



The Diplomatic Envoy

INDIA AND PAKISTAN RENEW CEASEFIRE AFTER 20 YEARS

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For the first time in almost 20 years, India and Pakistan have ceased firing across their shared border. Military officials from both nations released a joint statement stating they have agreed to a new ceasefire that went into effect at midnight on February 26, according to The New York Times. The ceasefire agreement includes the disputed region of Kashmir in the Himalayas, which has been the main source of contention between India and Pakistan. The region has seen the two sides regularly exchange artillery and small-arms fire. Despite the apparent low intensity of the conflict, it annually kills dozens of villagers and military personnel in the region, reports The Washington Post.

In Feb. 2019, the conflict worsened when India blamed Pakistan-based armed groups for an attack on the Indian-administered Kashmir town of Pulwama that left more than 40 Indian security force members dead, according to Al Jazeera. Pakistan denies these allegations. Al Jazeera describes that when India carried out a retaliatory air attack a few days later, Pakistani jets also scrambled to conduct similar air raids near military installations in Indian-administered Kashmir. While tensions cooled when Pakistan returned an Indian fighter jet pilot who was shot down, the relationship soured further in August 2019 when India revoked a special constitutional status granted to Indian-administered Kashmir. This move was in violation of United Nations Security

Council resolutions on the decades-long dispute according to Pakistan. The region of Kashmir itself has faced many hardships due to continued conflict. Since 2018, Indian information shows that 70 civilians and 72



An India-Pakistan ceasefire has implications for regional security. Courtesy of Flickr

soldiers have been killed in the exchange of fire across the border, according to NBC. On the Pakistani side, nearly 300 civilians have been killed since 2014, when violations of the original ceasefire began to rise, according to a Pakistan mil-

itary source, states NBC. According to Foreign Policy, previous cease-fire violations were caused, in part, by local commanders on both sides of the border having considerable leeway to undertake military actions. When one

side bolsters its position through the construction of fortifications, the opposing side often initiates fire. These actions rarely have the approval of higher commanders or political authorities. Many analysts remain doubtful that the newest ceasefire will last,

but different circumstances may have prompted the latest agreement between India and Pakistan. The recent ceasefire may be in the self-interest of both sides. India has barely stabilized its northern border with China since a series of clashes last year and may not be eager to start another border crisis with its old rival, states Foreign Policy. Pakistan may also have its own reasons to reduce tensions. Under Former United States President Donald Trump, the U.S. adopted a tougher stance toward Pakistan, furthers Foreign Policy. With a new U.S. president, it may be in Pakistan's interest to demonstrate that it can be a responsible partner in the region and play a role with the peace process in Afghanistan. While the reasons behind earlier ceasefire fail-

ures have not vanished, but the political landscape has changed. With China's rise, Pakistan's political desires, and international pressure, this latest gambit could be a short-term agreement or a major shift in policy for both nations, states Foreign Policy. To make this work, Pakistan will have to rein in the activities of terrorist organizations that exist within their borders, while India will have to exercise suitable restraint along the Line of Control, furthers Foreign Policy. The odds may not reflect the situation, but there may finally be a chance for long-term peace in the conflicted region of Kashmir.

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GERMAN POLITICIAN RESIGNS OVER MASK SCANDAL

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In Germany, corruption allegations are threatening the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as well as its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) ahead of elections in multiple German states. The CDU is the party of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has been in power for 15 years. However, this scandal is coming just months before

she planned to step down in September. BBC News notes that with Merkel leaving office, strong CDU leadership is needed if the party is to pick up the torch from the chancellor. Two politicians are at the center of this corruption scandal: Member of Parliament (MP) Nikolas Löbel and MP Georg Nüsslein. Both earned several hundred thousand euros from the sale of face masks during the early days of the pandemic when the

world was dealing with a personal protective equipment shortage. According to The Guardian, MP Nikolas Löbel's company earned 250,000 euros by brokering a deal between facemask suppliers and private companies in the cities of Mannheim and Heidelberg. Löbel is the representative from Mannheim, a city of 300,000 residents. He initially resigned only from his role on the foreign affairs committee but has

since been forced to resign from his role in the CDU party as well as his position in the Bundestag, Germany's parliament, following these allegations. He was pressured to do so by the current leader of the CDU, Armin Laschet. The other MP at the center of the scandal, Georg Nüsslein, is said to have received a commission of 600,000 euros for facilitating a deal between facemask manufacturers and the Bavarian Health Ministry. Nüsslein belongs to the CSU, the Bavarian sister party of the CDU. Rather than resigning immediately, like MP Löbel was pressured to, Nüsslein was pressured to, Nüsslein will stay in office through the end of his term. According to The Guardian, Nüsslein denies any wrongdoing. With key elections in multiple states just on the horizon and a national election in September, this scandal could harm the CDU in regions where it was already performing

poorly in elections, according to The Washington Post. Some analysts believe that the response to this scandal could be the difference between whether the CDU wins the elections or not. The Washington Post furthers that this is a so-called "super election year" in which major state elections take place in addition to a national election. The scandal is impacting the entire party and may hurt the seats the CDU can win and the coalitions it will be able to form after the national election. While discussing the corruption allegations, Politico reports Armin Laschet as saying, "Anyone who, as a representative of the people, tries to make money for himself in this crisis must leave parliament immediately. Any MP who enriches himself in the crisis damages the highest good of democracy, trust." Another prominent conservative German lawmaker told Deutsche Welle that these scandals

are "totally unacceptable" and "unforgivable violations of ethical standards." The most striking condemnation of Löbel and Nüsslein, however, comes from German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, a member of the Social Democrats (SPD). Reuters quotes Steinmeier as saying, "MPs, of all people, are holding out their hand before the modest medical protection of face masks even reaches the people... That is shabby and shameful!" This scandal comes as the slow vaccine rollout across the EU is causing frustration and ire within Germany. This scandal reveals how some saw the pandemic as an opportunity to profit off of the current zeitgeist of anxiety and fear. Many Germans feel that politicians should do more to help Germany's recovery and this scandal has shown that some politicians have much more interest in protecting their wallet than German citizens.

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The scandal undermines the German government's image as a leader on COVID-19 policy. Courtesy of vperemen.com

INSIDE

**FOCUS ON
VACCINE
DIPLOMACY**
On pages 8-9.

INT'L NEWS

**THAILAND CRACKS DOWN
ON ANTI-GOVERNMENT
PROTESTS**
On page 2.

INT'L NEWS

**POPE FRANCIS
MAKES HISTORIC
VISIT TO IRAQ**
On page 5.

DIPLO NEWS

**INTERVIEW WITH
PROFESSOR WOOD ON
CONFLICT MEDIATION**
On page 7.

OPINION

**THE "BURQA BAN"
IN THE AGE OF
COVID-19**
On page 10.

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LIBYAN PARLIAMENT APPROVES UNITY GOVERNMENT

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Libya’s parliament has appointed a new interim government in hopes of progressing unification in the conflict-ridden state. The government of Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah will replace the rivaling East-West administrations that have been ruling Libya for years, a transition that PBS reports was approved by 132 lawmakers. The appointment of officials to serve within the unity government has emerged after months of negotiation, with the United Nations brokering a political roadmap to hold parliamentary and presidential elections on December 24. PBS furthers that Dbeibah, a powerful businessman from the western city Misrata, pledged to respect this date following his confirmation. He also told lawmakers that “the war should not be repeated. We should not kill each other again,” as the country progresses toward unification.

The death of de facto leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 destabilized Libya, causing the country to split into factions. Since 2014, two rival parliaments governed Libya, with rebel general Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army (LNA) occupying the East and the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) occupying the West. The UN has taken an active role in Libyan post-conflict efforts at the request of the country’s authorities, establishing the United Nations Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL) in 2011. UNSMIL’s mandate has been modified and extended by the Security Council every year since its inception, with the current mandate extending the mission until September 15. Fayez al-Serraj, head of the GNA, congratulated the unity government that will replace his own administration. Deutsche Welle reports that Dbeibah’s cabinet was approved after two days of intense deliberation in Sirte, obtaining a

vote of 132-2 in favor, with 36 members absent. Afterwards, Dbeibah told parliament that “through this vote, it became clear that the Libyans are one unit.” The new cabinet includes 33 ministers and two deputy prime ministers who are said to be representative of Libya’s geographic areas and social segments. The executive branch also includes a three-member Presidential Council that will be chaired by Mohammed Younes Menfi, a diplomat from Eastern Libya. Najla El Mangoush, a lawyer and human rights activist, will serve as Libya’s first female foreign minister. Dbeibah’s office denies

the claims as fake news designed to disrupt the political process, urging the UN to reveal the details of its investigation into the accusations. According to The Guardian, the bribes were as high as \$200,000, with one delegate hearing that as much as \$500,000 was offered. The Los Angeles Times reports that a UN panel of experts determined at least three participants at the political forum were offered bribes, though the prime minister candidate was unnamed, and the participants were “categorical in their rejection of the bribes.” Dbeibah has also faced backlash for not delivering on promises that 30 percent of ministerial posts would go to women. In the end, only five women were appointed among 31 government posts. In a joint statement issued by France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the approval of a unity government has been praised as a “critical step” despite the “long road ahead.”

While the main task of the new administration is to prepare Libya for the Dec. 24 parliamentary elections, Al-Monitor reports that they will also have to provide essential public services, initiate reconciliation between warring factions, address critical national budget needs, and implement the October 2020 ceasefire agreement brokered by the top UN envoy for Libya, Stephanie Turco Williams. The process is further complicated by the presence of foreign powers taking sides in the conflict. Historically, Haftar and the LNA have seen comradeship from Egypt, France, the United Arab Emirates, and Russia, while the internationally recognized GNA has been backed by Turkey and Qatar. As Libya’s new unity government approaches these tasks, however, there is still hope that the decade-old conflict is on the road to resolution.

