U.S. DEPENDS ON WITHDRAWAL TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN

Drew Starbuck
Staff Writer

U.S. President Joe Biden recently announced that he will withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by September 11, ending the United States’ 20-year war in Afghanistan, according to Al Jazeera. President Biden’s administration means that the United States will not abide by the earlier May 1 deadline set and negotiated under the Trump administration. A policy review conducted by the Biden administration determined it was “clear that withdrawing the remaining 2,500 troops [by the May 1 deadline] would be difficult and potentially unsafe,” furthers Al Jazeera.

The Biden administration’s decision has quickly been revised down from Republican politicians. U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell called Biden of planning to “turn tail and abandon the fight in Afghanistan,” reports Reuters. “P precipitously withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan is a grave mistake,” McConnell said, adding that effective counter-terrorism operations require presence and partners on the ground.

Currently, close to 2,500 U.S. soldiers are stationed in Afghanistan, compared to about the approximate- ly 100,000 American sol- diers who were stationed in the country during the surge in 2011, Reuters furthers. Throughout this 20-year long conflict, about 2,400 U.S. service members have been killed and many more thousands have been wounded, states Reuters.

Officials in Afghanistan are bracing for the with- draul. “We will have to survive the impact of it, and it should not be con- sidered as Taliban’s victory or takeover,” said a senior Afghan government source, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity. The proposed troop withdrawal has stirred Afghan fear of a Taliban mil- itary victory once American troops are out of the pic- ture. A UN report that came out the week of Biden’s an- nouncement stated there was a 29 percent increase in the number of civilians killed and injured during the first three months of 2021 compared to the same peri- od in 2020, with the Taliban Rahmani does not be- lieve now is the right time. The American intelli-gence community is also concerned about the poten- tial impacts from the troop withdrawal. Since former Biden administration of-

dicials disclosed the plans of the withdrawal, the U.S. intelligence community expressed unease about the fu- ture of the U.S.-backed gov- ernment in Kabul, which has steadily lost ground against the resurgent Tal- iban forces, states Al Jazeera.

“The Afghan government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the opposition withdraws support,” said the U.S. assessment, which was sent to Congress. “Kabul continues to face setbacks on the battlefield, and the Taliban is confident in the United States’ ability to leave. The Associated Press furthers.

In response to the antici- pated U.S. withdrawal, NATO is coordinating their own troop withdrawal. Sec- retary of State Anthony Blinken and Defense Sec- retary Lloyd Austin briefed NATO officials on the U.S. decision to withdraw in Brussels and quickly won support from the alli- ances states. The Associated Press.

The U.S. decision to withdraw will struggle to hold the Taliban in Kabul, for the “partnership is changing,” but the partnership is en- dangering,” according to NBC.

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IRANIAN NUCLEAR FACILITY ATTACKED, TEHRAN VOWS REVENGE

Joshua Powanda
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Iranian Foreign Min-
ist Mohammad Javad Zarif has vowed to “vex revenge” against those re- sponsible for a cyber-attack on an Iranian nuclear production facility in Na- tanz. NBC News explains that an explosion inside the facility cut off electricity to both the central and back- up power systems. Not only did the attack damage many critical centrifuges, but the lack of power has forced work to cease at the facility.

The attack comes at a pinnacle moment in the indirect U.S.-Iran negotia- tions in Vienna. After the Biden Administration ex- pressed their willingness to come back to the nego- tiating table following America’s previous with- drawal from the contro- versial Iran Nuclear Deal, the EU spearheaded unof- ficial talks between the two nations. The New York Times reports that this is a serious blow to Iran’s attempts to gain leverage in the negotiations, which they had hoped to do by increasing their nuclear production.

According to Al Jazeera, Tehran has condemned the attack as an act of “nucle- ar terrorism” perpetrated by Iran’s enemies, most notably Israel. This attack is only the most recent in a series of reported Israeli- attempts to sabotage the Iranian nuclear weapons program.

A history of sub- stanting Iran’s nuclear am- bitions is extensive. The Associated Press explains that the Natanz facility has been the target of similar attacks in the past. In 2010, the Stuxnet computer vi- rrus, which was discovered and widely believed to be a joint U.S.-Israel creation, was used to disrupt and de- stroy Iranian centrifuges at the Natanz facility. More recently, the same site ex- perienced a mysterious explosion at its advanced centrifuge facility in July of 2020, which was also cred- ited to Israel. It has also been reported that Israeli intelligence carried out the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran’s lead- ing nuclear scientist, in late 2020.

Unlike the previous attacks for which Israeli interference is suspected, Israeli news outlets have been open about the in- volvement of Mossad, Is- rael’s intelligence agency, in the explosion at Natanz. According to The Jeru- salem Post, not only was Mossad behind the attack, but the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Lt. Gen. Aviv Ko- havi, hinted to Israeli in- volvement, describing the IDF’s actions throughout the Middle East as not be- ing “hidden from our en- emies’ vision.” He contin- ued by highlighting Israel’s operational achievements, saying “by virtue of clever operational activities, the past year was one of the most secure years” for the Israeli people.

Although the goal of the attack was ultimately to deter the regrowth of the Iranian nuclear program, it may have many unforeseen implications. Along with the safety risk of driving an already sensitive pro- gram further underground, CNN reports that Iran has announced it will begin to enrich uranium at a much higher level than before the attacks against Natanz. Tehran plans to increase enrichment from 20 per- cent to 60 percent enrich- ment, much closer to the 90 percent needed to de- velop a nuclear bomb. The Biden Administration has referred to the measure as a “provocative announce- ment” that calls into ques- tion Tehran’s seriousness about nuclear negotiations in Vi- enna. Iran has long maintained that its nuclear program is peaceful and aimed at ener- gy development. However, due to the fact that Irani- an leaders have long called for the destruction of the “Zionists,” Israel sees in- creased nuclear activity as an existential threat. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vehemently opposed any return to the previous Iran Nuclear Deal and seeks to prevent the Iranian issue on his own terms.

Despite these recent moves in the conflict, The New York Times explains that the latest offensive action against the Natanz nuclear facility highlights a growing issue for the Iranian regime. Because of the level and scope of the attack, Iran has begun to suggest the destruction of the highest level of its se- curity apparatus. The Ira- nian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has been both for securing nuclear sites and protecting nuclear scientists, may face internal backlash from the regime.

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The Diplomatic Envoy
Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was able to avoid a security situation that the authorities are attempting to create a bad narrative around the life of an asylum seeker in Denmark. However, it is not clear how this will come under international criticism for its decision to revoke Syrian refugees’ residency permits. It is the first European country to do so. This is especially surprising given that Denmark was the first country to sign the United Nations Refugee Convention in 1952, according to VICE.

