVID-19 virus. The country’s president, Cyril Ramaphosa, was among the first six people to receive the jab, according to VOA. Earlier in the month, the South African government halted the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on frontline workers after a study found it not to be effective enough against the variant prevalent in that country. According to The Washington Post, the country’s hopes on turning the corner on the virus were raised in early February when South Africa received millions of doses of the vaccine, only for that hope to be dashed seven days later. The South African variant of COVID-19 is considered one of the deadliest and most infectious variants. Scientists say the variant accounts for 90 percent of new COVID cases in South Africa. BBC News reports that South Africa has recorded almost 1.5 million COVID-19 cases and more than 46,000 deaths since the pandemic began, more than any other country on the continent. News of the vaccine, therefore, brought hope to a country left at a standstill for months. A trial carried out by researchers at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa and the UK’s Oxford University, whose results were not yet peer-reviewed, showed that the AstraZeneca vaccine did not work against mild and moderate illness triggered by the new variant, according to the trial’s Chief Investigator Professor Shabir Madhi. To maintain their scheduled vaccine rollout, South Africa’s government would need to expedite its procurement of Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. South Africa’s Health Minister Zweli Mkhize explains to BBC News that while waiting for further advice on how best to proceed with the AstraZeneca vaccines in light of the findings, the government was hoping to start the immunization with Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccines by mid-February. However, only the efficacy of Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been studied in South Africa during the time the country grappled with predominance of the new variant; as such, the impact of the Pfizer vaccine on the variant is unclear. While studying the Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine, the latter was found to be less effective against the variant but was able to almost totally prevent severe cases and death. The health minister said his government had ordered 20 million doses of Pfizer vaccine whilst expediting the approval process of Johnson & Johnson vaccines. The AstraZeneca setback will harm not only South Africa, but other developing countries who have pinned their hopes on this vaccine to enhance their fight against the virus. Reuters reports that Malawi and Nigeria plan to move on to innoculating their people with the AstraZeneca vaccine, while Uganda plans to seek guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO). Meanwhile, the WHO has warned countries against being quick to discard the AstraZeneca vaccine. The organization’s Director of Immunization Dr. Katherine O’Brien explained to BBC News that the vaccine still has a meaningful impact on the South African variant, especially in preventing hospitalizations and deaths. “Comparing from one piece of evidence to the next really can’t be done without a sort of level playing field,” she said, referring to the evaluation of different trials in different populations and age groups. Dr. O’Brien stressed that the WHO expert panel held “a very positive view” of proceeding with the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, including in areas where variants were circulating, though more data and information will be needed as the pandemic continued. Get in touch with us:

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Glacier Collapse in India Leaves at Least 30 Dead and Nearly 200 Missing

Shweta Parthasarathy  
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On February 7, 2021, a massive glacier in the Himalayan mountain range collapsed, leaving at least 32 dead and almost 200 missing in the state of Uttarakhand. Part of a glacier near the Nanda Devi mountain broke off into a river, breaking dams, sweeping away bridges, and destroying hydroelectric projects in the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers. Numerous towns had to be evacuated, and 13 villages are still being resupplied by air after being cut off by the flood waters, according to Reuters.

A small hydroelectric project, known as the Rishiganga facility, was completely swept away and another larger project site was heavily damaged. The AP reports that the Rishiganga power station has become the site of a major rescue operation after more than 40 of the plant's workers went missing. Another rescue operation has been initiated at the mouth of a 1.5-mile tunnel at the state-owned Tapovan Vishnugad hydropower project. CBS News explains that rescue efforts are progressing slowly because of the large quantities of mud, slush, and debris blocking the tunnel and other entryways into the flooded areas. According to ABC News, rescue workers, assisted by paramilitary and police forces, as well as Indo-Tibetan Border Police officers are using every tool at their disposal, from shovels to mechanical diggers to wooden planks, in order to clear enough mud to get people out of the tunnel.

Scientists and climate change experts believe this incident to be a result of climate change, adding to the concerns that global warming is becoming even more dangerous to countries like India, according to The New York Times. Rising temperatures are making the Himalayan glaciers, which supply water to tens of millions of people in the region, with shocking speed. Dr. Anjali Prakash, a lead researcher with the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is among the experts who have spoken on the effect of climate change in this region. He told CBS News that the impact of global warming on glaciers was well-documented; a recent report showed temperatures were rising in the Himalayan region, emphasizing that “this looks very much like a climate change event as the glaciers are melting due to global warming.” Many are blaming the government for building dams and hydroelectric power stations in an area so vulnerable to climate change. The former minister for water resources, Uma Bharti, had reported on climate change causing more severe damage to the region. Umar Bharti also announced that his government would be consolidating political power by attacking Haiti's judiciary, giving some credence to the opposition's fears. France24 reports that while the Supreme Court judge Yvickel Dah-reil was ordered released from prison in February 2021, Moise's prison administration refused to carry out the order. This illegal detention of Judge Dah-reil was accompanied by another larger project's workers going missing in February 7, 2017. The opposition party claims that Moise's term started when he was first elected in 2016, meaning his presidential term should have ended on Feb. 7 of this year. Moise, on the other hand, maintains that his presidency did not begin until he was sworn into office in 2017, allowing him to stay in office for another year. Critics of Moise and his administration, both at home and abroad, worry that allowing Moise to remain in office will only result in further anti-removal measures and policies enacted from Moise and his government. To support these suspicions, opposition of Moise was pointed to his failure to hold the legislative elections that were scheduled for October of 2019, leaving Moise free to rule by presidential decree until the next legislature convenes.

While Moise blames the election delay on parliament's reluctance to vote, he also appears to be consolidating political power by attacking Haiti's judiciary, giving some credence to the opposition's fears. France24 reports that while the Supreme Court judge Yvickel Dah-reil was ordered released from prison on Feb. 10, Moise's prison administration refused to carry out the order. This illegal detention of Judge Dah-reil was accompanied by another larger project's workers going missing in February 7, 2017. The opposition party claims that Moise's term started when he was first elected in 2016, meaning his presidential term should have ended on Feb. 7 of this year. Moise, on the other hand, maintains that his presidency did not begin until he was sworn into office in 2017, allowing him to stay in office for another year. Critics of Moise and his administration, both at home and abroad, worry that allowing Moise to remain in office will only result in further anti-removal measures and policies enacted from Moise and his government. To support these suspicions, opposition of Moise was pointed to his failure to hold the legislative elections that were scheduled for October of 2019, leaving Moise free to rule by presidential decree until the next legislature convenes.