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Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, Prime Minister-elect of Libya during the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. Courtesy of Flickr

THAILAND CRACKS DOWN ON CONTINUED ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS

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On March 8, Thailand’s Bangkok Criminal Court detained three pro-democracy activists on the charge of insulting the monarchy, according to Human Rights Watch. Al Jazeera states that 15 other protesters were indicted over attending anti-government rallies on charges of sedition and disobeying a ban on public assemblies. The pro-democracy movement arose last year when youth protesters began demanding

the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha, who led the 2014 coup, and the reformation of the Thai monarchy. Al Jazeera furthers that demonstrators gathered in Bangkok demanding the release of some of the protest leaders on March 6. Protesters shouted for authorities to “release our friends” as they surrounded a criminal court. Groups burned photographs of the king, chanting for the government to “Abolish 112.” Protesters accuse the prime minister of manipulating the

2019 election rules in his favor and feel that the current constitution gives the king too much power. The three leaders, Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul, Jatapat “Pai” Boonpattaraksa, and Panupong “Mike” Jadnok, were charged with lese majeste, the insult of a monarch, for their speeches demanding monarchy reform at a rally on September 19, 2020. Their cases resemble the court decision to place four other pro-democracy activists in pretrial detention in February. Human

Rights Watch explains that the court denied the activists’ bail requests multiple times, despite Thailand’s ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which allows bail requests or a faster trial for those denied bail. Jadnok felt his group and him were undeterred with being jailed, stating that their work was “only the beginning,” and that their cause would “go ahead even without us,” Al Jazeera reports. Article 112 outlines lese majeste in Thailand’s criminal code: whoever “defames, insults, or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent” will face incarceration of three to 15 years. According to Al Jazeera, the deputy commissioner of Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau emphasized that “protests are illegal” at a police conference, and anyone who participates or invites others to “is breaking the law.” In December 2020, a spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for

Thailand to “bring this law in line” after Thai authorities charged 35 protesters, including a 16-year-old, under Article 112. The statement urges the country to stop using criminal charges against its citizens for “exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.” NPR reports that activist leader Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul first spoke out against the monarchy in August 2020 as a student at Thammasat University, reading a manifesto calling for the reform of Thailand’s monarchy. In an interview, she felt that “the monarchy has to be under law like everyone else in this country,” stating that the manifesto was the “first level” to affect change in the country. Amnesty International explains that protests began in early 2020 with university students and schoolchildren primarily leading the movement, organizing, and participating in protests. The main demands of the protesters include the dissolution of the parliament, the reform

mation of the monarchy, the revision of the military-centric constitution, and the end of intimidation and harassment tactics against those critical of the government. International students were warned against participating in protests or risk losing their visas, reports Reuters. The day after Bangkok’s Criminal Court order, the Asian Institute of Technology sent out an email, asking for students to “be respectful of the laws and policies of the host country Thailand.” Despite the threats, foreign students have taken to the streets in protest of Thailand’s government. While the institution claims it was passing on a request from the country’s immigration bureau, the chief of the immigration office of the university’s province explained no request was made concerning foreign students.

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Anti-government protestors show the Three Finger Salute, a symbol of rebellion from the Hunger Games Series. Courtesy of Khaosod English (Wikimedia Commons)

BRAZILIAN SUPREME COURT OVERTURNS CONVICTION OF FORMER PRESIDENT

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Staff Writer

In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court of Brazil overturned the corruption conviction of former two-term President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), according to BBC News. The conviction was related to the massive anti-corruption investigation known as “Operation Car Wash” that exposed the largest corruption scandal in Latin America. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that Lula’s conviction was invalid because the court he was tried in lacked jurisdiction. He was convicted of money laundering in 2017 and subsequently barred from running for office in 2018 when he was considered the front-runner in the presidential race. With no significant opposition, far-right candidate Jair Bolson-

aro won the election.

Lula was President of Brazil from 2003 to 2010 as the leader of the left-wing Worker’s Party. According to The Guardian, Lula oversaw the largest economy in Latin America during his eight years in office. Under his administration, 28 million people were lifted out of poverty and Brazil underwent a significant period of economic growth. He remained incredibly popular in Brazil despite his conviction in 2017, which many people viewed as politically motivated.

According to The Intercept, there were many disparities among the judges who voted in Lula’s original trial, creating doubt in people’s minds about its authenticity. The Supreme Court found that a judge in Lula’s case had illegally collaborated with the prosecutors to help ensure Lula’s con-

viction. This judge, Sergio Moro, later became the justice minister in President Bolsonaro’s administration. The court found that Moro expedited trial dates so that Lula’s defense could not put together coherent arguments, all but ensuring that Lula would be convicted and barred from running for office before the 2018 elections. The Supreme Court also found that Moro had committed an “abuse of power” and nullified all of the Car Wash charges made by his court against Lula including allowing him to run for president again.

This ruling comes at a conspicuous time for President Bolsonaro who is facing a lot of criticism for his handling of the coronavirus. According to The Washington Post, the outbreak in Brazil is “worse than it’s ever been” with nearly 500,000

new cases and nearly 13,000 deaths reported during last week alone. Throughout the pandemic, Bolsonaro consistently downplayed the virus, calling it a “measly flu” while mocking masks and lockdowns. He contracted COVID-19 early in the pandemic and touted unproven cures, such as hydroxychloroquine, to the public. He consistently undermined his health officials and in the span of the pandemic, has gone through four health ministers, two of whom resigned because of his response. According to Time, he told Brazilians, early in March, to “stop whining” about the rising death tolls and spread vaccine misinformation, saying it could “turn people into crocodiles.”

Lula excoriated Bolsonaro’s handling of the pandemic in a speech delivered shortly after the

Court’s ruling came down, saying “This country is in a state of utter tumult and confusion because there’s no government,” reports The Guardian. He also told CNN that “[Bolsonaro] prefers to wake up at four o’clock in the morning, tell his lies through his mobile phone... and we have been producing fake news as we’ve never seen in the history of Brazil, and he’s not dealing seriously.” Lula’s outspokenness has fueled speculation that he may run for president against Bolsonaro in 2022, and when asked, he replied “I will not deny that invitation.” Although he is 75 years old, he claims he still has a lot of energy, and has led Bolsonaro by 12 points in a recent poll.

In his speech, Lula spoke about the importance of getting vaccinated and remaining vigilant in the face of the virus,

according to The Guardian. He encouraged the use of masks and social distancing and spoke about the strength of the Brazilian people. Politicians from across the political spectrum praised his tone which struck a deep contrast to Bolsonaro’s fleeting attitude towards the virus. Time reports that Bolsonaro is now changing his tune on the virus and trying to acquire more vaccines from Russia, China, and Pfizer. It is clear to him that in the upcoming election, Lula remains his biggest threat.

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INDIA THREATENS TO DEPORT ROHINGYA REFUGEES TO MYANMAR

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Authorities in Jammu detained over 200 Rohingya refugees in early March and are threatening to deport them to Myanmar, the state from which they are fleeing. India claims that the refugees are considered “illegal immigrants” and explains they are in the process of deporting the detainees back to their home country, despite the continued severe violence against Rohingya Muslims in the region. The government claims that the detained refugees did not have valid permits of residency, despite many of the detainees having UN-issued refugee identification cards. The Indian government claims that refugee identification cards are not considered valid in India.

The recent mass detention of refugees is a part of the latest crackdown by the Indian government, which started in

West Bengal this year after officials started to claim that Rohingya refugees were “illegally becoming Indian citizens,” according to The Guardian. The Hindu Nationalist government of India, run by the Bharatiya Janata party, has stated that they believe Rohingya refugees are illegal immigrants and a security threat, calling for the mass deportation of Rohingya refugees. There have since been ‘verification exercises’ throughout refugee camps across India in which refugees are

checked for identification and permits of residency.

A ‘verification exercise’ was conducted on March 14 in Jammu, during which refugee camps were raided and refugees were summoned by police and detained, continues The Guardian. Those who were detained were taken to Hiranagar jail outside of Jammu and are being prepared for deportation. The Indian Government has stated that the reason for the deportation of the refugees is that they did not

show adequate citizenship documents for India or Myanmar. Most Rohingya refugees are considered stateless, as citizenship for Rohingya peoples was revoked in Myanmar in 1985, and most refugees only applied for refugee status from the UN and did not apply for Indian citizenship.

Many human rights groups and lawyers both in India and abroad have condemned the Indian government’s actions. They are calling the deportation of the Rohingya

a violation of both international law and the guidelines of the UN’s International Principle of Refoulment, as the government is attempting to send refugees back to a state in which they will be physically unsafe and at risk of being exposed to genocidal violence. Ravi Nair, a human rights lawyer in New Delhi, has filed a petition against the detention and deportation of the refugees, which is now pending in the Indian Supreme Court, Al Jazeera reports. According to CNN, the Indian government still stands firm in its claim that the deportation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar does not violate the UN’s guidelines. The government has also argued that India was not a signatory to the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, which protects and outlines the rights of refugees, and therefore should not be held to it.

The mass detentions, refugee camp raids, and

threats by the Indian government that more refugees will be detained and deported have sparked panic throughout Rohingya refugee communities across the state. France24 reports about the proliferation of videos of Rohingya refugees attempting to flee from camps to avoid returning to Myanmar. In response, Indian authorities have encircled some of the camps and are preventing refugees from leaving, causing many refugees to flee into the forests. Some refugees fleeing from camps are now trying to seek help at UNCHR centers across the country. However, according to VOA News, the situation has only worsened as refugees seeking aid from the office UNCHR in New Delhi were detained by police outside the building.