NPR explains that this decision was preceded by a 2019 Danish report claiming that the security situation in some parts of Syria has “improved significantly.” Yet, according to The Guardian, many international human rights organizations have criticized this analysis, stating that the security situation has only appeared to improve because the repressive regime under Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been able to retain control of the area. “The very reason the general level of violence in greater Damascus has fallen is that it has come under the full control of one of the most [violent and] notoriously repressive regimes,” said Villads Zahle, a communications officer at the European Council for Refugees and Exiles, an umbrella organization that protects the rights of refugees in Europe, according to VICE. “It makes no sense that the authorities would send back Syrian refugees to an area controlled by a government they don’t recognize and refuse to cooperate with due to their human rights abuses.” Since Denmark does not recognize Assad’s government, it cannot deport refugees to Syria. Therefore, most refugees have been sent to “detention centers” where residents can choose to either live indefinitely, voluntarily go back to Syria, or “go underground” to another European country, NFR reports. As of now, this policy only affects people from certain areas of Syria who were initially granted asylum because they were escaping civil war, according to The Associated Press. The policy does not apply to individuals who can point to a specific threat to their lives, such as men who would potentially face conscription into Assad’s army.

The policy’s exception means that it has disproportionately affected women and children. Single women are typically sent to the Kaershovedgaard deportation center, where even simple activities, such as cooking, are prohibited. Many human rights activists have described the centers as prisons, with the only difference being that residents can go out in the daytime, the Associated Press reports. This policy has been criticized as demonstrating the country’s increasingly racist and right-leaning immigration policy. According to The Washington Post, Denmark has also applied this policy to Somali refugees of whom have since been forced “underground.” The thousands of Syrian refugees currently residing in Denmark had originally been attracted to the country for its historically welcoming stance on refugees. Yet according to Michala Bendixen, head of the Danish refugee advocacy group Refugees Welcome, this is precisely the reputation that the government is hoping to get rid of.

“We have a new expression now among migrant researchers called ‘negative nation branding,’” she explained to NPR. Bendixen added that the government is attempting to create a bad narrative around the life of an asylum seeker in Denmark, hoping to discourage others. Denmark is trying to create the impression that asylum seekers think that “you should never feel safe or secure about your future here, because even if you are among the lucky ones who are granted asylum, you will be locked out sooner or later.” In a maneuver to capture the populist vote from the conservative Danish People’s Party, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was able to avoid a security situation that the Social Democrats by maintaining a staunch anti-immigration policy, The Washington Post reports.

According to Al Jazeera, Denmark has stated a goal of attracting “zero asylum seekers.” It has also instituted a policy which offers special grants for Syrian returnees, though the offer has only been accepted by 137 Syrians.

Coronavirus was the first country in Europe to grant refugees asylum. It is the only asylum seeker in Denmark, hoping to discourage others. Denmark is trying to create the impression that asylum seekers think that “you should never feel safe or secure about your future here, because even if you are among the lucky ones who are granted asylum, you will be locked out sooner or later.” In a maneuver to capture the populist vote from the conservative Danish People’s Party, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was able to avoid a security situation that the Social Democrats by maintaining a staunch anti-immigration policy, The Washington Post reports.

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Sinovac’s Efficacy Remains Unclear After Trials

Lauren-Marie Diawalan Staff Writer

On April 11, 2021, the director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Gao Fu, acknowledged that China’s domestically produced vaccines offer little protection against COVID-19. The Associated Press. According to BBC News, Gao explained that the vaccine process could be improved by increasing the number of doses each person is given or by mixing different vaccines. However, he rescinded the comment in a statement to Global Times, a state-run media outlet, saying that all of the world’s vaccines, not just China’s, have varying protection rates. BBC News further that Gao emphasized that improving vaccine efficacy “is a question that needs to be considered by scientists around the world.” China has produced four different vaccines, and 100 million Chinese citizens have received an initial vaccine dose. Sinovac is a major producer of China’s COVID-19 vaccines, reports BBC News. Sinovac’s vaccine, CoronaVac, exposes the body to the virus by injecting dead virus particles to avoid a disease response. Like the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, CoronaVac can be refrigerated at 2-8 degrees Celsius, while Western vaccines Moderna and Pfizer must be kept at -20 degrees Celsius and -70 degrees Celsius, respectively.

In contrast to Sinovac’s inoculation method, Moderna and Pfizer are mRNA vaccines, injecting the patient with some of the virus’ genetic code to trigger the body into producing proteins to prepare the immune system to recognize and attack the virus itself. Associate Professor Luo Dahai of the Nanyang Technological University explains that CoronaVac’s traditional inoculation method is more successful in comparison to mRNA vaccines, which are a “new type of vaccine” with “greatly no successful example of them being used in the population.” Brazilian trials of Sinovac’s vaccine reported an efficacy rate of 50.7 percent, a rate that is barely above the established 50 percent threshold to receive approval from the World Health Organization, says The Economist. In contrast, a real-world trial only reported the vaccine to be 49.6 percent effective against symptomatic cases, falling to 3.1 percent when asymptomatic cases were included. However, results from later-stage trials in Turkey reported an efficacy of 83.5 percent. Bloomberg News states that while the vaccine’s effectiveness is barely above the WHO’s threshold, its 100 percent efficacy in moderate to severe coronavirus cases is highly valuable for a vaccine. The vaccine results between Brazil, Indonesia, and Turkey are difficult to compare due to the varying trial procedures, as well as the P1 variant present in Brazil. It is unclear if CoronaVac could be used to reach herd immunity due to factors such as protection from virus transmission and different variants. Using a less effective vaccine requires more people to be vaccinated. Reuters reports that a recent emergency use trial from Chile says that Sinovac was 67 percent effective against asymptomatic infection and 80 percent effective against death. Chilean Vice Trade Minister Rodrigo Yáñez said the trial results are “a game changer for the vaccine.” In Chile, and he emphasized that it “ratifies quite graphically the discussion over its efficacy.” The trade minister made a deal with Sinovac to hold its clinical trials and buy 60 million doses of the drug over the next three years. BBC News says that CoronaVac is only fully authorized by China. The highest importers of the vaccine in Asia are Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, and the Philippines. In Latin America Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador have purchased the shot. In Africa, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Benin, Tunisia, and Somalia have already received shots from China. On April 15, the World Health Organization-Europe vaccination expert Siddharta Datta reported that the WHO was communicating with Sinovac and considering establishing a platform, while in Latin America Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador have purchased the shot. In Africa, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Benin, Tunisia, and Somalia have already received shots from China. On April 15, the World Health Organization-Europe vaccination expert Siddharta Datta reported that the WHO was communicating with Sinovac and considering establishing a platform, while in Latin America Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador have purchased the shot. In Africa, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Benin, Tunisia, and Somalia have already received shots from China.