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Canada is defending its decision to accept coronavirus vaccines from COVAX, a program developed to help low- and middle-income countries with the vaccination process. According to THE Washing ton Post, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland stated that the Canadian government “will not apologize” for doing what they can to vaccinate Canadians alongside the rest of the world.

BBC News explains that Canada is the only member of the G7, a group of some of the world’s most advanced economies, to receive vaccine doses from the COVAX initiative. According to Canadian government data, 2.43 percent of the general population and 55.35 percent of health care workers in the country have received at least their initial dose.

“Canada failed to pick a new president by the February 8 deadline after negotiations between the central government and the federal states broke down in the days leading up to the election, states Africa News. The president of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, ran for another term in office and is accused of semi-autonomous regions of Jubaland and Puntland of failing to compromise on setting an election. Farmajo is also accusing his rivals of breaking confidence on a deal constructed in September, which laid out a timeline for the vote and would have allowed indirect presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in late 2020 and early 2021, reports Al Jazeera. The nature of Somalia’s electoral process and system in which they elect their legislators and presidents is unique, Al Jazeera outlines that clan elders from the Somali clans indirectly choose the members of the Lower House, while the five federal states of Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubaland, Puntland, and South West elect the members of the Upper House. Members of both houses pick a president, who then nominates a prime minister, who then selects a cabinet.

The failure to instate a new president has caused opposition leaders across Somalia to united to condemn the president. This alliance of Somali opposition parties has advocated for the creation of a national council of lawmakers, opposition leaders, and civil society members to govern the nation after the president’s term expired on Feb. 8, reports the Washington Post. However, they do not have a clear succession plan, which remains a point of contention.

The group is allied altogether against Farmajo, bolting the al-Shabab movement. Though two of Somalia’s former presidents, are running independently to replace him, putting the opposition factions at odds with one another.

The opposition coalition urged the president to “respect the constitution” and ensure a peaceful transfer of power in the fragile country. “Starting from 8th February 2021, the council of opposition candidates does not recognise Farmajo as president,” they said in a statement, according to Al Jazeera. “The council will not accept any form of mandate extension through pressure.” Foreign Minister Mohamed Alhirdzikar of Somalia also refuted claims of the government illegitimacy in an interview with Al Jazeera, asserting that there will be no transfer of power until after an election is held.

With uncertainty and division gripping the federal government of Somalia, its enemies have taken notice. According to Reuters, Somali security analysts warn that the current power vacuum is bolstering the al-Shabab insurgency, which is responsible for a recent flurry of attacks in a relatively peaceful part of the country. Hussein Sheikh Ali, Somalia’s former national security advisor and founder of the Mogadishu-based Hiralk talktank, said al-Shabab has already taken advantage of the chaos caused by the electoral instability to launch attacks into different parts of central Somalia that had been relatively peaceful for close to a decade, according to Reuters.

On Feb. 12, al-Shabab launched a documentary series criticizing the president and the electoral process, which it accused of being riddled with corruption, according to Al Jazeera. The group also attacked the city hosting the election talks on the night the president arrived and the following night. No one from the town was killed, but security forces on the second night killed four attackers and detained two. Meanwhile, Somalia is adjusting to the ongoing withdrawal of some 700 US military personnel from the country, leaving 20,000 African Union forces to finish the end of the year. The United Nations Security Council released a statement condemning the “rise of the African Union force in promoting dialogue between Somalia’s parties.” Council members also “condemned terrorist attacks by al-Shabab and its allies, and their support for the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Somalia,” adds Al Jazeera.

The United States and the United Nations Security Council have both called for all parties in Somalia to come together and unite to hold free and fair elections. On Feb. 9, the United Nations Security Council held a virtual meeting on the presidential situation in Somalia, to call for a resolution by all parties and a commitment to holding elections as soon as possible, continues Al Jazeera. Washington said the gridlock has led to a lack of progress in the fight against al-Shabab, which continues to carry out attacks in Somalia. However, with neither side willing to compromise, the delay and instability caused by the election will continue.
RUSSIA AND U.S. EXTEND LAST REMAINING NUCLEAR TREATY

Juliet Nangini  
Staff Writer

With only two days remaining before its expiry date, the Biden administration officially extended the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the United States and the Russian Federation. According to the Associated Press, the Russian Parliament unanimously voted for a five-year extension of New START on Wednesday, followed by President Vladimir Putin signing the bill on Friday. The two leaders discussed the treaty, which places limits on each country's respective nuclear arsenals, on a phone call last Tuesday, January 20.

New START limits both sides to a maximum of 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers, The Washington Post says. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking on the treaty, stated, "Especially during times of tension, verifiable limits on Russia's intercontinental-range nuclear weapons are vitally important," The Hill reports.

The bilateral agreement was signed by former President Barack Obama and former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2010. According to The Washington Post, Blinken stated that the U.S. has consistently found Russia to be compliant with the limitations of the treaty since it came into force in 2011. The treaty also symbolizes the remaining nuclear accord between the two countries, as both parties withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 2019. The U.S. pulled out of this treaty due to claims of violations by Russia, despite the latter's denials on the matter, Reuters says. In addition to the INF Treaty, both parties have reexamined the Open Skies Treaty. Russia previously declared that it will withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty after the Trump administration stated its intention to withdraw, according to AP.

The extension of New START was one of the first foreign policy and national security concerns facing the administration – the treaty would have expired on Feb. 5, giving the new administration just 16 days to negotiate an extension. The Trump administration tried to form a trilateral accord with Russia and China; however, China declined to put its nuclear arsenal on the table. According to The Hill, NATO's North Atlantic Council supported the extension and issued a statement saying, "NATO allies believe the New START treaty contributes to international stability, and allies again express their strong support for its continued implementation and for early and active dialogue on ways to improve strategic stability. However, it believes that the treaty's extension does not halt threats by Russia. The New START treaty will provide the U.S. with greater insight into the "future size and composition of the Russian arsenal" which can help control "arms-racing behavior," Defense News says. However, there are some limitations to the treaty, such as its inability to cover shorter-range "tactical" nuclear weapons. Others worry about the lack of coverage of China's nuclear arsenal, which is becoming an increasing concern. However, according to NBC, Secretary Blinken mentioned that the current administration will work on a treaty that covers all nuclear weapons of the U.S., Russia, and the concerns of China's growing arsenal.

Despite the concerns, Blinken states that decision to extend the treaty has made "the United States, U.S. allies and partners, and the world safer" as an "unconstrained nuclear competition would endanger us all."