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Rohingya refugees are being detained and deported from India to Myanmar.
Courtesy of The Great Norwegian Encyclopedia

NEARLY 100 KILLED IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA EXPLOSION

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Early in the day on March 7, a large explosion ripped through blocks of Bata, the largest city in Equatorial Guinea. The death toll continues to rise, with official reports hovering around a death toll of nearly 100 and an injured count close to 1,000, according to Reuters. The president of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, appeared in a press conference after the blast, pleading for international aid to help his small nation provide adequate medical care to those injured in the explosion and to rebuild his country's most important economic and trading hub. The massive explosion originated on an Equatorial Guinean military base and has been officially blamed on negligence relating to the improper

er storage of munitions. These high caliber munitions, which were stored in a depot on Bata's Nkoantomata Military Base, were said to have exploded after a fire on neighboring land migrated onto the base. While Deutsche Welle has quoted President Obiang Nguema as saying the original fire was started by "neighbors at nearby farms," Al Jazeera attributes the original fires to soldiers who were ordered to burn bush right outside the confines of the base. This disaster has renewed the voice of the opposition party in calling for President Obiang Nguema's removal from office. His administration, which has been in power since 1979 after he executed his uncle and former president in a bloody coup, has been accused of rampant corruption and embezzlement for decades. This recent tragedy has only

strengthened the opposition's calls for both him and his son, who serves a dual role as Equatorial Guinean Vice President and Defense Minister, to be removed from office. The corruption claims against President Obiang Nguema are based on both his personal economic situation and that of the country. Equatorial Guinea is a small, oil-rich nation with a little over 1.5 million residents and one of the highest GDPs per capita in the world at \$10,000, according to the Wall Street Journal. However, majority of the country's residents actually live on less than \$2 a day while President Obiang Nguema has amassed great wealth. President Obiang Nguema and his family have attempted to move much of their wealth offshore. CNN reports that in 2019, a collection of \$13 million in super

cars was seized and sold as part of a money-laundering investigation into President Obiang Nguema's son in Switzerland. In the same year, the president was forced to agree to a \$30 million dollar settlement with the United States Government in a case that centered on his corruption. Given the high levels of corruption within the Nguema administration, as well as the country's pandemic-related economic retraction, the millions of dollars in damage caused by the recent explosion will only make the country's economic situation worse. To help prevent complete economic disaster, President Nguema has turned to the international community for disaster aid and economic relief. So far only Equatorial Guinea's previous colonial ruler, Spain, has reached

out and pledged humanitarian resources. Without more substantial aid in addition to Spain's contribution, it is likely that those injured in the explosion will continue to suffer. The Associated Press reports that most of the hospitals in and around the city of Bata, which were already strained due to COVID-19, became overwhelmed by the sudden increase in patients, with many victims still in need of care days later. Given the severity of the blast, in both human

and economic terms, as well as the political pressure on the Nguema administration from opposition, the political future of Equatorial Guinea is still to be decided. Only time will tell if this tragedy will be the end of the Nguema presidency or if his response can engender renewed good will towards the administration among the people of Equatorial Guinea.

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Negligent handling of dynamite caused an explosion, killing at least 100 and injuring over 1,000. Courtesy of Sadi Richards (Flickr)

VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN MEXICO ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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Thousands of women took to the streets in Mexico City -some carrying their children and others bats and hammers- to protest the rising violence against women in Mexico, on March 8 which marked the International Women's Day. The march was stimulated by public outrage over the actions of Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, commonly known as AMLO, who many see as out of touch. Lopez Obrador was heavily criticized for his continuous support of the candidate for governor of Guerrero, Felix Salgado Macedonio, who had been accused of rape on two occasions. Guerrero prosecutors are currently investigating these accusations of rape against Salgado, but the candidate has denied them through his lawyers. AMLO was sworn into office in 2018 after promising to lead a social transformation and purge the country of the deep-rooted corruption afflicting

the Mexican economy. Many citizens, however, condemned President Lopez Obrador for ignoring the problem of gender-based violence. Lopez Obrador responded by defending his record on gender equality, mentioning that half of his cabinet is comprised of women. Despite his professed efforts to increase equality in the state, his policies have not succeeded in addressing the ongoing violence that kills more than ten women a day and subjects many others to live in fear of their lives. According to Reuters, data shows that at least 939 cases of femicide, or murders specifically targeting women, were reported in 2020 and that gender violence rates in Mexico have soared over the past five years, with murders of women rising almost 130 percent. Unlike demonstrations of the previous year on International Women's Day when Mexican women combined their efforts to form a vast and peaceful protest against gender-based violence, the march this year was

smaller in size, which is attributed to the concerns over COVID-19 precautions. Despite the smaller scale of the protest, the authorities decided to erect steel barriers around the National Palace in Mexico City on the Saturday before the day of the march. AMLO announced that the barrier was simply a means to avoid injuries and prevent any potential confrontation with the police. According to NBC News, the barriers did not sit well with the public, further inciting negative

feelings from women in Mexico who saw the barrier as a symbol of the division that exists between the women's movement and the president. In a show of resistance, protesters agreed to use the ten-foot tall barriers to their advantage, painting the walls with the names of women killed, many of them victims of femicide. Activists also tore a section of the barrier apart and spray-painted different sidewalks and kiosks. Some groups opted for violence to force the

government of Mexico to pay attention to and consider their demands, leading to clashes between demonstrators and Mexico City police. According to BBC News, one such instance occurred in the main square of the capital, the Zocalo, where officers used tear gas, batons, and riot shields to push back protesters and cause them to disperse. In retaliation, some demonstrators set fire to the riot shields. There have also been reports of police arresting journalists and activists in the crowd. According to The New York Times, Mexico City's security branch reports that at least 62 officers and 19 members of the public were injured, some of whom were hit by bullets. While altercations between women's rights demonstrators and the police are becoming more common, many agree it is necessary for the government to understand that they are not doing enough to prosecute femicide and commemorate murdered women. Support for the wom-

en's movement has also been growing among Mexico's celebrities and politicians. According to Bloomberg, over 500 politicians and supporters of Lopez Obrador's party, the Morena, have denounced Salgado for the rape accusations against him and have signed on to a letter calling for his removal as a candidate for governor in Guerrero. Celebrities like Julieta Venegas and Gael Garcia have also urged the president to stop finding fault in the protest movement. The Guardian cites Arussi Unda, spokeswoman of the Las Brujas del Mar and a feminist collective in Veracruz, who asserted that "[AMLO] has placed the feminist movement as public enemy No. 1." She went on to say, "We are not asking for crazy things. We're asking that women get to work, that women aren't killed, and girls aren't raped. It's not insane, not eccentric, it's human rights."

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A painting reads "We were all", the chant used at the 8M march for women's rights in Mexico City. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

POPE FRANCIS MAKES HISTORIC VISIT TO IRAQ

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In early March, Pope Francis embarked on a four-day trip to Iraq, where he met with political and religious rulers to encourage better Christian-Muslim relations. According to the official Vatican itinerary, titled Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Iraq, the Pope arrived in Baghdad on March 5, where he was met by the Prime Minister and later that day visited the Iraqi President. He concluded his trip in Erbil, where he led mass in front of a large crowd. He preached words of encouragement to Christians living in Iraq, pointing to a better future in which they can restore the communities that were ravaged by ISIS militants years

ago when they seized control of the region. Many Iraqi citizens viewed the Pope’s visit as extremely meaningful. In an interview with NPR, Iraqi man Saasane Hasan described the Pope as a beacon of light. He said that he never would have imagined that Pope Francis would visit his country, and he expressed admiration at the Pope’s bravery to come to the country despite safety concerns that turn many others away. On March 7, the Pope prayed in Mosul on top of church ruins destroyed by ISIS. ISIS took control of the region in 2014, and Christians were among those who were displaced and persecuted in numbers, according to BBC News. The Pope prayed for the victims of ISIS and the war with ISIS. CBS News states that the Pope

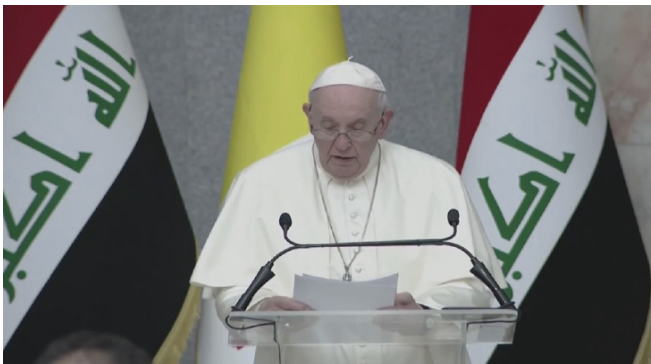
condemned ISIS terrorism while simultaneously calling for forgiveness. BBC News continues that there have been complaints by Christian Iraqis of discrimination and harassment. The number of Christians in Iraq has rapidly decreased from 1.4 million two decades ago to 250,000 now. Throughout the Pope’s visit, he called for violence and extremism to be eradicated and for Iraq’s Christians to be afforded full rights and liberties. Appealing

for religious coexistence, Pope Francis also met with the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, reports The Washington Post. Occurring against the background of the pandemic, the Pope’s arrival in Iraq caused many to worry that crowds would cause a new wave of cases. NPR describes masses that the Pope held with little social distancing, despite plans made by the Vatican and local organizers to make sure there were always masks and proper social

distancing. NPR reports that the Pope and his travel entourage did get vaccinated before arriving in Iraq. This was the Pope’s first time leaving the Vatican in 15 months due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Pope said he felt like he was, “in prison,” due to not being able to leave the Vatican for so long. NPR quotes United States President Joe Biden on his thoughts of the Pope’s visit, saying “To see Pope Francis visit ancient religious sites, including the biblical birthplace of Abraham, spend time with grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani ... and offer prayers in Mosul ... is a symbol of hope for the entire world.” Supporters of the Pope’s visit see it as inspirational, stressing the importance of peace among religious nations and expressing encour-

agement at the Pope’s actions in attempt to encourage such peace. Critics, however, see the Pope’s attempt to heal Christian-Muslim relations as an artificial publicity stunt. The Pope visiting a country which has had so much history with Christians and Muslims, especially during a pandemic, is a momentous event. According to The New York Times, Iraqi officials saw the visit as an affirmation of the country’s importance in the region. Perhaps a call for peace is what the world needs today.