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

1,800 INMATES ESCAPE IN NIGERIAN PRISON BREAK

Kristen McGuire
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In the early hours of April 5, gunmen attacked the Okwuri Custodial Centre in Imo State, a region in Southeast Nigeria, freeing over 1,800 inmates, according to BBC News. The New York Times explains that the attack on the prison was just one of a series of attacks against several police and military facilities that have taken place since late February.

There have been several different types of responses by Nigerian officials in the wake of the attack. The Minister of Interior, Rauf Aregbeso, has promised that no inmate who returns voluntarily will be charged with unlawful escape. The New York Times further states that prison officials are attempting to “facilitate the recovery effort,” for their statement. However, as of April 23, only a small number of escapees have returned.

Other officials have taken a harsher tone in response to the attack. According to The New York Times, Mohammed Adamu, the former inspector-general of police, reportedly instructed his officers to “deal with [attackers] ruthlessly” and “unleash your full arsenal on them.” Similarly, aggressive rhetoric was used by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, who denounced the attack on the Okwuri facility as an act of terrorism and accused the separatist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) of orchestrating it. IPOB spokesman Emmanuel Ekwe不仅仅是 the allegations of involvement by IPOB and their paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network, in a statement, asserting, “[We] have no business with the said attacks…It is not our mandate to attack security personnel or prison facilities.”

Hostility towards IPOB, which was declared a terrorist organization in 2017, and the Nigerian government has persisted for years, according to The Associated Press. A 2016 Amnesty International report found that Nigerian security forces committed “gross human rights violations” the year prior when it suppressed demonstrations by supporters of IPOB, killing at least 150 peaceful protesters. The Wall Street Journal explains that the two parties also clashed again earlier this year in Orlu, which led the Nigerian military to conduct airstrikes before a cease-fire was eventually called.

Tensions between the two parties originate from the Nigerian Civil War that took place from 1967 to 1970, according to BBC News. A military coup in 1966, during which a number of prominent political figures were assassinated by mostly ethnically Igbo officers, was followed by months of massacres against Igbo people living in Northern Nigeria. The BBC News explains that this caused a mass movement of Igbo people to the east, who eventually seceded to create the independent state of Biafra. However, this independence was short-lived. Following almost three years of civil war, the separatist leaders were forced to surrender, and Biafra once again became a part of Nigeria. Despite this failed attempt, some still hold out hope of creating an independent Biafra again, especially in the southeast region of the country.

Quelling separatist efforts is just one problem that President Buhari and his government faces in a country that is growing increasingly unstable internally. VOA News describes that other threats include ongoing jihadist insurgencies in the Northeast, banditry, and a spree of kidnappings. These matters reflect the far deeper-seeded issues of religious divisions between the Muslim-majority North and Christian-majority South and the struggles of the central government to maintain internal security in the African nation.

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JAPAN TO DUMP WATER FROM FUKUSHIMA INTO PACIFIC OCEAN

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The Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) is on track to release over a million tons of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean as part of its cleanup efforts. The first release is anticipated to begin in 2023, with the total process expected to last over a decade. The move comes as water continues to accumulate, despite the plant being decommissioned following a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

The infamous incident damaged the plant’s nuclear reactors and cooling systems, forcing more than 150,000 people to evacuate the area. Amid increasing water levels over the years since, the plant’s 1.37 million ton-capacity is expected to be filled by late 2024. forcing TEPCO into action, reports CNBC.

The water, which is a mixture of fluids used to cool the core of nuclear reactors, is expected to be filtered through a complex treatment system designed to reduce dangerous levels of radioisotopes to trace amounts. The treatment, however, cannot separate tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen. Experts consider tritium to be harmless in small amounts and internationally accepted levels will be achieved by diluting the tainted water before pumping it into the ocean, Reuters reports.

Scientists have said that with dilution, the treated water poses no scientifically detectable risk. Since tritium has a half-life of around 12 years, it will only take a matter of decades to disappear from the environment. However, radiation from tritium can still be ingested, albeit the scientific consensus is that it does not pose a threat to human health, according to CNBC.

According to The Economist, both the United States and the IAEA have endorsed this approach, noting it is “both technically feasible and in line with international practice.” However, while Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has claimed that the decision is Japan’s most realistic option, the later has been met with fierce criticism from both domestic and international actors, reports VOA.

South Korea called the decision “utterly intolerable” and accused Japan of taking “unilateral action” without regard for its neighbors. China has also cited “grave concerns” and reserved the right to take further action if Japan continues without consulting the international community. According to CNBC, South Korean President Moon Jae-in has gone as far as to call for officials to find ways of referring Japan’s move to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas.

Concerns have also been raised over the environmental impact of the decision, residents of Fukushima fear it will destroy the local fishing industry which is already suffering after a decade of self-imposed limits. Moreover, The New York Times reports that a national poll issued by The Asahi Shimbun found 55 percent of respondents opposed the water dumping. Such criticism has been dismissed by Japan as unscientific, noting that releasing treated water into oceans is a routine practice among nuclear plants around the world. The IAEA confirmed that releasing into the ocean is a disposal method utilized by other plants around the world. Moreover, a nuclear engineering professor, Brent Heuser, who spoke to CNBC, claimed the decision is “simply not a concern” and will have “zero environmental impact,” despite concerns from international environmental groups. Rather, Heuser suggests environmental focus remains on plastic pollution.

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Voters in Ecuador elected Guillermo Lasso, a conservative bank-er, to serve as president for the next four years. Lasso won the runoff election with just 52.5 percent of the votes, re-porting the Economist, after claiming a spot in the runoff with a lead of a half a percentage point. Lasso defeated Andres Arauz, a left-leaning pol-ician, in a nationwide turn away from liberalism. According to The Associ-ated Press, Arauz is widely con-sidered the protege of former President Ra-fael Correa, who reportedly be-came increasingly authoritarian towards the end of his decade-long term. Correa was recently im-prisoned after being embroiled in a cor-rup-tion scandal. Correa was succeeded by Lenín Moreno, who did not seek re-election this year.

Guillermo Lasso, former governor of Guayas, Ecuador. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

National discontent towards Correa, Moreno, and their leftist policies allowed Lasso to gain the upper hand, although he will face strong Correista opposition in Congress as his term begins. Accord-ing to Reuters, Arauz was convicted in absentia on bribery charges, which, along with his strong con-nections to the apparently corrupt Correa, created an air of suspicion and helped Lasso win. Arauz conceded, despite earlier statements from his camp-aign claiming election fraud, and wished Lasso luck. Arauz called the result “an electoral snub, but not a political or moral de-feat” and said it was time to “move on, build brid-ges, and create consensus,” according to BBC News. Lasso’s primary objec-tive for the beginning of his presidency is to kick-start Ecuador’s economy, which, describes The As-sociated Press, was a ma-jor point of contention between the presidential candidates. “The first action will be to put the economy in order, pro-mote investment and gen-erate employment to the extent that all Ecuadorians do not emigrate, stay in Ecuador and achieve the dreams they want for their fami-lies here,” said Lasso at a recent press conference. According to NBC News, Lasso advocated for a free-market eco-nomy in his campaign, while Arauz supported a return to a more so-cialist economy. Lasso’s goal is to eliminate the national deficit without increasing value-added taxes. “We are not go-ing to raise taxes, we will not raise VAT,” Lasso explained. “We must be ambitious and achieve a zero deficit in four years of government. We will not depend on debt.” Lasso has proposed several other ideas that are meant to boost Ec-uador’s economy, contin-ues NBC News. He will reportedly soon propose new risk-sharing contracts with private companies in Ecuador’s oil sector, but he reassured companies that he would respect all current contracts. He also pledged to pursue free trade agreements with the United States, China, and other major actors in the global economy in order to attract investment in Ecuador’s companies and infrastructure. Lasso has promised to eliminate the national deficit and create jobs through his conser-vative economic policies.