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To protest a newly proposed media tax, dozens of independent media outlets in Poland went offline to suspend new coverage and other programming on Wednesday, February 10, with various television screens, web portals, and front pages blank or blacked out for over 24 hours. A letter signed by approximately 45 media companies was published to Polish authorities citing that the tax on advertising revenues was a disguised attempt to weaken the freedom of the press and silence criticism. Described as "scandalous" and unfair, the tax was proposed by the government to raise money to supplement state finances, which have dwindled greatly due to the global pandemic. The media companies protested this reason, as they already pay many taxes and the addition of a new one could push some of the companies to financial collapse. The Polish government began limiting the abilities of independent media outlets prior to the announcement of the new advertisement tax. According to The Washington Post, Poland has dropped to 62nd, down from 18th place, in a global press freedom ranking done by Reporters Without Borders, the world's biggest non-governmental organization in the safeguarding of media freedom. This drop comes after the government replaced journalists working radio and TV stations and trying to suppress independent print media outlets, such as Gazeta Wyborcza and Polityka, by limiting public advertising. The "solidarity" tax, according to Reuters, will charge media companies between 2 percent and 15 percent to go towards healthcare and culture projects, and is expected to take effect later this year. In addition to television and radio broadcasters, internet media companies, and print outlets, both cinemas and those operating outdoor advertisements displays will also be affected by the tax. However, state media will be exempt, which according to The Guardian was foreseeable as state-run outlets are often used by the government to publicize and spread propaganda.

The United States and the European Union have criticized the Polish government for the new ad tax and have stressed the value of media diversity. According to Bloomberg, during the protest on Feb. 10, the U.S. embassy located in Warsaw, Poland, tweeted that "free media is the cornerstone of democracy." Christian Wajgard, the spokesperson for the EU's executive arm, emphasized that the EU expects that Poland and other members "ensure that their fiscal or other policies will not affect the duty of ensuring a free, independent and diverse media ecosystem." The EU also accused Poland of imitating Hungary, whose government has infringed on media freedoms, most recently through closing Kla- tradio, one of the last remaining independent radio stations in Hungary. Both countries have been accused of undermining democratic values and transitioning from being known as models of democracy to supporters of communism.

The Polish government, led by the right-wing Law and Justice Party, has announced that it is now working on rewriting the media tax to make it less restrictive. This comes after widespread criticism from the media firms, critics abroad, and, most notably, the party's coalition partner. The Agreement Party, part of Poland's coalition government, does not approve of the current version of the media tax. Without its approval, according to The Hill, Poland's Parliament is unable to pass the measure. Spokesperson Piotr Mueller said, "We are reviewing all the suggestions made by various media groups and other interested parties." As stated by the Associated Press, the Polish government anticipates that the redrafted tax will be enacted by July 1.

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Polish Media Goes Offline to Protest Ad Tax

Media Bez Wyboru goes "offline" for a day in protest of the ad tax.Courtesy of Media Bez Wyboru

The New START treaty was first negotiated under the Obama Administration. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

February 2021
Page 4
ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION

Shaira Taylor
Staff Writer

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the country's longest serving prime minister, has been charged with three counts of corruption. According to BBC News, Netanyahu is accused of offering to give Israel’s national news outlet positive coverage in exchange for favorable treatment on a telecom giant, in a quid pro quo that would benefit Shaul Elovitch, the controlling shareholder in the Bezeq telecom giant, in a quid pro quo that would give Netanyahu more positive coverage on Elovitch’s news site. Netanyahu denies these allegations and is pleading not guilty on all counts in the Jerusalem district court. According to The Washington Post, on the first day of the corruption trial on February 9, Netanyahu asked his legal team to convince the court to postpone the hearing until after the Israeli elections on March 23, 2021. However, his lawyers failed to delay the trial, which Netanyahu pled not guilty and walked out of the courtroom just 20 minutes into his trial. This continued without Netanyahu’s presence. Since he stands by his innocence, Netanyahu is carrying on with his prime ministerial duties as usual, instead of attending the hearing. Axios cites Netanyahu, who claimed that “everybody knows the cases against me are rigged. This is why I don’t think the hearing of witnesses in my trial should begin before the elections because even if it is not the intention, it would look like a flagrant interference in the elections.” Netanyahu’s refusal to leave office proves his strength to his supporters and why he has been previously elected three times to be prime minister. According to Al Jazeera, weekly protests against Netanyahu have persisted on for months with demonstrators from the “Crime Minister” movement focusing on the graft allegations. Others have protested against how the government has been dealing with the pandemic. A counter-protest movement backing Netanyahu has also taken to the streets. According to The New York Times, if Netanyahu is found guilty, he could face prison time. However, the trial could last for years and the prosecutors fear that Netanyahu will continue to postpone the trial, even past the elections on March 23, 2021. Reuters asserts, “he will fight to remain prime minister in March and possibly for years afterwards. If he wins, he could try to secure parliamentary immunity, or pass laws to exempt a serving prime minister from standing trial.” Netanyahu could stay in power throughout the trial and if he wins the election, he will remain in office. According to Reuters News, “under Israeli law, a prime minister is under no obligation to stand down unless convicted,” a unique element of Israel’s government/constitution.

The trial of Netanyahu on corruption charges has caused a division within the country, between those who support Netanyahu and those who have long distrusted his decisions as prime minister. Those who do not support Netanyahu fear that the goal hoped for of relieving him of his post and sentencing him to prison, will not be achieved. The opposition believes the trial will take months, or even years before it is complete. However long it takes, Netanyahu also has the support of his right wing.

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SHELL ORDERED TO COMPENSATE NIGERIAN FARMERS

Jasmine Ortega
Staff Writer

A Dutch court has held the Nigerian subsidiary of the British-Dutch multinational Royal Dutch Shell liable for several oil spills in the Nigerian Niger Delta in 2006 and 2007. The New York Times reports this case, which concludes a 13-year-long legal battle between four Nigerian farmers and the company, will likely be a catalyst for more successful environmental cases against multinational oil firms. According to Bloomberg, the ruling, which came from the Hague Court of Appeals, ordered Shell Nigeria to issue payouts to compensate for the damages arising from pipeline leaks in the villages of Otuama and Gota. It has also ordered both Shell Nigeria and its parent company to pay for preventative leak-detection systems to avoid other leaks in the future. The ruling is significant because oil spills have plagued the Niger Delta region for many decades. More oil is spilled across this region every year than was spilled in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, making it one of the most polluted places on the planet, the Guardian reports. Shell, despite being responsible for a great number of these spills, has rarely taken preventative measures to avoid them. According to company records, Shell Nigeria manages around 50 oil fields, five gas plants, and more than 3,000 miles of pipelines in the country. In 2008, according to the New York Times, a U.S. cable published by WikiLeaks revealed that 75 percent of Nigerian pipelines owned by Shell were more than ten years overdue for replacement, “with some that had a life expectancy of 15 years still in operation after 30.”