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Pope Francis’ landmark visit signals unity between Christianity and Islam. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

NEW ZEALAND ANNOUNCES INITIATIVE TO MAKE SANITARY PRODUCTS FREE IN SCHOOLS

Lauren-Marie Diawatan
Staff Writer

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on February 18 that starting this June, all New Zealand schools will provide free sanitary products to tackle period poverty across the country, reports Reuters. “Period poverty” refers to the poor accessibility to pads or tampons that can negatively impact education, health, and employment, according to The New York Times.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education states that all state and state-integrated schools, from primary to secondary education, and kura – state schools based on Maori culture and values, according to the New Zealand Education for Parents – can now choose to receive free period items for their students. The first phase of distribution will include pads and tampons, but the Ministry of Education will consider expanding to provide menstrual cups and eco-friendly sanitary underwear. NPR News reports that the entire program



New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern fights to provide women with increased access to sanitary products. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

will cost an estimated \$18 million through 2024. The Ministry of Education report cites a Youth19 Survey explaining that 12 percent of year 9 to year 13 students find period products inaccessible because of their price. The report also references research from the University of Otago, which furthers that 94,788 girls from New Zealand’s poorest households may have difficulty purchasing period products, causing them to miss school because of their menstrual cycle. Prime Minister Ardern

states that “providing free period products at school is one way the government can directly address poverty” and improve the well-being of the country’s children, continues Reuters. She hopes to see “improved engagement” and “reduced financial hardship amongst families,” with less students missing school because of their period. The country-wide plan to rollout free period products in schools was announced following the widespread success of the Waikato trial phase,

continues the Ministry of Education report. The trial included fifteen schools and kura in the Waikato region, all receiving enough free period products to account for 3,200 people. The Ministry of Education worked alongside five suppliers to provide a variety of period and tampon products. These suppliers employed different engagement strategies, with some offering their products to be ordered in advance and others installing dispensers in bathrooms. The Waikato trial phase concluded with

students reporting that “they felt heard and cared for,” and that they are appreciative of the choices provided for them. The initiative began with Dignity NZ, an organization that works to provide free sanitary items for New Zealand’s students and youth. The founder, Miranda Hitchings, stated that her organization approached schools, finding that period poverty was “incredibly prevalent” and that many school nurses and teachers were personally paying for products for their students, contin-

ues The New York Times. Hitchings and her cofounder, Jacinta Gulasekharam, began a campaign in 2019 pushing for free period products, submitting a petition of 3,000 signatures to New Zealand’s parliament. Julie Anne Genter, a member of the country’s Green Party and the then Minister of Women, brought the cause to the Prime Minister’s office. New Zealand is the second country to make period products free for those who needed them, following Scotland, who did so in November 2020, according to The New York Times. Like the initiative in New Zealand, Scotland’s legislation expands on previous accessibility efforts to make free access to tampons and pads in education and public buildings a legal right. Scotland’s law includes collaborating with local authorities to make period products free of charge for everyone.

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PROFESSOR ANN MARIE MURPHY DISCUSSES THE NEW CENTER FOR FOREIGN POLICY STUDIES

Nandini Jani
Staff Writer

The Diplomatic Envoy recently joined Professor Ann Marie Murphy for a riveting discussion about her professional career in the field of diplomacy and developments within the School of Diplomacy's Center for Foreign Policy Studies. Professor Murphy joined the School of Diplomacy and International Relations in 2004. Since then, she has been the recipient of numerous awards recognizing her for distinguished student mentorship and research development.



Dr. Ann Marie Murphy specializes in U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia. Courtesy of Seton Hall University

Murphy received the Diplomacy Teacher of the Year award in 2017 as well as the Researcher of the Year award in both 2011 and 2019. She is the recipient of several research grants and fellowships, which have allowed her to conduct research on Asia and Southeast Asia, one of which includes the Fulbright U.S. scholarship. Murphy's research is centered around the political development in Asia as well as the rise of transnational security issues. In addition to her independent research, Murphy teaches both undergraduate and graduate-level classes at the School of Diplo-

macy. Two of her most sought-after classes include an undergraduate course on comparative foreign policy and a graduate course on statecraft-designing foreign policy. Sarah Bond, one of Murphy's current undergraduate students, considers what she has learned in her comparative foreign policy class as "fundamental to [her] understanding of how states evaluate actions and events that inevitably impact foreign policy" and believes that "every diplomacy student should take this class with Professor Murphy." As the director of the Center for Foreign Policy Studies, Murphy col-

laborates with a team of esteemed diplomacy professors to design and implement a number of research projects, teaching, and training programs for graduate students. Murphy's team includes Dr. Zheng Wang, diplomacy professor and director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, Dr. Yanzhong Huang, professor and director of the Center for Global Health Studies, Professor Benjamin Goldfrank, specialist in Latin American studies, and Professor Margarita Balmaceda, specialist in Eastern European politics. At the center, Murphy's team strives to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to become effective policy analysts and advocates. The Center for Foreign Policy Studies engages students through career-development workshops, guest-speaker events, and esteemed professional networking opportunities. One of the many skills developed through these programs is communication. Murphy pointed out that the ability to articulate and

respectfully defend arguments is an indispensable skill. Projects developed within the center are designed to give students the opportunity to strengthen their critical thinking and analysis competencies, while also giving them a platform for meaningful application. In accordance with the center's goal to provide students with meaningful networking opportunities, Murphy hosted a virtual event with former World Bank President, Deputy Secretary of State, and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick on March 3. Murphy moderated the discussion which highlighted topics such as U.S. allies, public and congressional support, and America's purpose. As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, Murphy has coordinated a number of watch-parties and webinars for students and faculty to observe international relations presentations at research centers beyond the university. These online events have addressed topics including human trafficking, race and

foreign aid, as well as propaganda and disinformation. A few themes the center has explored in recent years include the power transition in the Asia-Pacific, the impact of democracy on the policy making process in emerging powers, and transnational threats in Southeast Asia. Moving forward, it will prioritize research and programming related to the impact of the U.S. presidential transition on American foreign policy and its implications for key allies, adversaries, and other issues. The Center for Foreign Policy Studies is a unique opportunity for graduate students at the School of Diplomacy to explore their interests in the field while receiving personalized guidance from acclaimed professors and faculty. As the director, Murphy strives to connect passionate students with the professional opportunities that will deepen their understanding of international relations both in theory and in practice.

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ROBERT ZOELICK SPEAKS ON FOREIGN POLICY AND U.S. DIPLOMACY

Jazlyn Dominguez
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The School of Diplomacy recently welcomed former World Bank President Robert Zoellick to discuss his new book, *America in the World: A History of U.S. Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*. Zoellick also served as the Deputy Secretary of State, and U.S. Trade Representative from 2001 to 2005. The event was moderated by Dr. Anne Marie Murphy, Director of the Center for Foreign Policy Studies and Professor at the School of Diplomacy. The event kicked off with an introduction by Dr. Courtney Smith, Acting Dean of the School of Diplomacy, who familiarized the audience with both Professor Murphy and Robert Zoellick. Dr. Murphy highlighted Zoellick's extensive achievements by describing him as "one of America's most experienced and accomplished statesmen." His book, she said, successfully helps one understand the scope of American foreign policy from its foun-

dation to its current state. When asked what motivated him to write his book, Zoellick said that he was inspired by practical problems in understanding foreign policy. He explained that theories in diplomacy are helpful in understanding foreign policy, but not as much as practical problems and experiences. Zoellick focused on the American experience and ideas in diplomacy to further indicate the influence of the U.S. alongside that of Europe. The book gauges American experiences and includes a comprehensive analysis of U.S. history and notable political figures. Aside from this subjective analysis, Zoellick also highlights his own ideas and personal assessments of the status of U.S. foreign policy based on his experiences. The discussion moved on to assessing the contents of the book, at which point Dr. Murphy noted some influential figures mentioned, such as Cordell Hall and Vannevar Bush. Zoellick first elaborated on Cordell Hall, to whom a whole

chapter is dedicated. Zoellick uses Hall as a reference for talking about trade and foreign policy issues, such as the Smoot Hawley Act of 1930, and the Reciprocal Trade Act of 1934. Zoellick chose Hall due to his belief that trade can serve as the key to peace by helping to build prosperity and mitigate risks of conflicts with other nations. Speaking about Vannevar Bush, Zoellick described him as the "godfather of an American diplomacy that leverages perpetual science and technological change." This chapter in the book focused on the scientific aspect of diplomacy, discussing events such as Bush's 'Endless Frontier' report to the U.S. president in 1945, urging him to develop a future science policy post-WWII. Next, Dr. Murphy assessed the five traditions of U.S. diplomacy listed in Zoellick's book. Regarding the first tradition, she asked about the significance of North America in U.S. global power and why it is overlooked in American

foreign policy's agenda. Zoellick explained that North America is a base of U.S. foreign policy - a unit of three energy and trade-sufficient democracies with more than 500,000,000 people. He also agreed that it is often overlooked in American foreign policy, although it should not be, given its significance. The second tradition deals with trade transnationalism and technology. Dr. Murphy questioned why a breakdown of foreign trade would be costly for the U.S. and how to prevent it. Zoellick responded by naming the benefits of trade, including its economic advantages, prosperity, ties with other nations, and a non-zero-sum scenario for all parties. He mentioned the U.S. acting as a cutting-edge economy, which requires it to make new rules for new industries. However, it is difficult because others want to protect the industries that already exist. The third tradition focuses on the importance of alliances and order in the

international system. Dr. Murphy raised the question of what challenges the U.S. will face as it begins to restore alliances and how these challenges can be addressed. In response, Zoellick went over a short synopsis of alliance policies throughout American history, such as isolationism in the early 20th century and the new alliance system based on economics in the postwar order. Then, he highlighted some of the challenges found in the domestic, security, and economic agendas. In terms of domestic challenges, the economy and pandemic recovery require the most effort. However, security issues stemming from the different forms of aggression the United States is currently facing, as well as other countries' reliance on the U.S., are also prevalent. The fourth tradition deals with public and congressional support, raising the question of whether it is possible for the president and Congress to work together on U.S. foreign policy. Zoellick replied by

stressing the importance of public opinion in forming a democracy. He also mentioned the theme of pragmatism with congressional support. This transitions into the fifth tradition, which discusses America's purpose: liberty and independence. The question dealt with the challenges of promoting American ideas abroad. Zoellick discussed the difficulties resulting from external environments, public attitude, and the push for democracy. Once Zoellick discussed the five traditions, the event wrapped up with a student-directed question & answer session. The questions ranged in topics from great-power politics to the use of historical memory. Dean Smith closed the event by reminding students of why lessons in history are important and how we can connect past challenges to solve current ones.