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Sarah Hyser Staff Writer

A series of devastat-ing volcanic eruptions on the island of St. Vincent has forced thousands to flee. According to BBC News, the volcano La Soufrière first erupted on Thursday, April 9, after a series of earthquakes, with the most devastat- ing eruption happening the morning of Monday, April 12. The volcano is emitting a 20,000-foot cloud of smoke, ash, and superheated noxious gas that can travel over 120 miles per hour. Scientists speculate that this erup-tion could continue for weeks or even months. Earthquakes have continued throughout the week, but the eruptions have slowed down. This lack of activity could indicate the building of a “lava dome” within the volca-no, although this has not been confirmed. No ca-sualties or serious injuries have been reported thus far.

Ralph Gonsalves, prime minister of St. Vin-cent and the Grenadines, ordered the complete evacuation of the “Red Zone” in the North East and North West areas of St. Vincent nearest to the volcano. Gonsalves is calling for a total evacua-tion of the affected areas and warns that it could be months before residents can return to their homes. Business Insider reports that citizens are being evacuated to the neighboring islands of St. Lucia, Grenada, Barba-dos, and Antigua. Howev-er, due to the COVID-19 pandem-ic, only residents who have been vaccinated are being accepted on the other islands.

Disaster prepared-ness in the Caribbean is usually well-organized, but the rapid develop-ments of this situation have strained the disaster response teams. 16,000 people have already been evacuated from the area according to The As-sociated Press. Near-ly 4,000 residents have tak-en refuge in 80 govern-ment-run shelters. Doz-ens of residents had to be rescued from the North end of the island after not evacuating in time, NPR reports. Cruise ships from Carnival and Royal Caribbean arrived to the island to hold residents who cannot find shelter. St. Vincent is running out of clean water and dam-age to power lines has led to blackouts.

La Soufrière is ex-pe-riencing pyroclastic flow, meaning it is spewing gas, ash, and debris at high speeds. This is more dan-gerous than lava, which is slow moving and con-tained. The ash fall is so intense that it has blocked out sunlight over St. Vincent. NewswEEK re-port-s that ash from La Soufrière can be seen falling on the island of Barbados, which is over 100 miles away from St. Vincent. Volcanic ash is known to have dam-ag ing effects to health, particularly lung health, which poses a threat as COVID-19 continues to impact the island. The ash has caused damage to property as well, with St. Vincent officials estim-at-ing that it will take mil-lions of dollars to recover from the damage, accord-ing to The Washington Post. NPR explains that pyroclastic flows can also impact the environment by boiling the surround-ing sea water and increas-ing cloud speed. Falling ash and pyroclastic flows are able to contaminate the water supply and demolish crops on St. Vincent.

This is not the first time La Soufrière has erupted. According to National Geographic, the volcano erupted at the begin-ning of the 20th cen-tury, killing 1600 people. It last erupted in 1979, but has been inactive since. However, based on the patterns of the previous eruptions, the volcano is now expected to have continuous activity for the next several months. Citizens of the island are remaining hopeful that this eruption will be less devastating than the pre-vious ones.

La Soufrière is not the only volcano that is currently erupting. ABC News reports that Mauna Loa, the world’s largest volcano located in Hawaii, has also started erupting after 34 earthquakes in the past week. The Geldingadalur Volcano in Iceland is also erupting. Volcano experts say that this amount of activity is for a good treatment for Ecuadorians living abroad and mistreating foreign-ers living in Ecuador.”

Lasso’s election win rep-re-sents a shift towards con servatism and away from the liberalism Ecuador has pursued for years, with millions of people hold-ing out hope that Lasso’s conservative policies will revive Ecuador’s economy. Lasso has so far demon-strated his commitment to improving the economy and praised Ecuadorians for turning the tide: “Ecu-adoreans used their right to vote to choose a new course, very different to that of the past 14 years.”

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St. Vincent expects to experience many months of volcanic activity. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
Heads of State from Ukraine and Turkey Meet Amid Tensions With Russia

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According to The Associated Press, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul in early April to discuss matters of national security and the de-escalation of tensions surrounding the Black Sea region. The meeting between the two heads of state occurred as reports of a build-up of tens of thousands of Russian troops along the eastern Ukrainian border flooded international news headlines. Ukraine and Turkey, both European Union (EU) membership-seeking countries, have had their fair share of conflicts against Russia over the past decade. There are two key differences between the countries, however. Turkey is a full-fledged NATO member, and has been engaged in only proxy conflicts with Russia in recent years. Ukraine, on the other hand, is not a NATO member and has been engaged in a seven-year long conflict, fighting Russian backed-troops and paramilitar- ies within its borders. Since 2014, there have been 29 ceasefires in an attempt to bring peace to the Donbass region. Nevertheless, fighting persists to this day and has caused the deaths of an estimated 14,000 people since 2014.

In a joint press conference, Zelensky said, “I informed the Turkish parties in detail about the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine: Donbas and Crimea in particular about the violation of human rights on the peninsula and its ongoing militarization.” He also asserted that Tur- key’s support was critical to the “restoration” of the war-torn eastern prov- inces. Turkish President Erdogan responded by saying “We do not wish the escalation of tensions in our shared geography under any circumstance.” Ukraine and Turkey have made numerous trade, energy, and de- fense agreements, in ad- dition to establishing a passport-free travel zone in 2017, according to Al Jazeera. Both countries share similarities in opposing Russian expan- sion in the region, despite disagreeing over certain issues such as in Syria, Libya, or Nagorno-Karabakh.