Chief James, the assistant secretary to the Bodo region’s council of chiefs and elders, has stated that the oil spills caused by Shell have led to “environmental devastation, theft, or sabotage. According to Al Jazeera, weekly protests against Netanyahu have persisted on for months with demonstrators from the “Crime Minister” movement focusing on the graft allegations. Others have protested against how the government has been dealing with the pandemic. A counter-protest movement backing Netanyahu has also taken to the streets. According to The New York Times, if Netanyahu is found guilty, he could face prison time. However, the trial could last for years and the prosecutors fear that Netanyahu will continue to postpone the trial, even past the elections on March 23, 2021. Reuters asserts, “he will fight to remain prime minister in March and possibly for years afterwards. If he wins, he could try to secure parliamentary immunity, or pass laws to exempt a serving prime minister from standing trial.” Netanyahu could stay in power throughout the trial and if he wins the election, he will remain in office. According to Reuters News, “under Israeli law, a prime minister is under no obligation to stand down unless convicted,” a unique element of Israel’s government/constitution.

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Indian Farmer Protests Draw International Scrutiny

Natalie Sherman
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Farmers in India began protesting the new farming regulations instituted under the Modi government in early November. Protests escalated in scale and size in the months that followed, culminating in violent confrontations with police at Red Fort in New Delhi in January. However, while UN officials praised the Ethiopian government for their efforts to aldı the severe food shortages in the region, they criticized the actions taken by the Modi government.

The Tigray region is suffering from a food shortage due to an ongoing conflict with the government. While the Ethiopian government has been creating an open dialogue with protesters, the Modi government continues to face criticism from the international community. The protests in India are seen as a reflection of the broader conflict in the region.

Indian World Food Program to “Scale Up” Efforts in Tigray Region

Sylwan Pagan
Staff Writer

UN officials, the High Commission for Refugees, the World Food Programme, and the Ethiopian government have agreed to expand access to humanitarian aid in the region.

In a statement, the World Food Programme praised the Ethiopian government for their efforts to alleviate hunger in the region. The WFP has been supplying food assistance in the region since the conflict began in November. The WFP has thusfar delivered food assistance to nearly 100,000 people in the Tigray region.

The agreement will allow humanitarian aid into areas that have been cut off since the conflict began in November. The World Food Programme is a branch within the United Nations that delivers food assistance in emergencies and works within communities to improve nutrition in some of the poorest regions in the world. On its site, the WFP advertises having improved nutrition in some of the poorest regions in the world.

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The intersection of language, power, and society: Dr. Amelia Tseng and the role of language in international relations

Jasmine DeLeon Staff Writer

“Language is like water for fish or air for humans; we can’t live without it and it’s everywhere,” states Dr. Amelia Tseng, an award-winning linguis, professor of world languages and culture at American University, and researcher at the Smithsonal Institute for Folk Life and Cultural Heritage. On February 10, the Joseph A. Unanne Latinon Institute at Seton Hall University held a virtual event with guests speakers. Dr. Amelia Tseng to discuss the role of linguistics in identity, culture, and society.

Tseng stressed on the significance of language in the lives of individuals and societies several times during the event. She argued that language shapes our identity because “[it] is part of how we think of ourselves and others and how we build the world.”

“What you speak is who you are,” Tseng mentioned, “which is a kind of double-edge sword.” Since it is common for families to have different lingustic eras across generations, some people feel that a fragment of identity is not knowing the language of their heritage. Tseng pushed back against this phenomenon, stating that, often, it is not the person’s fault for not knowing their heritage language. “Let’s understand personal history and social context” and “celebrate those strengths that are important for people to maintain culture.”

During an interview with The Diplomatic Envoy, Tseng made sev- eral important connections between linguistics and international relations. More generally, Tseng pointed out that “when you have different languages and cultures, you have potential for misunderstandings in that cross-cultural communica-
tion.” Some examples include how there are dif-
f erent politeness norms and how multilingual-
ism is part of our past.

Tseng encouraged Set-
on Hall students to learn a new language. “It opens doors to see a culture in a different way, and it is a sign of respect.” She em-
phazised how this applies to diplomacy students, ex-
planing that “a diplomat doing everything in one language is missing out on a lot of possibilities. To be a diplomat, you should know how to speak another language but also to have a broader inter-
cultural understanding.”

Tseng called to atten-
tion power dynamics in linguistics that she believes should be talked about more. When thinking about how countries are establishing their relationship-
ships, Tseng pointed out that “these conversations are mostly taking place in colonial languages.”

The role that multilingualism plays in health-
care, education, and other areas forms a basis for Tseng’s argument that “language policy is how people institutionalize power.” She explained that the implications of language in relation to human rights, immigration, refugee and migration questions as well as have a symbolic value in immi-
gration and nationalism. Tseng asserted that the most pressing linguistic issue in the United States is language discrimentination. “English is a sign of American identity; a particular kind of white American identity.” In addition, she believes that what makes language dis-
crementination a problem is that “it is invisible.”

“Language is an ac-
teptable proxy for ra-
cial discrimination. With language, it is easier to bring up excuses, making it harder to call out than racism,” Tseng stated. Citing multiple cases of Spanish accent discrimi-
ration and prejudice toward African-Americ-
ian Vernacular English, Tseng argues that “lan-
guage discrimination is part of the discrimination we see in our country.”

This discrimination has an impact in plac-
ing in government emissions, courts, and schools. Tseng called for more sup-
port in bilingual edu-
cation. She believes that this support is critical for equity and educational outcomes because “kids taught in languages they cannot speak will not do well in school.” Additionally, if students are unable to obtain educational sup-
port for their home lan-
guage, they may not be able to learn other things. Another reason for more bilingual education is practicality, for example working in an interna-
tional setting. According to Tseng, “a lot of lan-
guages we need are not talked about in schools.” On a more fundamental level, Tseng stated, “language rights are hu-
man rights. While it is such an important part of peo-
ple’s lives, it is not always part of the curriculum.”

Tseng expressed op-
timism for President Biden’s education sec-
retary appointment, Mi-
chael cardona, who is both an educator and has a master’s degree in bilingual education. One recommendation Tseng has for students of international relations in enhancing and better un-
derstanding socio-cultural cooperation is to include language in broader con-
versations. This means having a “socio-linguis-
tic perspective where we see language as part of a society and the history of how it is positioned. [It] also means having [a] background [under-
standing] in how language intersects with power, identity, and history.”