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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS VP TALKS ON HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY WARFARE

Jasmine DeLeon
Staff Writer

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been using humanitarian action, policy, and diplomacy to combat the impacts of contemporary warfare, according to Gilles Carbonnier, the vice president of the ICRC at a School of Diplomacy event on March 18.

One of the distinguishing qualities of the ICRC is that, although it is a private organization under Swiss law, it is bound by international humanitarian law (IHL), which applies in situation of armed conflict, Carbonnier said. This is important to note since the founding of the IHL paralleled that of the ICRC. Carbonnier described this moment as “the birth of the laws of armed conflict that seek to preserve humanity in the worst of the conflict.”

“What we do at the ICRC is promote IHL all the way from assisting states to adopting national laws and regulations to

ensuring that it is embedded in training manuals and training programs of armed forces and also police forces when it comes to law enforcement,” Carbonnier added.

Carbonnier also addressed the common question of whether IHL works. Without attempting to sound overly optimistic, he acknowledged that while there are sometimes egregious violations of IHL, it does very often work in practice.

“International humanitarian law often saves lives,” Carbonnier said. “Every day we see military commanders making decisions not to hit places in order to spare civilians.”

Another specific distinction of the ICRC is that while many other humanitarian organizations focus on specific sectors or target groups, the ICRC focuses on a multifaceted response to help people affected by armed conflict according to their priority needs, Carbonnier clarified. According to

him, the ICRC does not simply provide assistance, but also works to protect people in armed conflict.

An important feature of the ICRC, Carbonnier noted, is that it acts as a neutral intermediary in war. For example, the organization arranges as a neutral intermediary dignified distribution of human remains to families. In October 2020, the ICRC arranged the turnover of over 1000 detainees to the operation in Yemen using confidence building measures after two years of diplomatic talks building on the 2018 Stockholm Agreement.

According to Carbonnier, three main challenges of contemporary warfare today are the “protracted nature of conflict, the fragmented nature of parties to the conflict, [and] the fact that war is happening more in urban centers and settings.” He also warned against the privatization and criminalization of conflict. “We see endemic

violence because of gangs and organized crime, which is driving displacement and endemic violence in Central America, a case in point,” he noted.

Armed conflict is currently being compounded by climate change and COVID-19, Carbonnier continued. “Climate change fuels competition over scarce resources, and the pandemic stretches medical and social worker systems to their limits, which exacerbates tension and inequalities in fragile conflict environments.” The issues of climate change and COVID-19 are urgent matters high on the ICRC agenda, he assured.

“Over half of the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change are also impacted today by armed conflicts. The convergence of climate risk and conflict aggravates food insecurity, economic insecurity, it weakens access to essential services,” Carbonnier furthered. He added that

the ICRC stands ready to work with the United States and others on global COVID-19 vaccine deployment to ensure equitable distribution.

According to him, the ICRC has been helping states better mobilize financial resources to combat these challenges are through diplomatic and humanitarian relief efforts. Two ways are by encouraging states to provide essential services to the population and by mobilizing donors and international partners.

When asked to provide practical examples of how the ICRC engages with state and nonstate actors, Carbonnier emphasized the importance of going beyond engaging directly with all parties to the conflict. “It is critical for us to engage all those states that can wield a positive influence on parties to the conflict in terms of respecting international humanitarian law.” “It is critical also to ensure that the norms embedded in the

Geneva Conventions resonate with diverse cultural and religious tradition.”

One example of how the ICRC has merged the universality of IHL with specific cultural environments is by working with Muslim scholars to highlight fundamental principles of IHL and norms under Islamic law. While humanitarian action and diplomacy are methods of combating the challenges of contemporary war, these methods are not applicable to all conflict areas.

“There is no humanitarian solution to the large humanitarian crisis we have seen over the years evolving in Syria and Yemen,” Carbonnier concluded. “It is only through a political settlement or solution that such a complex humanitarian crisis can be addressed.”

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PROFESSOR WOOD DISCUSSES NEW UNDERGRADUATE COURSE AND MEDIATION WORK IN LIBYA

Sergei C. Valenzuela
Staff Writer

The Diplomatic Envoy recently interviewed Professor David Wood to discuss his new undergraduate class and ongoing conflict mediation work. With over 15 years of experience as a peacebuilding expert, Professor Wood currently serves as a professor of practice at the School of Diplomacy. His work includes resolving violent international conflict and mediating peace processes, which he has done both at the non-governmental and international level for a wide variety of agencies. In 2011, Wood created an international peacebuilding organization, The Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI). His organization focuses on mediating conflict that arose from the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa starting in the same year.

Wood’s research focuses on interactive approaches to mediation

and dialogue in periods of open violence when political environments and dialogues become toxic. His organization is closely involved with conflict management and developing new ways for promoting stabilization in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Wood has been at the School of Diplomacy since 2018 and leading the development of several projects through the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies in the MENA region. He is also teaching a graduate-level course and an undergraduate course on conflict studies.

During the interview, Wood discussed the components and approach he uses with his undergraduate students and explained how the field of conflict studies is academically rigorous. The course requires students to understand various conflict areas, as well as the motives for either the rise of violence in a conflict or the reasons for why a conflict moves from violence to a

positive relationship.

“[Along with] a research focus,” he explained, “we’re also looking [for] personal skill sets. [We have to consider] the attributes of an individual who’s engaging with those in conflict. As such, we are both interested in a balance between the academic rigor at the university and the skill sets needed on the ground.” Wood added that he hopes “[students] obtain a good sense of what it is that drives conflict and what are the ways in which we can manage it.”

Additionally, Wood spoke about what it was like to establish PCI and how he built his reputation for political support. “It started in Libya after the open face of fighting ended. There was just very little left in Libya after 40 years of organization of the [oppressive] regime.” He furthered, “Within that period of time, there was very limited exposure to the international community and international

organizations didn’t have a footprint on the ground. As such, when we arrived in Libya, there wasn’t any large organization present giving us room to operate.”

Wood added that “big organizations like Oxfam and Care International move quite slowly because they have a heavy internal bureaucracy and a lot of risk management procedures. [Therefore], as a smaller organization, we are more mobile and able to work. Our approach to mediation,” he stressed, “was to do it at the point of violence between people, since the risk threshold of others is often beyond them.”

Since he worked in high violence and conflict areas, like Yemen, Wood recognizes that the biggest challenges within protracted conflict are the massive humanitarian need, political violence, and fractured state infrastructure. He also finds that these three things are interlinked. Wood explains that “the [intensi-



Professor Wood works in peacebuilding in Yemen and Libya. Courtesy of the School of Diplomacy

fied] levels of violence are creating high levels of humanitarian aid and affecting state infrastructure. The weakened infrastructures also become a cause for humanitarian needs. As such, we actually need to deal with all these three parts within the country in order to move towards a solution.” Wood refers to these three components of the conflict cycle as “The Nexus.”

Professor Wood concluded that “It’s all about

knowing how to make a difference in a bigger world. None of us can make changes by ourselves [as] we are all parts of a bigger puzzle.”

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CHINA

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Over a year after the world first felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, countless vaccines have been produced at record speed. Vaccine diplomacy, the practice of using shots to enhance a country's regional ties and global status, provide nations like China the opportunity to flex their diplomatic muscles by using resources and development to their advantage. If vaccine diplomacy is a competition, then China is winning.

The vaccines developed by China are an attractive alternative to many Western jabs. The BBC reports that unlike its Western alternatives from Moderna and Pfizer, both Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines can be stored in a regular fridge and do not require extremely cold temperatures. Additionally, instead of using new and unproven mRNA vaccines, the

Chinese shots are inactive vaccines, meaning that dead COVID-19 particles are injected into the body.

However, there are some concerns preventing countries from jumping on the China train. Foreign Affairs reports that, unlike many Western vaccine alternatives, questions remain about the safety and effectiveness of the three Chinese vaccines currently in use. There is only limited information available from Phase 3 clinical trials, and results from trials in China and other countries have yielded disparate results. Disclosures from China are slow and spotty, with some even questioning the validity of the trials China released.

While China claims it is not using vaccine diplomacy, it has delivered "vaccine aid" to 53 countries and exported vaccines to 27 others, though in small amounts, says the Associated Press. Countries ordering vaccines from China are classified as low-

and middle-income. Mr. Guo Weimin, a spokesman for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, called claims that China is using its vaccines to "expand [their]

tation of a digital health passport. In addition to donating vaccines to other countries, China plans to set up vaccination stations and offer Chinese vaccinations in other countries.



China's COVID-19 vaccine is used primarily in developing countries.
Courtesy of Marco Verch (Flickr)

geopolitical influence" is "narrow-minded," reports Reuters. Chinese President Xi Jinping echoed this sentiment, promising to make his nation's vaccines a "global public good."

South China Morning Post reports that one facet of China's vaccine diplomacy includes a plan to vaccinate all nationals abroad and the implemen-

Analysts say these efforts are "aimed at improving China's image across the world."

The West, China, and Russia are fighting a battle for influence in Central Europe and the Balkans. It seems that in the meantime, China gained a leg up on the competition as Serbia and Hungary now depend largely on China's

vaccines. According to an additional Associated Press report, Serbia was the first European country to use vaccinations from China, which purchased 1.5 million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine. Hungary followed in Serbia's footsteps, approving the Sinopharm vaccine after delays in shots from the European Union. China's aid fans the anti-EU flames that already burn strongly in these countries' populist leaders, who are outspoken against the EU.