Despite Turkey’s purchase of the S-400 missile system and Erdogan’s relation- ships with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia and Turkey have been essentially engaged in a cold war for decades, according to Al Jazeera. Differences such as the use of Russian-made rockets in Syria and Libya have proven that Turkey is willing to engage in con- flict to pursue its ambition as a top regional power. Soon after the two leaders held their meetings in Istanbul, Russian President Putin invited Ukraine and Turkey to attend a NATO Summit in early April to discuss the “restoration” of the Black Sea and that, “we are constantly looking to see how we can step up and provide more practi- cal support to Ukraine.” Erdogan responded by saying “We do not wish to Turkey, Erdogan told reporters that Turkey is “not picking sides” regard- ing the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. He also warned other countries to refrain from feeding what he called “belligerent sen- timent” into Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia insists it has no intention of invading Ukraine. Foreign Ministry spokes- woman Maria Zakharova described the idea as part of a “propaganda cam- paign.” She noted, “Russia is not interested in fueling a civil war in Donbas and will do everything to protect its citizens and ensure peace,” according to The Washington Post.

New Zealand Passes Legislation for Paid Miscarriage Leave

Shawn Tuman
Staff Writer

There has long been a positive correlation be- tween employer support and productivity in the workplace. In response to this, Employment New Zealand reports that New Zealand’s parliament recently passed legislation that provides a mandat- ed, three-day paid time off policy to women and spouses who have ex- perienced a miscarriage during their pregnancy.

This legislation, brought forth by Mem- ber of Parliament (MP) Ginny Anderson, has been a long time com- ing. Concerning a Global Legal Monitor, it was first proposed in parliament in June 2019, after being drawn from the members’ ballot in 2018. The initiative was championed by MP An- derson, who has served as a dedicated advocate after having experience a miscarriage herself. On many occasions, MP An- derson was, and contin- ues to be, an active voice speaking out on behalf of women and couples who have suffered miscarria- ges across New Zealand. One to two out of every ten pregnant women in New Zealand have suf- fered a miscarriage, The New York Times reports. After a miscarriage, many women and cou- ples were left without the proper support systems with only sick days avail- able to both potential- ly bury their miscarried child and grieving. This legislation puts New Zea- land’s workforce at the forefront of developed nations by having such miscarriage laws in place. Currently, the United States does not have any comparable legislation. In respect to putting forth laws and regulations regarding various types of employer support in 2020 legislation, according to NPR, demonstrates how this may positively and directly impact long-term worker happiness and productivi- ty. New Zealand is not the only country with such legislation. The Washing- ton Post describes that Australia, Britain, India, and the Philippines all offer a variety of PTO op- tions for women who suf- fer a miscarriage between 12 and 24 weeks of preg- nancy and, in some cases, their spouses as well.

The recently enact- ed legislation approving three days of PTO guar- antees for employees who have suffered a miscar- ria ge after the minimum 20-week gestation period is considered by some to be a step in the right di- rection toward providing New Zealand’s parliament passed legislation mandating at least three days of paid miscarriage leave. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

adequate healthcare for employees in New Zealand.

Nevertheless, it is im- portant to note that even the strongest advocates of this legislation, such as pregnancy loss educator, Vicki Collins, feel that this is the beginning of a pow- erful movement. When interviewed about the bill passing, she responded, “I’m celebrating it,” […] “but I want to see us keep- ing this compassion going and looking further into the needs of these par- ents,” According to NPR.

This statement rings strong with hope that law makers in New Zealand and else- where will continue to remain cognizant. NPR con- tinues, that when addressing such sensitive matters, MP Anderson emphasized, “Grief is not a sickness, it is a loss. And loss takes time.”

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New Zealand's parliament passed legislation mandating at least three days of paid miscarriage leave. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

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Catalonia

Kiara McGaughy Staff Writer

The Spanish autonomous region of Catalonia is one with its own rich and distinct culture, customs, and language developed over thousands of years. Catalan separatist movements have strengthened their presence and reignited the debate of whether there should be an autonomous Catalan state.

Catalonia has seen multiple separatist movements and rebellions as far back as the 17th century. In the 20th century, the region's freedoms were stripped after the Spanish civil war led by fascist dictator Francisco Franco. Spain.gazette.com reports that “independence was repressed when the Spanish central government and the region began to prosper. However, this status was revoked by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010. Tensions were further exacerbated between Catalans and Spain during Spain’s financial crisis in 2008 that forced public spending cuts in the area. Many Catalans also felt overtaxed and that too little went toward public services. The crisis only reinfected feelings that the region should be independent.”

Given the strength of Catalonia's national identity and the region's history with separatist movements and rebellions, today's independence movement stems from the history and politics of the region. Catalonia's separatist movement became incredibly prominent in 2013 when the regional parliament, as well as the leader of the Union and Convergence party Artur Mas, called for a referendum to be held the following year regarding Catalan opinion on independence from Spain. The referendum was suspended by Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, but Mas proceeded with the referendum by claiming that it was an informal poll. One-third of voters in Catalonia voted on the referendum, where an estimated 80 percent of participants voted in favor of independence.

In 2015, Catalan separatist parties won a regional and national election and scheduled a full referendum through the regional parliament for October 1, 2017, a move considered illegal by Spain's constitutional court. Spanish authorities attempted to seize ballot forms and arrested multiple pro-independence officials. On the day of the vote, police tried to stop voters from entering polling offices and used excessive force, inflicting hundreds, reports Human Rights Watch. Many could not vote due to interference by authorities, and voter turnout was reportedly only 42 percent. Of those able to vote, 90 percent were in favor of independence. However, due to voting difficulties and ballots getting lost, this number is relatively unreliable. Reuters reports that later polls showed that only 47.2 percent favored independence.

After the referendum, the Spanish government enacted emergency measures to dissolve the Catalan parliament after it voted to declare independence from Spain. While many of the parliament's leaders were arrested, regional President Carles Puigdemont was able to escape to Belgium. The leaders were to stand on trial on the charges of sedition, though many across Spain protested the trial, reports EFE News. UN leaders also urged Spain to not press charges against the parliament members, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

ABC News reports that support for separatism in the region has remained strong even amid the COVID-19 pandemic and wins by the pro-union Socialists Party in recent elections. Separatists have stated that Catalonia would have fared better in the pandemic had it been independent, pointing towards the Spanish government's failures during the crisis, according to Reuters. Despite the continued strong support for separation, proponents of an independent Catalonia face many obstacles. Puigdemont, who is currently in exile in Belgium, has lost immunity from the European Parliament and may be sent back to Spain, the New York Times states, where he may be tried by Spanish courts on sedition charges.

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Kurdistan

Juliet Nangini Staff Writer

Among global separatist movements, the Kurds stand as the largest nation without an independent state and make up the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, according to BBC News. There is an estimated population of 30 million Kurds scattered across the mountainous regions within the borders of Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The Kurds often say that they have “no friends but the mountains.” The Economist also reports that “inward division has been one of their worst enemies.”

Proposals for an independent Kurdish state range as far back as the First World War. The Treaty of Sevres of 1920, a pact between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire after the end of World War I, featured an Allied proposal for an independent Kurdistan. However, this was followed by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which provided the Republic of Turkey with international recognition as the sovereign successor of the Ottoman Empire. With the new boundaries established through this treaty, the provision for a Kurdish state was forgotten and led to the suppression and limitation of rights for Kurds that are still seen today.