“Race and diplomacy”: Foreign policy experts discuss the implications of racial injustice

Jazlyn Dominguez Staff Writer

Nearly six weeks after the attack on Capitol Hill, Seton Hall University hosted a virtual panel of three young foreign policy experts to discuss the im-
-plications of racial injust-
ce in American foreign policy. The three panelists invited were Lia Miller, a foreign service officer who previously served as chief of the Public Af-
fairs Office at the U.S. Embassy in Yervan, Ar-
menia, Asha Castleber-
y-Hernandez, an appointee as senior advis-
ior in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. State Department, and Jessica Lee, senior re-
search fellow on East Asia at the Quincy Institute. The event was moderated by Troy Dorch, a Seton Hall alumni and member of the University’s Divers-
ity, Inclusion, Equity, and Justice Coalition.

The event began with an introduction by Dr. Courtmey Smith, Acting Dean of the School of Dis-
AFGHANISTAN

Hamzah Khan
Staff Writer

Afghanistan, a nation emboldened in war for near-ly 20 years, is home to one of the worst narcotic epidemics in the world. Opium cultivation, which is turned into heroin, became an important live-lihood for thousands of people. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the opium industry makes up approxi-mately seven percent of the country's GDP but could potentially be much higher, and supplies 90 percent of the world's heroin. This arrangement has allowed the Taliban to re-tain control over many ra-ral areas by giving people a stable source of revenue while the Afghan govern-ment remains fractured by corruption and lack of resources. Failed count-er-narcotics campaigns by the U.S. and Afghan governments have only strengthened the Taliban's legitimacy in the region. According to Rolling Stone, opium cultivation began large-scale pro-duction in the late 1970s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The CIA, seeking to undermine the Soviets, covertly support-ed opium traffickers. The drug trade continued to take off throughout the 1990s amid a civil war un-til the Taliban took control of the country in 1996. They imposed a complete ban on opium in 2000, bringing Afghanistan down to its lowest levels of production in decades and ever since. After September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S. invasion that deposed the Taliban, the drug trade exploded and quickly turned Afghanistan into the world's most promi-nent narco-state, Rolling Stone says. The production of Helmand, largely con-trolled by the Taliban, became the epicenter of opiate cultivation previ-ously empty swaths of farmland became bustling opium plantations. The Taliban raises hundreds of millions of dollars annually from the drug trade, according to BBC News. The Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai was heavily involved in the drug trade and a Bill, with the president appointing for-mer drug lords as provinci-al governors and heads of anti-corruption agen-cies. The drug trade has woven into every aspect of the country, from the bringing of the government to the econ-omy and people's livelihoods.

The widespread availabil-ity of drugs has a large impact on the civilian pop-u-lation as well. The Brookings Institution reports that nearly 5 million Afghans are addicted to some form of opioids or hard drugs, including nearly two-thirds of all Afghan youths. The opium industry also employs nearly 600,000 people and provides a source of income for thousands who live below the poverty line, including child opium harvesters. In areas with strict anti-drug enforcement, thousands lose their livelihood and many farmers turned to-wards the Taliban, which allowed them to harvest their crops. The government tried many times, unsuccessful-ly, to stop opium produc-tion by promoting other less valuable crops. Alter-native livelihood programs sponsored by the U.S. and UK, including paying farmers to destroy their opium fields, failed spec-tacularly as the systems were stymied by corrup-tion. The Taliban took this opportunity to strengthen their position with most of the rural population by providing them with secu-rity.

The U.S. also attempted to alleviate the drug problem, launching Operation Iron Tempest which targeted Afghan drug traffickers through aerial bombing campaigns. The most re-cent example was Opera-tion Iron Tempest which started in 2017. This opera-tion was intended to de-stroy the drug dens where opium is turned into her-oin, thus cutting off a sig-nificant revenue stream for the Taliban, reports BBC News. These aero-biel bombing campaigns were swift and precise in targeting heroin “labs” but killed many civilians. The prob-lem, however, was that these “drug labs” were only a few miles away from heroin labs they were already producing heroin when they were bombed. The operation was a mas-sive failure, and to this day, “heroin is grown on nearly 1,000 square miles of land.” TIME reports that the U.S. spent nearly $7 bil-lion on counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan since 2001. Despite this huge invest-ment, Afghanistan today produces 88 percent of the world's opium supply. Afghanistan has only been able to thrive as a narco-state due to its con-tant state of war for the last 20 years. Foreign inter-vention has dominated the country, causing the illicit drug trade to run rampant and leaving a destabilized government unable to re-spond. In February 2021, the U.S. and the Taliban signed a peace deal outlin-ing that the U.S. would fully-withdraw troops by May 2021, signaling an end to the decades-long war, re-versing the presence of a stable government, the drug trade could slowly phase out as peace and stability allow other sectors of the economy to grow. As far off as this may seem, only the pres-ence of peace can reform the world's premier narco-state.
The Netherlands

Collin Duran
Staff Writer

The Netherlands is currently confronting a narco crisis—it is a problem that has evolved over the last four decades. The country, which is a global tourism hub due to its famed red-light districts and relaxed drug laws, has been plagued by organized crime tied to the drug trade. Officials are now attempting to confront the concerning rise in violence in hopes of preventing the country from becoming an all-out narco-state.

Since the 1970s, the Netherlands has institut ed a policy of “tolerance” toward soft drugs such as marijuana, as noted by the Library of Congress’s Law division. As outlined by the Dutch Opium Act of 1976, the sale of soft drugs is nominally illegal, but the government’s tolerance policy has made it clear that citizens will not be prosecuted for the purchase, consumption, and/or possession of soft drugs. This seemingly paradoxical approach to drug regulation was instituted in the hopes of deterring citizens from coming into contact with hard drugs such as Mexican, heroin, and opium. In turn, the “coffee shops” that sell soft drugs have been granted a form of immunity from the law, allowing drugs to be consumed on their premises. However, it is this very caveat in the law that is promoting drug-related organized crime.

While coffee shops can sell marijuana, it is still illegal to produce the drug in the country, and recreational-Amsterdam has claimed to be a black market that has spiraled out of control in recent decades. With the high demand for the drug, a large number of organized crime groups began to delve into the production of synthetic hard drugs as well. A recent Deutsche Welles report indicated that the Netherlands generates nearly $20.8 billion in the production of synthetic drugs and synthetics. The article also noted the potential involvement of other international drug cartels. In Dutch narco industry, it is suggested that Mexican cartels are playing a significant role in the distribution of Dutch synthetics.

With staggering profits involved in the production of synthetic drugs and synthetics, the public include the murder of a mother and a child, as well as the theft of other international crime families in the Dutch drug trade. A narco-state itself is defined by the involvement of organized narcotic-related crime syndicates in a state’s societal and political institutions.