According to the Washington Post, many developing and low-income countries are turning to China after being shut out of Western markets. Ms. Jennifer Huang Bouey, a China expert and epidemiologist, claims that "COVID can be a real game-changer for China." China has "never seen such large international demand for their pharmaceutical products," making this a prime opportunity to win over clients who

desperately need aid in low-income countries. For China, which has historically seen little international interest in its pharmaceutical products, success with its vaccinations could now lead to profit later.

Foreign Affairs says that China's vaccine diplomacy appears to focus on rehabilitating its global image, which took a hit following criticism the country received last year at the outbreak of the pandemic. Through the release of vaccinations, China "is looking to showcase its global health leadership to lower- and middle-income countries, where it is distributing vaccines." By offering vaccinations to countries that failed to receive the promised shots from the U.S. and other Western nations, China demonstrates its strength and value as an ally.

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INDIA

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Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, developing countries faced long delays obtaining access to vaccines due to vaccine nationalism and hoarding by rich countries. To fill the gap, India has emerged as a 'vaccine superpower' and source of hope to poorer countries, which are unable to access vaccines due to their high cost and unavailability. India is offering governments in developing nations both the locally-manufactured British AstraZeneca vaccine and its own home-grown vaccine, Covaxin.

Just days after India rolled out its domestic inoculation program – which has so far inoculated more than 30 million people – Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India will supply countries with vaccines through a foreign policy initiative called Vaccine Maitri. Republic World reports that New Delhi sent 58.64 million

made-in-India vaccines doses to more than 70 countries since January 20, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Iran, Cambodia, Bahrain, Canada, Oman, Afghanistan, Barbados, and the Dominican Republic. According to External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava, more than 6 million vaccine doses have been supplied as aid, with the others being sent on a commercial basis.

"Instead of securing a country by sending troops, you can secure the country by saving lives, by saving their economy, by helping with their vaccination," said Dania Thafer, the executive director of the Gulf International Forum, a Washington-based think tank, according to the New York Times. This is exactly what India is doing as it continues to donate millions of vaccines to neighboring states in Southeast Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Africa – experts have dubbed such moves as "vaccine diplomacy." India also offered 1.1 bil-

lion vaccine doses to the WHO's COVAX program to distribute inoculations to poorer countries.

So far, New Delhi's successful vaccine diplomacy has been possible due to certain factors, included the cost-effectiveness of the vaccines, the efficiency of India's pharmaceutical industry, and the increasing need to counter China's influence in the Asia-Pacific. India's pharmaceutical industry is the world's largest producer and exporter of generic drugs, accounting for more than 25 percent of generic drugs produced globally. It also accounts for more than 60 percent of manufactured global vaccines – this huge manufacturing capacity gives India leverage and empowerment to meet global vaccine demands. The Serum Institute of India (SII) manufactures 1.5 billion vaccine doses every year from the company's manufacturing plant in Pune and is currently by far the largest vaccine maker in the

world, according to BBC News.

Pharmaceutical production costs in India are also among the lowest in the world. According to Hindustan Times, India's home-grown vaccine, Covaxin, costs barely \$4.06 per dose, compared to U.S. pharmaceuticals-made vaccines Novavax (\$15.35), Pfizer-BioNTech (\$19.80), and Moderna (\$25-\$37), Johnson & Johnson (\$10). Even when compared to Russia's vaccine, Sputnik V (\$10), China's Sinopharm (\$77.80), and Sinovac (\$14), India's Covaxin (\$4.06) appears to be the cheapest. Possessing the capacity to manufacture high-quality vaccines at very cost-effective rates has given India the ability to donate millions of doses to neighboring states and partners.

In a recent op-ed with Project Syndicate, Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general, former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, and current MP for the Indian National Congress, suggested that India's vac-

cine diplomacy should not be considered as purely "altruistic." Rather, India's vaccine diplomacy should be viewed as seeking to leverage its scientific and technological know-how for influence in the international system. He further urged developing countries to remember to pay the goodwill back when an opportunity arises, noting that "if and when the permanent seats at the United Nations Security Council are ever rearranged, grateful governments will know who has done the most to save a world reeling from the onslaught of a deadly pathogen."

Yet, India's vaccine diplomacy is not immune to challenges and pushbacks. Recently, several European and Asian countries temporarily suspended the roll-out and use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine over concerns that it may be causing blood clots in recipients. The World Health Organization refuted such claims, reassuring countries that the 'benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine outweigh

its risks and therefore recommends it." However, this has not deterred New Delhi from sending vaccines to more African countries. In fact, according to a recent report from the Hill, the biopharmaceutical company Ocugen Inc. expects to sell 100 million doses of India's Covaxin vaccine in the U.S. this year upon emergency use regulatory approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

As the United States and the European Union focuses on the inoculation of its citizens and China falters in meeting global demands, India has stepped up and is filling the void as a great power would. Their vaccine diplomacy continues to help mend relations with neighboring states like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and solidified relations with Cambodia, Seychelles, and Nepal – all states within its sphere of influence.

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ISRAEL

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The world's most pressing challenge is the rush to inoculate everyone against COVID-19 and achieve herd immunity. Some countries choose to exchange vaccines with foreign nations to reward compliant behavior, while others seek to help countries that do not have access to vaccines. The Soufan Center, a non-profit research center, calls this a "new arms race," states France 24. Amid this "vaccine diplomacy" race, Israel is demonstrating its power to the international community and stands as number one in global vaccine rollouts. The country vaccinated almost 60 percent of its residents over 16 years old with the first dose, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Multiple factors are contributing to Israel's success, including its large supply of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and

its national healthcare system, which requires all residents to pay taxes in exchange for medical services. However, there is a catch to Israel's quick vaccine response—consent and privacy. Israel made a deal with Pfizer and BioNTech to receive vaccine supplies partly in exchange for medical data for research. The country's health-management organizations also collect patient data, which allows for quick intervention to monitor those who are infected. To some, such as Israel Democracy Institute's senior fellow Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler, "it's frightening," and calls for "stricter rules in terms of asking for consent," reports The Wall Street Journal.

Despite the praise Israel receives for its vaccination efforts, there is growing controversy regarding the lack of Palestinian vaccinations under Israeli occupation. Israel is criticized for shipping

vaccines overseas as part of its vaccine diplomacy efforts, even as Palestinians remain unvaccinated. Israel sent shipments of extra vaccines to allies supporting a one-state solution and states that have or intend to move their embassies to Jerusalem, such as Guatemala and Honduras. According to Reuters, Israel shipped 5,000 vaccines to Honduras and several thousand to the Czech Republic to engage in vaccine diplomacy. Even though the Czech Republic supports a two-state solution, the country is one of Israel's biggest supporters. Additionally, last month, Israel paid Russia to purchase vaccines for the Syrian regime in exchange for an Israeli captive, despite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that "not one Israeli vaccine" was sent to Syria, reports the Associated Press.

Recently, however, Israel sent 5,000 vaccines to Palestinians in the West

Bank. NBC News cites Caitlin Proctor, an associate of the Migration Policy Centre, who explains that the vaccines are only a "drop in the ocean" for Gaza's two million residents. Israel also agreed to vaccinate the 100,000 Palestinians who work in Israel.

Other countries have stepped in to assist Palestinians with vaccinations. While Israel is shipping vaccines overseas, China and India, both of whom are exporters of the vaccine, are planning to send doses to the West Bank and Gaza. The European Union also pledged to provide 20 million euros to supply vaccines for Palestinians, says The Jerusalem Post. Russia donated 10,000 doses of their Sputnik V vaccine, while the United Arab Emirates donated 40,000 doses of the Russian vaccine on March 11, according to Reuters.

The debate regarding Israel's responsibility

to vaccinate Palestinians depends on which perspective is being examined—through the Oslo Accords or the Geneva Accords. NBC News says that the Oslo Accords, signed in the early 1990s, are a set of agreements between the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization which gives the Palestinian Authority limited responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza. Under this agreement, Israel would not need to provide vaccines, as healthcare responsibilities would rely on the Palestinians. However, Al Jazeera adds that Israel is required to enforce "the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics" under the Fourth Geneva Convention in its role as an occupying power. Additional tension arose recently when Palestin-

ians accused Israel of "political interference" for hindering a shipment of Russia's vaccine donations intended for Gaza at a military checkpoint, reports The Washington Post.

Despite the issues and questions that arise about vaccine diplomacy and who holds the crown in the new "arms race," the virus makes no distinction between countries and transcends all global boundaries.

"To me, health should be beyond politics," Palestinian Health Minister Mai al-Kaila tells The Washington Post. "We and the Israelis, the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Egyptians, we are all in the same region. We should reach herd immunity together."

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RUSSIA

Luisa Chainferber
Senior Correspondent

The global effort against COVID-19 is intensifying as countries race to vaccinate their populations and use vaccine diplomacy to improve relations with foreign nations. Russia's Sputnik V vaccine now has emergency authorization in more than 30 countries and a peer-reviewed efficacy rate of 91.6 percent in Phase 3 trials, reports the New York Times Vaccine Tracker. Researchers are currently working on a single-dose version of Sputnik V, which would be called "Sputnik Light."

On its official website, the vaccine's producers note that Sputnik V was the first registered COVID-19 vaccine in the world. The vaccine is now being produced in several countries such as India, South Korea, Kazakhstan, and Brazil. While the website explains that the price per dose can vary due to logistics and production costs, it sets the maximum price per

dose at \$10, and markets Sputnik V as the "vaccine for all mankind."

Despite its branding, Russia's vaccine is facing skepticism globally, reports the Washington Post. Russia is fighting claims by the U.S. State Department that Moscow's intelligence agencies sought to politicize Sputnik's Western competitors by publishing false information online about Western vaccines.