The levels of Kurdish autonomy and oppression vary between each country. In 1988, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein launched nerve gas attacks against Kurdish areas and communities. The United States, Britain, and several other countries supplied humanitarian aid to Iraqi Kurdistan and established a no-fly zone. Now, more than thirty years after the chemical attacks, families are still trying to identify and bury the victims of the attack.

According to Al Jazeera, several mass graves filled with bodies that were believed to be killed by Saddam Hussein’s regime were found in Southern Iraq in 2019. Meanwhile, Syrian Kurds have been in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have received military and diplomatic support from the U.S. According to Voice of America, the Kurds are hopeful that they will have continued support from the U.S. as Biden’s victory in the election, as they “have a common objective to defeat terrorism in Syria.” This came after worries produced by the U.S.'s partial troop withdrawal from Syria in October 2019, which was followed by a Turkish invasion of the region. During the campaign event in October 2019, Biden expressed support in unity talks to dissolve the Kurdish government and sympathy with the region. During the campaign event in October 2019, Biden expressed support for political rights but also urged Spain to not press charges against the parliament members, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Support for separatism in the region has remained strong even amid the COVID-19 pandemic and wins by the pro-union Socialists Party in recent elections. Separatists have stated that Catalonia would have fared better in the pandemic had it been independent, pointing towards the Spanish government’s failures during the crisis, according to Reuters. Despite the continued strong support for separation, proponents of an independent Catalonia face many obstacles. Puigdemont, who is currently in exile in Belgium, has lost immunity from the European Parliament and may be sent back to Spain, the New York Times states, where he may be tried by Spanish courts on sedition charges.

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political influence.

The Economist reports that the Kurds seem to have established too much pressure for independence is dangerous in Iraq and Syria. Despite the many gains and losses for the Kurds, they continue to face different challenges across the Middle East.

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Violence erupted in late 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed territory self-declared as the Republic of Artsakh by Ethnic Armenian separatists and Ingushetian population. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the region became a tinderbox waiting to erupt into conflict following the 1994 ceasefire. Centuries of tensions once again sparked the conflict, as a six-week war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan in late September 2020. The majority of the region is ethnically Armenian but recognized by the international community as part of Azerbaijan. According to the New York Times, thousands were killed as Azerbaijan regained large swaths of territory lost decades earlier in Armenia. Baku, Azerbaijan, which had used sophisticated drone attacks in addition to the powerful, long-range rocket artillery used by both sides. Fighting has been fierce since 1998, part of a strengthening New Power Tension between the Christian Armenians and the Turkic Azerbaijanis. There was no formal truce agreement for over a decade, but the two groups coexisted in relative peace until the 20th century. The then-newly formed Soviet government created the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, with an ethnic Armenian majority, inside the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. As the Soviet Union’s power declined, war broke out among Armenian separatists and the Azerbaijani military when the region’s population voted to join Armenia. In 1991, the region declared itself an independent republic, though not even in its closest ally and main financial and military backer, Armenia, officially recognizing its independence. The war ended in 1994 with a Russia-brokered cease-fire. At that point, Armenia controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and 20 percent of the surrounding territory, according to the United Nations. The region is known as the Abkhazia and western Georgia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been unresolved for more than 30 years. The territory is inhabited by Armenians and Azeris. The conflict has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The conflict has been supported by various countries, including Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the United States. The United Nations has tried to mediate the conflict, but so far, there has been no resolution. The region has been under the control of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, which declared independence from Azerbaijan in 1991. The international community, including Russia and the United Nations, recognizes the Artsakh Republic as a de facto independent state, while Azerbaijan considers it to be an integral part of its territory. The conflict has been simmering for decades, with occasional outbreaks of violence. The latest escalation began in September 2020, with Armenia and Azerbaijan accusing each other of挑衅, leading to a fresh round of fighting. The situation has become more tense as Azerbaijan has gained support from Turkey and other countries, while Armenia has received support from Russia, Iran, and France. The conflict continues to be a major regional and global concern, with implications for stability in the region and beyond.
Lieutenant Colonel from U.S. Army Intelligence Speaks About ‘Terrorism and the Great Game’

Jasmine DeLeon
Staff Writer

Retired Lieutenant Colonel of the U.S. Army Andrew Swedlow gave an account of his work on the use of terrorism in the Great Game at the School of Diplomacy on April 8. Swedlow gave a description on the history of the Great Game, different ways nation states utilized terrorism, and the effects of terrorism on the great power competition.

“The use of terrorism in the Great Game by nation states to cover up for their internal or external weaknesses is evident in conflict today,” Swedlow, an expert on intelligence, the Middle East, and world politics, explained. At the start of his presentation, Lt. Col. Swedlow asserted that Russia and China are the main global competitors for the United States. According to Swedlow, Russia has been competing with the United States on the world stage for the past ten years. He cited Russian bounties on American soldiers in Afghanistan and recent intelligence collection campaigns that are designed to harm the credibility of the U.S. government as evidence of this competition.

Swedlow noted how modern China, a relatively new world power since the end of World War II, has been expanding its influence in nations all over the world through its Belt and Road Initiative, as well as other projects. He added that China is growing increasingly aggressive toward its neighbors, including India and Vietnam, and has been testing the extent of their restraint.

Swedlow furthered that these activities, tied together, “gain the affect of pulling us from the world stage or keeping us tied up where we cannot have an impact on what Russia and China are trying to achieve.”

According to Foreign Affairs, the Great Game, which started in the mid-19th century and is characterized by an Anglo-Russian rivalry that took form when Great Britain started pushing back against Russia’s territory and power into Islamic Asia. However, the Great Game ended without the two countries going to war, which many people at the time viewed as inevitable. Swedlow described the Great Game through several developments, including Great Britain’s attempt to defend its Indian colonies from invading forces, and the Ottoman Empire. He states that the contested area in the Great Game is where the Ottoman Empire was located. The Muslim population “became an important population in undermin- ing or bolstering one’s position in the Great Game at the time,” according to Swedlow.

A somewhat successful use of terrorism, Swedlow explained, is how the Ottomans used it after taking control of Mecca and Medina in the 1500s for internal control and to manage revolting populations. He described that the Ottoman empire expanded so rapidly that it did not have the infrastructure necessary to administer all its location, causing the Ottoman government to pit rival leaders in places like Damas cus and Cairo against each other to maintain control in the region. The result was that the Ottoman Empire floundered on for several hundred years with little legiti macy within its own borders, forcing the empire to be constantly on guard against attack and invasion.

In his next example, Swedlow cited the Serbian use of terrorism to protect ethnic Serbs from Austrian expansion in the early 1990s. He described this as a “successful but messy use of terror ism.” In 1914, Dragutin Dimitrijevic, a Serbian intelligence officer and national who wanted to create a Yugoslav state, assisted the Black Hand, a secret Serbian society, with the assassina tion of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Sofie Sarajevo. While Dimitrijevic intended to create a Yugoslav state, the assassination eventually led to World War I.