According to both U.S. and Dutch authorities, the involvement of organized narcotic-related crime syndicates, the drug trade is so lucrative for the Dutch narco industry, the drug trade.

One of the most visible and profitable regions for the drug trade is the Mexican state of Sinaloa. The Sinaloa Cartel, which paved its way to fame with the leadership of the imprisoned Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, is also responsible for a vast amount of economic development in the state.

As a result, some citizens have expressed their respect and praise for Guzmán’s contributions to the local community. For instance, in a video from France24, locals can be seen singing along to the street about “How [Guzmán] we would give our lives.” Unfortunately, however, there are many other criminals in the state that need to be faced with charges related to drug trafficking and corruption. The New York Times details that many in the Drug Enforcement Agency were frustrated by the quick passage of events leading to his release.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is attempting to reform the country’s approach to combating drug-related violence. On February 11, he told those who believe the borders to be “open” due to the new Biden administration in power that they were incorrect in their assessment. Lopez Obrador had no hope that the new administration would accept the illegal migration from the South. Instead, the new administration had no desire to improve the situation for the migrants. Lopez Obrador had no hope that the new administration would accept the illegal migration from the South. Instead, the new administration had no desire to improve the situation for the migrants.

However, flipping the system on its head by immediately legalizing recreational marijuana may cause confusion in both domestic and international institutions. American and Canadian investors are slightly reluctant to invest in Mexico’s drug market due to uncertainty in how its policies translate into actions. Regardless, President Lopez Obrador brings a markedly different stance regarding the ethical implications of drug use from his predecessors. Taking solid steps to legalize was what for decades a criminal substance might be which brings an end to the devastating drug war once and for all, putting the cartels out of business by avoiding monop olicizing production on the black market. Time will tell if this bold vision transforms into something revolutionary for the common good.

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MEXICO

As COVID-19 continues its rampage throughout the world, Mexico’s population grapples with a far deadlier fact of life: the war on drugs. Drug-related killings in Mexico are extremely high. On the macro level, data from the country’s former Defense Minister, General Salvador Cienfuegos, in Los Angeles on charges of espionage with Mexican authorities claims that a month after initially being released, Cienfuegos was accused of murder, drug trafficking, and weapons possession.

Vice and Dutch authorities fear that stopping narco-gang activity may be an insurmountable task, especially due to the involvement of other international crime families in the Dutch drug trade.

According to both national crime families in Italy, Ireland, and the Netherlands has a significant minority of Moroccan residents stemming from a 1960’s program to bring over “guest workers” to fill jobs in the hospitality industry. Most of the Moroccans now in the Netherlands are from impoverished areas, and upon their arrival, were “treated like cattle” and forced into brothels in ghettos and other low income, high crime areas. These circumstances lead many Moroccans to turn to crime as a way to make ends meet and/or gain status in the country. Selima el Musalima, a female imam in the Netherlands, articulated that the drug trade is so lucrative for the Dutch narco industry, the drug trade.

The Netherlands is promoting drug-related violence waged on the public include the murder of a mother and a child, as well as the theft of other international crime families in the Dutch drug trade.

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NARCO-STATES

February 2021
Page 9

Zachary Schullian
Staff Writer

The Netherlands is a far deadlier fact of life: the war on drugs. Drug-related killings in Mexico are extremely high. On the macro level, data from the country’s former Defense Minister, General Salvador Cienfuegos, in Los Angeles on charges of espionage with Mexican authorities claims that a month after initially being released, Cienfuegos was accused of murder, drug trafficking, and weapons possession.

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The Future of U.S. Politics: A Warning from Brazil

Patrick Condon
Staff Writer

Brazil and the United States have experienced a rise in anti-establishment protests over the last decade. As leftist groups gained social acceptance in both countries, far-right groups started to emerge. These groups began putting pressure on sitting officials to make substantial changes, showing the need for political reform. While the shifts resulting in many years of political upheaval came to Brazil in 2013, the U.S. would not feel the widening political gap and respond to social protests or it too may find itself in a more polarized climate.

In Brazil, the initial 2013 protests were led by the Movimento Passe Livre (MPL), a student organization against bus fare inflation in Sao Paulo, but caught little attention from the media as they were seen as “a fringe movement with utopian goals,” according to Americas Quarterly. The protests climaxed on June 13 when several thousand MPL protesters marching through Sao Paulo’s streets were met by “un-necessarily heavy-hand”’ of police, resulting in 105 protestors. The police response ultimately shifted the narrative of the protests from a movement to an attack on the crucial middle class, dramatically increasing national support for the protest. However, the protest movement against allegations of political corruption, the focus shifted to ease the range of corruption causing the original issue of bus fare inflation and inequality.

This mirrors the escalation of protests in the U.S. in 2020. Primarily centering with protests following the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement aimed to provide greater media attention to the racial biases of police and brutality. The movement gained new attention as the media closely detailed the Minneapolis protests on May 26, where the police employed tear gas, dispersion with plastic bullets, and attacks on protestors. As protests and looting in Minneapolis continued into early June, satellite demonstrations popped up around the country, expanding the movement into months of national protest. This in turn shifted the narrative of the overall racial inequality present in the U.S.

At the end of 2013, the protest groups began bringing down politicians instead of forcing them to make administrative or fiscal changes, creating a division between the parties. The movement is roughly around the time America experienced protests over the Minneapolis Police Department and MBL. While the MPL continued its protests for free bus fares and greater middle-class security, the BLM elected far-right politicians to represent their protest’s goals, elevating a substantial number of far-right politicians into office. The most notable example was when the racial biases of some police officers while maintaining that the system as a whole could adapt to protestors’ demands, while some outright supported the actions of all police officers. This caused disdain from leftist and right-wing groups on the inability of politicians to make a clear decision, which validated the ideals on the left and right. However, the liberal tendencies of the American media seemed to illustrate a division in the overall political left.

In the aftermath of the 2013 Brazilian protests, former President Dilma Rousseff was impeached and turned many of her demonstrators violent. This crucial turn from social to political protest illustrated the proper dangers in socially protesting through the political establishment. As BLM protests last year, much support and national politicians, who failed to organize political parties, instead of forbidding them to act on the American people, elevated the ideal “path for right-wing groups to reinforce, rather than challenge, establishment politicians,” in Brazil reports The Atlantic.