Like other countries, Russia is seeking to gain geopolitical momentum from its COVID-19 vaccine. For example, while Western pharmaceutical companies are charging African states more than double the per-dose price they charge for wealthier countries, Moscow offered the African Union 300 million doses of its vaccine as well as a financing package, reports the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

This offer can be interpreted as a geopolitical move, as both China and Russia started to seek ways to meet African countries' vaccination

needs following the lack of Western interest in the region, reports Reuters. The Russian Direct Investment Fund, which is responsible for the international marketing of Russia's vaccine, admitted that "Africa is one of the key markets for Sputnik V." The offers made to African countries could become some of the largest vaccine contracts to date, even though the offer occurred while Russia itself was still struggling to start its national vaccination campaign, reports Reuters on an earlier news piece.

Besides African nations, Russia is also reaching Latin American states through vaccine diplomacy. According to CNN, Russia already delivered vaccines to Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Paraguay. As countries lifted lockdowns and sought vaccines, Sputnik V became an attractive option for Latin America given its lower price compared to other vaccines, such as the Pfizer-BioNTech.

Given the limited sup-

ply of Western vaccines, Moscow found itself with an opportunity to gain geopolitical influence in South America, reports the Wall Street Journal. Thomas Shannon, a former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, noted, "What the coronavirus has done and what the vaccines have done is give Russia another opportunity to build relationships in South America," which had weakened following the end of the Cold War.

In Europe, which is traditionally more skeptical of Russia, Sputnik V is

gaining more acceptance despite initial criticisms regarding Moscow's quick approval of the vaccine. Thomas Mertens, head of Germany's standing commission on vaccination, said that Sputnik V is "a good vaccine that will presumably also be approved in the EU at some point," reports the Guardian.

Additionally, according to the Associated Press, Russia signed a deal with Italy on March 10 to begin the production of Sputnik V for the first time in the European Union. While the European Medicines

Agency expressed concerns regarding the safety of Moscow's vaccine and compared it to "Russian roulette," countries in the EU such as Slovakia and Hungary are already seeking to obtain the vaccine. Despite the concerns for the political implications of the Russian vaccine, many experts emphasize the importance of different vaccines, including Sputnik V, to ensure a faster vaccination campaign globally.

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Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine is being exported to South America, Africa, and Asia.
Courtesy of Flickr

“BURQA BAN” IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Shweta Parthasarathy
Staff Writer

Switzerland joined several other European countries in banning burqas, niqabs, and other face coverings in public. This so-called “burqa ban” and those that came before it are highly controversial and inspired debate over religious freedoms and secularism, all of course, complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the biggest issues many people have with the bans is that it infringes on the religious freedoms of the Islamic community. According to the BBC, many supporters, including The Netherlands’ Prime Minister Mark Rutte, claim the ban is “religious-neutral,” because they reportedly ban not only burqas and some other traditional Muslim face-coverings, but also balaclavas, helmets, and anything else that impedes identification. However, The Islamic Central Council of Switzerland, a group dedicated to serving the Muslim community in Switzerland, said the ban was “Islamophobically motivated.” The group explained, reports NPR, that the decision to implement

the ban “is tearing open old wounds, expanding the principle of legal inequality and sending a clear signal of exclusion to the Muslim minority.” Human Rights Watch labeled the ban “discriminatory” and called it “the latest in a harmful trend.”

More interesting than the consequences, however, is the motivation behind these bans. Advocates of the law claim that the ban is meant to protect national security interests and the culture of these European countries. In fact, most of the laws do not mention burqas, niqabs, or Islam in any way. According to the BBC, the proposal in Switzerland did not mention Islam by name and was apparently aimed at stopping protesters and rioters from wearing masks.

Yet some prominent authorities have explained that the ban helps Muslim women assimilate into their home countries, while removing reminders of Islamic extremism. Walter Wobmann, the chairman of the Swiss referendum committee, explained that in

Switzerland, Muslim face coverings are “a symbol for this extreme, political Islam which has become increasingly prominent in Europe and which has no place in Switzerland.” He continued, “In Switzerland our tradition is that



Switzerland claims the “burqa” ban protects national security and culture.
Courtesy of Pixy

you show your face. That is a sign of our basic freedoms.”

Swiss People’s Party President Marco Chiesa further explained “The burqa creates a barrier between the person wearing it and the environment and thus prevents integration into society.”

Wobmann and Chiesa are not alone in this sentiment, according to the BBC. Austrian government officials have also

claimed that burqas stand in the way of the “open communication” vital to an “open society.”

Former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls called burkinis, a full-body swimsuit often used by Muslim women, “the

affirmation of political Islam in the public space,” and banned them in 2016.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the former president of France, said that burqas and niqabs oppress women and were therefore “not welcome” in France.

There is, overall, an understanding that while none of these bans overtly target Muslims, the implicit motivation is clearly to prevent Muslim women from wearing burqas.

And, what makes it worse, as with so many other issues in today’s world, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights another problem with the justification of the ban: what about a protective face mask?

To maintain what is arguably just a facade, lawmakers in many of these European countries made the ban purposefully vague, never mentioning which face coverings were allowed or prohibited. But the pandemic created a yet unanswered paradox – how can face coverings be mandated in one context, while also being prohibited in another?

Moana Genevey, a gender policy officer at the European Network of Equality Bodies (or Equinet), noted to EuroNews that the difference in legislation “when you cover your face for religious reasons and when you cover your face for health reasons” is seriously lacking.

According to the New York Times, , British schoolteacher Alia Jafar noted that wearing a protective mask and a baseball cap have the

same result as wearing a niqab - most of the face is covered, save the eyes. “It’s a big contradiction,” she said of the paradox created by the confluence of the ban and the pandemic.

The result, therefore, is an even larger controversy surrounding the ban. European governments created a double standard where an individual can be fined for wearing a face covering, but also for not. And this contradiction is inherently intertwined with the devious intentions behind these laws. No matter how hard politicians attempt to hide the motivations behind their laws, the consequences of those laws always tell the true story. In this case, it tells a story filled with discrimination, bias, stereotypes, and double standards.

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LEGALIZING MARIJUANA IN MEXICO CREATES A POWER TRIANGLE INVOLVING TRANSNATIONAL DRUG COMPANIES

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Mexico is positioned to become the world’s largest legal marijuana market in the world. On March 11, 2020, the lower house of Mexico’s Congress passed a bill legalizing recreational marijuana. This bill would “let users with a permit carry up to 28g and grow as many as eight plants at home for personal use,” according to BBC News. Currently, it is illegal to carry more than five grams in Mexico. This promising bill does not come without warning though, as it fails to address the violent history of Mexico’s cartel-led market. While the bill serves to promote the freedom of recreational marijuana usage to Mexico’s population of 127 million, its implications affect cartels, local growers, and transnational drug companies across the region. Additionally, the bill’s purpose is to reduce

violence in Mexico and increase the government’s ability to protect its people, but what does this really mean for the future of the drug trade?

Mexico is one of the few countries in the Western Hemisphere to consider legalizing recreational marijuana. If Congress passes this bill, it will join the small list of countries to legalize recreational marijuana, after Uruguay and Canada, reports the BBC. According to the New York Times, Mexico would be the world’s largest cannabis market, propelling its influence over the growing drug trade even further. While many opponents say this may increase cartel power, ruling party lawmaker Simey Olvera highlights the bill’s ability to dispel the false narrative that marijuana is dangerous to public health. This narrative marks an important distinction between the dangers of cartel-involvement and state behavior

in the drug trade. While state control of the drug trade through policing is marketed as safer than the notoriously cruel behavior of cartels to control trade, the duplicitous nature of controlling the trade reveals a bloodier truth than the bill suggests.

This bill comes at a complicated time in Mexico’s history of the cannabis trade, which stems back 100 years to the Mexican Revolution. Originating from a 1920 law banning marijuana, the drug which is largely grown by local indigenous farmers received the negative perception that it “could degenerate the race” and lead to “homicidal mania,” permanently marring the safe, recreational practice by many indigenous people, explains The Nation. This negative stigma was further amplified by the prejudicial foreign policy of former U.S. President Richard Nixon, who fueled the drug war between cartels through U.S.

law enforcement agents. Through aid and policy promotion, the U.S. systematically fought cartel influence in the Mexican states, cementing U.S. involvement in Mexican drug policy at the cost of thousands of innocent lives – this continues today through transnational drug companies, suggests the Associated Press.

Until now, the two main actors in the drug trade were influential cartels and government agencies. While the cartels retained domestic influence by controlling the production of cannabis through violent threats, U.S. agents aided the police tasked with bringing down the cartels. However, this led to hundreds of thousands of arrests of loosely-involved growers and couriers, resulting in the “public trust in police [dropping] quite low,” The Washington Post reports. As the Mexican government found legal ways of controlling the drug trade,

it took in funds from transnational drug companies, further alienating indigenous Mexican farmers. Drug companies from the U.S. and Canada are now “making investment decisions” on policies affecting the legal selling of the drug and watching this bill closely “with interest,” according to Al Jazeera. Now, as transnational drug companies move in to influence policy implementation, a frighteningly influential power triangle is forming, undermining the entire purpose of this bill and the 127 million Mexicans to be affected.

The question of legal recreational usage remains at the core of this bill. While it seeks to legalize marijuana, it that does not guarantee equal access and treatment for affected people. According to the Associated Press, the bill “would permit recreational use of marijuana, but establish a system of licenses required for the entire chain of production,

distribution, transformation, and sales.” These systems, in effect, would primarily benefit the influential people at the top of the system who are connected to government agencies and transnational drug companies. This proposed avenue further manipulates industry access to favor those connected to transnational companies, including the U.S. government, with oversight and control of the largest cannabis market in the world. If the bill were to have the proposed impact, it must allow the formation of an agency that provides equitable access to all Mexicans. While this is not likely to bring down any of the three major powers in the world’s largest drug trade, it may provide a more transparent approach to the legalization of marijuana and its subsequent trade.

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DEREK CHAUVIN’S TRIAL IS BEGINNING: WHAT HAS AMERICA LEARNED, AND HOW DO WE CONTINUE FORWARD?