“I called it successful because there was a Yugoslavia at some point, but it was extremely messy and there was a lot of un-intended consequences in that use of terrorism,” Swedlow claimed. When asked later in the discussion about how the United States should counter China’s growing influence, Swedlow drew his argument from the previous example of terrorism in Serbia. He explained that while the two ideologies of Serbian nationalist identity and the Black Hand’s anarchistic identity seem contradictory, working toward a common short-term goal was what brought them together. Swedlow concluded the discussion by not ing that the best way for the United States to challenge China is by bringing countries who want to counter China through short-term goals.

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Pedro Castillo, a schoolteacher-turned-politician, is leading in the polls. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Peru Flirts with Leftism in Upcoming Election

Sergio C. Valenzuela  Staff Writer

In the coming months, Keiko Fujimori will face off against Pedro Castillo in Peru’s runoff presidential election following inconclusive results in the first round of voting, reports BBC News. Before the mid-April election, Peru has experienced a campaign that has highlighted political identity and consistent authority. The country has gone through four presidents—three in the last five years—within the last five years, states The New York Times.

Keiko Fujimori is a conservative former congresswoman and daughter of populist former President Alberto Fujimori. She represents the Popular Force Party with a platform built on supporting free-market policies, including expanding the mining industry to stimulate the economy. Through these initiatives, she claims that she will create two million jobs by developing infrastructures and investing in health and education, reports BBC News. Fujimori lost in the 2011 and 2016 presidential elections to Ollanta Humala, making her this third run.

Despite her promising platform, Fujimori is being investigated for corruption. During her corruption, two charges lost she claims are politically motivated. Between 2018 and 2020 she served 13 months in prison. Her criminal past and questionable morals may be the reason why she won only 13 percent of the votes in the mid-April elections and continues lagging behind her contender Pedro Castillo.

According to BBC News, Pedro Castillo is a 51-year-old schoolteacher and former mayor. Running on a leftist platform for the Free Peru party, Castillo plans to nationalize key economic industries such as mining, oil, hydropower, and gas. This is a campaign promise that Castillo since retract-

Pedro Castillo, a schoolteacher-turned-politician, is leading in the polls.

Pedro Castillo, a schoolteacher-turned-politician, is leading in the polls. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

ing government officials used their status to access the country’s first vaccine doses in a scandal now dubbed “vaccinegate.” According to The Washington Post, some voters from the mid-April election “found themselves lining up Sunday both to cast a ballot and to secure tanks of oxygen for critically ill relatives.”

Overall, Peru’s political spectrum is wide to say, short on supplies and workers while high-rank-

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**Is the Biden Administration’s Immigration Policy All That Different from His Predecessor’s?**

Joseph MacKenna
Staff Writer

The Biden administration’s immigration policy has come under fire in its first 100 days over the president’s lack of movement on reverting former President Trump’s highly controversial immigration policies.

The administration has started rolling back some Trump-era policies, but at a pace at which the White House acting has failed to live up to the expectations promised from the campaign. The Biden-Harris campaign site listed ambitious goals for the first 100 days in office, stating objectives such as overturning the “Muslim Ban,” strengthening the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and ending construction on the border wall, but their ability to achieve these goals is justifiably coming under scrutiny.

Now, as of 92 days in office, the administration has signed six executive orders on immigration, checking off some of his more prominent campaign promises. According to the White House, one of these executive orders temporarily paused all emergency funding and construction of the border wall. Since then, however, the administration has failed to take the necessary next steps, including withdrawing lawsuits over private land where the wall would be built. The Washington Post outlines how the wall situates six acres of land after a judge ruled on an eminent domain case. This case represents the differences between Biden on the campaign trail and President Biden. With no further action from the president, the wall of the first 60 days period for reviewing the wall, Biden has left the American populace wondering if he will perpetuate or halt the wall construction at all. President Biden notably pledged during his campaign to reunite families separated at the border. To date, there has been a severe lack of change made to address the border crisis. Axios reported that as of the first 100 days, no families have been reunited. This news comes after Biden created a reunification task force in February to reunite families. Whether the families have been kept apart, President Biden now needs to come up with a plan for the families currently separated in the United States, especially after an increase by 71 percent of migrant interceptions in March compared to February, according to USA Today.

A recent surge of migrant activity at the border has seen families with children still being expelled under Title 42. The real question is whether high income countries are disproportionately obtaining and distributing vaccines compared to developing nations. This is worrisome for global health prospects but could also create a larger problem down the road. While global wealth inequality already growing prior to the pandemic, unequal vaccine distribution will most likely further exacerbate the wealth division between developed and developing states.

Worries over the inflammation of wealth inequality from vaccine distribution are not unsubstantiated and were even addressed in a statement from the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen. Speaking to committees from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Secretary Yellen explicitly stated, “The (COVID-19) crisis has exacerbated the trend of rising income inequality, raising concerns about a divergent path within and across countries,” reports Reuters. She also discussed how current efforts to vaccinate developing countries, primarily through the COVAX initiative, were considerable but not enough. COVAX is a branch of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative launched by the WHO. The alliance involves governments, scientists, NGOs, and manufacturers focused on equitably distributing COVID-19 diagnostic tools and vaccines. The majority of developing nations entered into COVAX in the hopes of obtaining access to vaccines, which in turn placed a special responsibility on this group to address the needs of the world’s most vulnerable. Their success in supplying to these countries has been generally inadequate, however. According to Al Jazeera, only one in 500 people in poorer countries are vaccinated, a stark contrast to the statistics of wealthy nations, where one in four people are vaccinated.

While wealthy states and multinational organizations continue to pour millions of dollars into COVAX, they continually overlook the biggest problem the organization is facing: access to physical vaccines. The World Bank pledged $12 billion to the program for the purchase and distribution of vaccines, but readily admits the biggest hurdle in vaccination is mere access to vaccines, according to the World Bank Blog. “Promising enough doses for the global population and injecting them into the arms of those who need it most could save millions of lives. But the world remains an immense challenge, unprecedented in scale, speed and complexity” notes the World Bank, a clear admission that funding is not the problem. The real question is what this all means for the developing world. Statisticians and academicians both hypothesize a divergence in the global economy. As discussed in Business Insider, the global economy is projected to grow by six percent in 2021, but that growth is projected to follow a k-curve, with the world’s poorest states expected to take on the brunt of the negative externalities. According to the IMF World Economic Outlook, “lower-income countries are expected to see an average annual loss of 5.7 percent per capita GDP from 2020 to 2024, but advanced economies will see a smaller loss of 2.3 percent in the same period.” The potential reality would undoubtedly upset the already imbalanced global financial hierarchy, and would unduly burden the wealthiest nations, many of whom have been more than happy to neglect their role in solving the problem.