The most notable escalation of far-right organizations following the BLM protests in the U.S. was the Capitol Riot on January 6, 2021. Initially, then-President Trump held a rally to gain support in opposing to the 2020 presidential election results. In response to the riot, the crowd of Trump supporter made up largely of far-right demonstrators, stormed the Capitol building in an attempt to stop the certification of the election results. While the physical location of the demonstrations was in the Capitol building in Brasilia in 2013, the scope of destruction was far greater and less explored in the U.S. According to The New York Times, the Brazilian protest response in the centralization of far-right politicians at the highest level, stemming originally from a student-led leftist protest. The recent riot at the U.S. Capitol displayed a call for radical right and left groups, if the U.S. on a social level. If demonstrations like that were to become more common, just as the BLM protests did last year, a political vacuum may emerge for greater political representation of far-right politicians.

Nearly eight years have passed since protests in Sao Paulo emerged, and Brazil had time to recover and respond to these events. The U.S., on the other hand, must now turn its head to the future of its political system and reflect on the events which once rocked Brazilian democracy. If the U.S. does not make changes to both groups, it may face similar consequences. While the newly-elected President Biden is relatively moderate, there may be opposition responses by far-right groups once again at an even greater scale.

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COVID-19 Relief Packages Must Invest in Digital Infrastructure and a Green Economy

Sebastian Kopeck
Staff Writer

As the United States nears its one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, many Americans are struggling with rent payments, home mortgage, and even putting food on the table. As Congress continues negotiating a third stimulus package and vaccine rollouts continue across the country, numerous Americans wonder if the bill should include further provisions such as building up our digital infrastructure and investing in a Green Economy.

The CARIS Act, the most recently-passed COVID relief bill during the Trump Administration, allocates 2 trillion dollars for $600 direct cash payments, and as stated by CNBC, “The $2 trillion CARES Act failed to address unemployment benefits to cover more workers, including self-employed and independent contractors who do not usually qualify for unemployment.” Aside from individual benefits, NPR also reports that aid will be given to small businesses, agriculture, transportation, and vaccine distribution as well.

The large cost of the CARES Act has been criticized by many lawmakers who also see the newest package as too great of an economic burden on the American economy. This partisanship has forced Democratic lawmakers to work on the new bill separately, resulting in legislation that is set to be just as expensive as the CARIS Act. While increasing benefits across the board includes a $1,400 stimulus check and expanded unemployment benefits past March, the Washington Post notes “…Democrats failed to add "$15-per-hour minimum wage in the package, although Biden has said that provision faces long odds in Congress.”

The question seemingly facing Democratic leadership in the Senate is whether the bill ought to be expanded with provisions that seemingly move away from a direct focus on COVID-related relief. With unprecedented winter storms battering the state of Texas and the 2020 California wildfires being a not-so-distant memory, discussion of the climate crisis is back in the front of American minds. NBC reports Texas waswoefully unprepared for the scale of the damage done to the state's electrical grid. While many Republicans in the state blame renewable energy for the crisis, it is oil, coal, natural gas, and nuclear energy that fulfills the bulk of Texas’ energy needs.

In a proposal such as the Green New Deal, favored by many progressive democrats, the Biden administration has promised to invest in green jobs, including a complete transition to renewable energy in five years. The proposal was defeated during the Trump administration, but it was recently revived by the Biden administration. The proposal aims to create millions of new jobs in the renewable energy sector while reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050.

The Green New Deal proposal is supported by many environmental groups and has gained significant support from the American public. However, the proposal faces opposition from the fossil fuel industry and some conservative politicians. The debate over the Green New Deal highlights the importance of investing in renewable energy and the need for a transition away from fossil fuels.

In addition to investing in renewable energy, the Biden administration has also proposed a significant increase in spending on infrastructure. The administration has proposed a $2 trillion infrastructure package that would be funded by a tax on corporations and wealthy individuals.

The proposed infrastructure package focuses on repairing and upgrading the nation’s roads, bridges, and public transit systems, as well as expanding broadband internet access and investing in clean energy technologies. The package also includes provisions for addressing climate change, such as funding research and development of new technologies to reduce emissions.

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February 2021
Page 10

Opinion
President Biden and the Iran Nuclear Deal:
Where Does it Go Moving Forward?

Chimdi Chukwukere Staff Writer

Before the United States presidential election, then-candidate Joe Biden promised not only to rejoin the Iran Nuclear Deal but also to “take steps to make sure US sanctions do not hinder Iran’s fight against COVID-19.” CNN reports. Withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, was one of Trump administration’s moves that further alienated the U.S. from its close allies in western Europe. It is the U.S.’s duty to rejoin the JCPOA, having been the defaulting party. Rejoining the agreement will signal the United States’ regained commitment to multilateralism and improve relations with major allies.

President Biden must reconsider the JCPOA nuclear deal agreed with Iran and other world powers. Unilateral sanctions against Iran are not effective, especially when our major allies do not wish to place such restrictions. “With the JCPOA, Iran’s compliance with the nuclear-related provisions of the JCPOA will be verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) according to certain requirements outlined in the agreement,” reports the Arms Control Association. Additionally, the nuclear deal was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 which keeps it valid without US compliance. The U.S. cannot afford to abandon a regime that is still effective.

On May 8, 2018, former President Trump withdrew the U.S. from the JCPOA and announced the reimposition of severe sanctions on the Iranian regime. A Congressional report explains the purpose of the unilateral targeted sanctions was to force the Iranian regime under what the former president referred to as “maximum pressure” to ‘compel Iran to negotiate an agreement that takes into account U.S. concerns beyond Iran’s nuclear program.’ Other major European allies and Security Council members insisted they would not default on the agreement with Iran. Targeted sanctions employed by the Trump administration succeeded in crippling the Iranian economy, driving it into recession and inflicting humanitarian costs on the regime during the pandemic. Additionally, sanctions were also imposed on Iran’s financial sector in October 2020 which was reported to compound the already dire humanitarian situation there.

Despite this, reports from The Washington Post indicate “Tehran has exceeded several limitations of the accord and now has more than 10 times the amount of enriched uranium allowed under the agreement, according to the UN nuclear watchdog.” Reaching an agreement as quickly as possible for the re-entry of the U.S. to the JCPOA should be a top priority for this administration and the removal of sanctions will help to alleviate the suffering of Iranian innocent citizens. In his op-ed released just before the U.S. presidential elections, President Biden bemoaned the Trump administration’s reimposition of sanctions against the Iranian regime, calling Trump’s Iran policy a “dangerous failure.” According to him, Trump’s Iran policy of “maximum pressure” achieved nothing but to draw Iran closer to Russia and China and gave Iran the opportunity to accelerate its nuclear weapons program. If President Biden’s words are anything to go by, we should expect that the U.S. will show more swiftness in rejoining the agreement with Iran, which will further convince our allies in Europe that the U.S. is ready to again lead from the front. President Biden promised, “If Iran returns to strict compliance with this nuclear deal, the United States will rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations,” which will include the demand for the release of “unjustly detained Americans” held by the Iranian regime.