Lylian Pagan
Staff Writer

On March 25, 2020, the world watched as George Floyd laid face down on a street outside a Minneapolis shop, pleading for his life. Floyd was accused of attempting to pay for cigarettes with a “fake” \$20 bill. Floyd was handcuffed and restrained by police officers, while then-Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin placed his knee on Floyd’s head and neck for 7 minutes and 46 seconds. Those moments, captured on spectators’ mobile cameras and shared on social media and the news, were Floyd’s final moments alive.

BBC News reports Floyd appeared cooperative at the beginning of the arrest and apologized repeatedly to the officers, but a struggle ensued when officers tried to put Floyd in their squad car. In response, officer Chauvin the “maximum restraint technique,” as per the Minneapolis PD training materials. Floyd never had the opportunity to defend himself in a court of law.

No one could have imagined the impact those final moments would have on America. In the aftermath of Floyd’s death, summer 2020 was defined by protests in major cities like New York, Chicago, and Portland. America

erupted – more specifically, Black America erupted with generations of fear, anger, and frustration driving people to protests in the streets. Floyd’s name became a rallying cry for protesters against police brutality and injustice, reports Newsweek. The Black community is over-policed for minor infractions that draw virtually no attention anywhere else, according to CBS News.

As the jury selection for Chauvin’s trial begins, what remains is an astounding mobilization by the Black community and allies, all the while Chauvin’s lawyer seeks to delay the trial until after Floyd’s family settles a 27 million lawsuit against the city of Minneapolis and the police department. The main shift is people who have not considered, or experienced police brutality are now faced with seeing it from the perspective of millions of Black Americans. Since Floyd’s death, a poll by Politico concludes six in ten white Americans now say racism is a “big problem” in society.

Moreover, Floyd’s killing reveals a greater problem between law enforcement and the Black community. This new outlook on race relations and police brutality brings hope for long-overdue change in police training.

So, where does that leave the U.S. since Floyd’s death? History.com says states are slowly removing the Confederate Statues are spread over 31 states plus the District of Columbia – far exceeding the 11 Confederate states that seceded at the outset of the Civil War. Police departments across the country are beginning to consider reform. On March 3, 2021, House lawmakers voted 220-212 to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a sweeping reform bill that would ban chokeholds and alter so-called qualified immunity for law enforcement, NPR reports. The legislation also redirects funding to community-based programs, opens the door to pursue claims of police misconduct, and excludes religious and racial profiling,

among other reforms.

Meanwhile, NFL reversed their opinion on taking a knee during the National Anthem by issuing an apology to Colin Kaepernick, who first led the silent protest among Black athletes and the Black community. Corporate America also took a stand on race relations, with companies like social media giant TikTok and tech giant IBM showing full support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

There is no doubt that police officers are faced with challenging responsibilities making the work they do important. No one wants to see their city burning down or police officers getting hurt. Good police officers should be respected and appreciated for what they give to maintain peace and security in the areas they patrol. However, what America is coming to realize is that the phrase “law and order” is used to justify abusive crackdowns on peaceful protestors puts Black Americans on edge for justifiable reasons. The pursuit of liberty and

justice cannot succeed in chaos.

The American people can no longer turn a blind eye to abuses against the Black community. Some will say that Floyd was a criminal with an extensive record and that Chauvin was doing his “job.” Others might say “Floyd should have obeyed orders”, while others might think those police officers had the right to restrain criminals by any means necessary. What Floyd and Chauvin have done is open the dialogue between white America and Black America. Let us not forget that Floyd did not have the opportunity to defend himself in court, while Chauvin has been given that privilege.

No matter your thoughts or feelings about Floyd or Chauvin, the death of Floyd changed the U.S., deeply and forever.

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After nearly a year, Chauvin’s long awaited trial is underway.
Courtesy of Flickr

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION MUST MAKE AMENDS FOR TRUMP’S MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Sebastian Kopec
Staff Writer

As the first half of President Joe Biden’s 100 days passes by, many are now beginning to analyze the trajectory of his term. The most recent airstrikes in Syria on February 25, 2021 against Iranian backed militias, have seemingly set the tone for his Middle Eastern policy. Many Americans and foreign policy analysts now wonder where the Biden Administration will go moving forward.

Targeted at multiple facilities in Eastern Syria, the retaliatory strike against the militias, Kait’ib Hezbollah (KH) and Kait’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS), sent a strong unilateral message to both Iran and American allies. In an official release by the Department of Defense, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby stated, “President Biden will act to protect American and Coalition personnel. At the same

time, we have acted in a deliberate manner that aims to de-escalate the overall situation in both eastern Syria and Iraq.” Departing from the Trump Administration’s general reluctance to continue their involvement in the ongoing conflict in Syria, the United States once again appears ready to aid its coalition partners in the region.

Unfortunately, for President Biden this shift is not seen favorably by either Syria or Iran, the latter of which the Biden Administration hoped to begin renegotiating the Nuclear Deal with. CNN reports “The Biden administration is disappointed after Iran rejected an offer by the European Union to partake in nuclear talks with the U.S. and the other signatories of the nuclear deal on Sunday, but said they remain open to diplomacy with Iran.” It is unlikely that Iran will be ready to trust the U.S. again anytime soon. Not only is the Trump Ad-

ministration’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Deal and assassination of General Soleimani still fresh in Iranian leadership’s mind, the Biden Administration has done nothing to begin rebuilding trust with Iran.

Sanctions still strangle Iran as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks havoc on Iranian citizens. According to NPR, “One of President Biden’s campaign promises — reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — is at a standstill. Iran has been ramping up its nuclear program and demanding that Biden lift economic sanctions imposed to deprive the regime of cash.” Unless the Biden Administration takes active steps to repair U.S.-Iranian relations, further talks will fail to produce meaningful results. More likely, however, as a senior state department official stated in an official briefing on the deal, “I know President Biden doesn’t think that the United States should take

steps simply for the — as an entry ticket to get back to the table with Iran.” It appears the road to a new Nuclear Deal will be a slow, diplomatic slog.

As for the Israel-Palestine conflict, more constructive solutions seem to be underway by the current Administration, marking a return towards working with American allies. Addressing a group of diplomats at the State Department, President Biden remarked, “I’ve asked my Middle East team to ensure our support for the United Nations-led initiative to impose a ceasefire, open humanitarian channels, and restore long-dormant peace talks.” To that end, it appears that Biden is extending a hand in good faith with Palestinian officials. “It is also reported to take a tougher stance on Israeli settlement activities and mentions efforts ‘to obtain a Palestinian commitment to end payments to individuals imprisoned (by Israel) for acts of ter-

rorism,” Reuters reports regarding a possible draft memo. Though not yet confirmed, this would be a very strong start to repairing U.S.-Palestinian relations. Though it risks angering Israel, a stable solution going forward requires the U.S. to broaden its coalition of allies in the region.

Though souring relations with Iran, the Syrian airstrikes sent a clear message to the international community. The U.S. returned to global affairs and is once again ready to

work with allies in finding grounded, diplomatic solutions to the crises of the past decade. However, in order to be successful, the Biden Administration must make amends for the previous administration and go beyond simple diplomatic measures if long-term solutions are to be reached with Iran or elsewhere.

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Following U.S. airstrikes in Syria, the Biden Administration has set the tone for Middle Eastern policy.
Courtesy of Flickr

HONG KONG DETAINS 47 ACTIVISTS IN CONTINUED
CRACKDOWN ON DEMOCRACY

Zachary Schullian
Staff Writer

On February 28, 47 pro-democracy protesters were arrested in Hong Kong on charges of conspiracy to commit subversion, The Associated Press reports. The news comes as yet another chapter in China’s quest to exert legal control over the former British colony. Prominent activists on social media, many of whom are in their 20s, have been primary targets for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) due to their influence over a wide audience. Last month, 55 other activists were arrested. The Washington Post explains that Hong Kong’s government enacted a law obliging loyalty to the CCP for anyone who seeks to run for political office in Hong Kong. The law, passed last June, criminalizes acts under broad terms such as “secession,” “subversion,” “terrorism,” and “collusion with

foreign forces.” This national security law was passed in Beijing without Hong Kong’s consultation, signifying Mainland China’s ever-increasing dominance over the island city. A Beijing-controlled election committee will not only have the power to decide who is allowed to hold positions of power, but also directly appoint “a large proportion” of the Legislative Council, BBC News reports. This makes it virtually impossible for any pro-democracy candidate to be elected to the Hong Kong legislature. The Wall Street Journal recorded Xia Baolong, Chief of Beijing office on Hong Kong affairs, as stating, “Those who violate Hong Kong’s national security law aren’t patriots.” Over the past year, China has been systematically overhauling democratic institutions and freedom of speech in the city. While Hong Kong’s independence officially

lasts until 2047, security laws and crackdowns by mainland China demonstrate Hong Kong’s weakening sovereignty. According to Al Jazeera, the arrest of 47 protesters displays the widest use of the China-imposed national security law to date, and those convicted of charges are often denied bail and face life in prison. Such large crackdowns demonstrate that

no matter the age or social standing, pro-democracy activists remain in danger of increasingly powerful Chinese authority. Many of those arrested for subversion were targeted for participating in an unofficial primary election last June. Many sought to elect a majority of pro-democratic candidates to Hong Kong’s legislature, but many of those candidates were

eventually disqualified from running for office. The elections were ultimately postponed under pressure from Beijing, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for the delay. China and Hong Kong called the attempt to fill the legislature with pro-democratic representatives an act meant to “overthrow” and “paralyze” the Hong Kong gov-

ernment, with subsequent arrests following on those deemed guilty on charges of “subversion.” Reuters reports that Hong Kong has dropped from the rankings of the Heritage Foundation’s Economic Freedom Index, on which it held the number one spot for twenty-five years. The think tank cited Beijing’s control over economic policies as the reason for the decline in the rankings. The Hong Kong Financial Minister responded by calling the decision “unwarranted” and “unjustified,” stating the policies are consistent under the “one country, two systems” rule instated in 1997. He also called the assessment “politically biased.”

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Hong Kong protestors fight tirelessly for political autonomy.
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



The Diplomatic Envoy



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