The U.S. cannot allow opportunities for Iran to roll back years of progress already made and must certainly prevent a nuclear-armed Iran from emerging. A nuclear arms race is detrimental to Israel and American allies in Europe and the middle east, and thus a threat to U.S. homeland security.

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The United States Has Far More to Worry About than Russia’s Protests

Sara Fakih Staff Writer

Activist Alexei Navalny, Russia’s main opposition leader, is known for exposing corruption in Russia and campaigning against the ruling United Russia Party. The spark that captured global attention was when Navalny found President Putin’s secret country house built with Russian citizens’ money. Pensions in Russia are reduced every year and the economy continues to suffer – the citizens were rightly furious.

Navalny was tailed for three years until he was imprisoned in August 2020 with a lethal nerve agent planted in his underpants, according to CNN. His survival is proof of the lengths Putin and his party will go to keep their positions secure. Even with evidence found in the investigation and Navalny’s proof of conversations with Russian intelligence, the story remains denied by Russian officials.

Navalny was recovering in a secret location in Germany before returning to Russia in January 2021. Before clearing customs, Navalny was unlawfully detained by Russian officials. In a YouTube video, the opposition leader says he returned in order to display that he is not afraid of Putin and ready to fight for people’s rights as mass protests spread throughout the country.

In response to Navalny’s arrest and the continued poor conditions for protesters, additional protesters turned violent. The United States Department of State issued a statement saying, “The United States strongly condemns the use of harsh tactics against protesters and journalists this weekend in cities throughout Russia.” The U.S. hypocrisy is amusing as local police and the national guard used the same, if not worse, tactics during nationwide Black Lives Matter protests following George Floyd’s death in 2020. Protesters were detained, fined, and harassed in both countries. The U.S. government did not meet the demands of protesters, allowed an attack on the U.S. Capitol perpetrated by former President Trump, and barely involved itself when needed, but Putin quickly jumped into Russian affairs about the harsh suppression of protests.

Aside from protests, reports Russia had alleged that a Chinese soldier in Afghanistan was attacked by Russian soldiers in a transaction with Taliban-linked militants. Additionally, initiated cyberattacks on the IT group SolarWinds that compromised the U.S. federal government. Shortening Russia’s reach, the U.S. Commerce, Justice, and Treasury Department were hacked as part of the attack on SolarWinds, which includes many federal agencies. Microsoft Corp President Brad Smith says this is “the largest and most sophisticated cyberattack the world has ever seen.”

The Hill confirms the Department of Homeland Security, Defense, and the Energy Department’s National Nuclear Security Administration were also affected by the attack. Then-President Trump simply tweeted about the situation, claiming “Russia, Russia, Russia is the priority chant when anything happens because Lamastream is, for mostly financial reasons, petrified of discussing the possibility that maybe China is [in fact] behind the SolarWinds hack.” The SolarWinds hack is far more of a threat to national security than the Russia protests, so instead of through a tweet, the U.S. should have addressed the situation more directly and seriously.

Following President Trump’s inauguration last month, one of his primary tasks was to formally speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin about the threats they pose to U.S. national security. According to Forbes, President Biden firmly believes that the U.S. will act in defense of its national interests, which are increasingly necessary following Trump’s inaction. Despite the tensions, their conversation was posted on Twitter, showing the willingness to de-escalate tensions for transparent communication and possible cooperation. While this cooperation would be a smart diplomatic move, tensions between the U.S. and Russia are not new, and realistically will continue especially with President Biden’s plans to crack down on Russia’s threats.

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President Putin is facing a new wave of protests following Alexei Navalny’s arrest. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
Unequal World Vaccine Distribution Needs to Change

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UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres recently heavily criticized the disproportionate distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and called on states to coordinate to ensure that more people across the globe can receive the vaccine, reports the Associated Press.

The UN chief emphasized that 130 countries have yet to obtain their first doses of the vaccine. Given this inequality, it is imperative that the international community builds stronger coordination so it can properly address global vaccine distribution.

Although efforts for greater coordination exist, more may still be necessary. Countries like the United Kingdom and the United States have already donated $734 million and $4 billion, respectively, to COVAX, an initiative by the World Health Organization (WHO) that seeks to make vaccine access more equitable across the globe, reports BBC News.

However, even members of the WHO — like board member Dr. Clemens Martin Auer from Austria — have already admitted that COVAX has not been fast enough due to the difficulty in obtaining vaccine contracts. These challenges raise concerns that COVAX alone will not be sufficient in guaranteeing that all countries will vaccinate at a rate to support global herd immunity.

Given the drawbacks of relying solely on COVAX for a more equitable global vaccination campaign, the international community should welcome and facilitate any additional efforts for vaccine equality. For example, the Dubai-based company DP World has logistics operations that are part of the supply chain of 10 percent of global trade annually, according to CNBC. The company has pledged to use its capabilities to assist in bringing vaccines to very remote parts of the world, including areas that are typically outside of the reach of other logistics companies.

In a statement, DP World Chairman and CEO Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem said that the company will do all it can because, “this pandemic will not go away unless everyone gets vaccinated.”

The company also noted it will provide its expertise to help UNICEF deliver vaccines to developing countries. Given the challenges of distributing vaccines on a global scale, partnerships between international organizations or countries with the private sector — as well as other types of solutions that can speed up the process of allocating, distributing, and applying vaccines globally — must be encouraged to complement the capabilities of COVAX.

It is true there are significant limits to how equitable vaccine distribution can be. This is demonstrated by people who used political influence or other means to jump ahead the vaccine line in several countries, reports the Thomas Reuters Foundation.

The advocacy for more equitable global distribution is not only the morally right approach to the pandemic, but it is also critical for the recovery of the global economy.

In fact, a study by the Centre for Economic Policy Research calculated that if developed countries become fully vaccinated by 2022 and the rest of the world remains with only partial access to the vaccine, the unbalanced vaccine distribution could cost the global economy up to $3.8 trillion. Half of the cost would be imposed on developed countries through lower demand for goods from trading partners that would still be suffering from the economic impacts of not having large portions of their population vaccinated. Additionally, as demonstrated by economic data and academic studies, vaccines are critical since the health and productive capacity of a country are highly interconnected.

Although an unequal distribution of vaccines can provide some economic relief for developed countries in the short run, an inadequate global economic recovery and the moral costs of an uneven global vaccine distribution demonstrates the utmost importance of working together. The world must continue to find solutions so that more people—especially those in developing nations that already encountered serious health and economic issues prior to the pandemic—can obtain access to vaccines in a more equitable way across the globe.

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