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The Taiwan Question: Strategic Ambiguity Is Not Enough

Joaquín Matamis
Layout Editor

Ever since Taiwan separated itself from mainland China in 1949, relations between Beijing and Taipei have oscillated between tense and less so. At worst, the Taiwan Strait has been a hotbed for diplomatic and military hawkishness between Beijing and Taipei. In the past months, China has increased its air and naval incursions into Taiwan’s airspace.

The Biden administration has repeatedly tried strengthening its robust unofficial relationship with Taiwan throughout its first few months in office. Numerous bills have been introduced to Congress addressing the issue, including some recognizing Taiwan’s sovereignty (Taiwan Voice Act) and others reconceiving relations with China and Taiwan (STRATEGIC Act). The State Department also unveiled the Taiwan Symbols of Sovereignty Act of 2020, a plan to loosen restrictions on government contracts with Taiwan and grant more open recognition of Taiwan during official talks and visits, according to the Associated Press. The association, while bold and progressive, also have been perceived as blatantly hostile towards Beijing, which viewsTaiwan as a “renegade” province.

Following the State Department’s announcement, Secretary of State Antony Blinken also warned Beijing against attacking Taiwan, saying that “It would be a serious mistake for anyone to try to change the existing status quo by force,” Politico reports. In response, China pushed back with an air incursion on April 20 and a verbal warning from Chinese foreign minister Zhao Li- jian, who advised the U.S. to “immediately stop any form of US-Taiwan official contacts, cautiously and appropriately handle the matter, and not send wrong signals to Taiwan independence forces so as not to subversively influence and damage US-China relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait,” according to Al Jazeera. In Beijing’s view, Washington is “playing with fire” as tensions heighten in the region. Tai- wanese independence is considered an option for the CCP, which are willing to quell with force.

In 2020, roughly 380 fighter jets flew into Tai- wan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). As of April 21, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has broken its squadron size record twice in Biden’s first three months in office, The Diplomat reports. These military demonstrations serve two purposes in the Taiwan Strait: one, they push the boundaries and limitations of Taiwan’s own security by consistently challenging and crossing the line; two, they serve as a psycholog- ical and economic attack on people’s morale and the island’s military resources.

With each incursion, Tai- wan’s Air Force is forced to respond to each threat, exhausting time, and resources. Even with mounting pressure to Taiwan, the U.S. has expanded in competing its interests in Taiwan while simultane- ously provoking China. Only a few days before the air incursion, a former U.S. Senator and two State De- partment officials made an unofficial visit to Taiwan and met Taiwan’s foreign minister Joseph Wu and President Tsai Ing-wen, according to the Associat- ed Press. Although the U.S. wants to maintain friendly relations with both China and Taiwan simultaneously, hostile incursions like these send mixed signals to the international community.

The U.S. has so far maintained a policy called “strategic ambiguity” re- garding Taiwan’s defense, a deliberate obscuration of foreign policy. It has been difficult for closer relations between the U.S. and Taiwan to overcome resistance from US- China relations. The U.S. has continued to support Taiwan’s independence from China, yet China and Taiwan’s leaders have been meeting in the past months. This article highlights the growing ambiguity and mixed signals between the United States and China.

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U.S. Anti-Trans Bills Highlight Growing Transphobic Legislation Around the World

Patrick Condon
Staff Writer

Over the past four months, the United States has been hit with a wave of anti-transgender legis- lation. While these Republic- can-Party-led bills claim to fight for the safety of both binary and non-binary children, courts and leading researchers af- firmed the danger they pose to transgender chil- dren. But this wave in the U.S. does not come without equal movement around the world. At least 14 countries formal- ly prohibit the expression of transgender identity either in legislation or po- lice practice - not to men- tion the overwhelming social stigmatization of trans-identifying persons. Although the social stig- matization of transgender people poses the greatest threat to their safety and identity, this legislative wave of transphobic sen- timent marks a new line of formal discrimination against the expression of one’s personal identity.

There is a long history of global anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. Recent data suggests 71 countries legis- late these prejudices into law, many times to accom- modate violence against LGBTQ+ persons. Ac- cording to Human Rights Watch, at least 70 coun- tries have anti-LGBTQ+ laws with penalties ranging from imprisonment to the death penalty. The crystal- ization of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination into law marks a growing legal battle for the identities of approximately 3 to 16 per- cent of the world’s popula- tion, as estimated by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance. This legislative wave further entrenches anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice around the world, silenc- ing the identities and ex- pressions of hundreds of millions of people. Current laws take vari- ous forms to prevent and punish LGBTQ+ rela- tionships including minors-from their funda- mental right to healthcare. Across the world, there are formal laws against the sexual practices of trans- gender persons and their personal expression from their clothes to the length of their hair. Additional- ly, mandatory sterilization practices are legal in 14 Eu- ropean countries, Japan, and multiple U.S. States, according to Transgender Europe and Movement Advancement Project. In these laws, the restriction of transgender expression is made clear and reveals invasive attempts at regula- ting the gender identity and genitalia of non-bina- rie people.

While these laws reveal the international stigma- nation and neglect of trans-identifying people, there are proposals seek- ing greater inclusivity for transgender identifying and transitioning indi- viduals. Currently, there are formal laws allowing self-determination of gender identity in states such as Belgium, India, and Uruguay; some that guarantee equal rights to transgender people in Bolivia, Ecuador, Fiji, Malta, and the United Kingdom, and a few that grant insur- ance for gender affirm- ation surgery in Argentina and Denmark, according to the Metadoss Network. These progressive laws essentially leave out the caveat included in many U.S. State ID offices that require gender reassign- ment surgery and/or ster- ilization for formal gen- der affirmation. If U.S. States were to propose bills to better allow for gender identification and reaffirmation, the overall inclusion of transgender people would improve.

A way to foster better transgender inclusion is through the recognition of international inclusivity standards. The U.S. is a microcosm of the differ- ing, and sometimes ab- sent, levels of worldwide transgender legislation. Some states like New York use healthcare, sports, and state identification to include trans-identifying persons, while many other states with newly proposed anti-trans bills seek to regulate the par- ticipation of trans youths while blocking them from their fundamental right to healthcare. These new bills are a gross step to- wards a dangerous regu- lation of identity and ex- pression of transgender people in the U.S. If the U.S. wants to formally include trans-identifying persons, they should fol- low suit with other leading countries and provide na- tional legislation on the in- clusion and protection of transgender people.

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Iran and United States to Resume Nuclear Negotiations

Timothy Georgetti  Staff Writer

The United States announced that it has resumed indirect negotiations with Iran over its nuclear weapons program. While Reuters reports that the first week of talks in Vienna, Austria closed on a positive note, there is still much work to be done to establish a peaceful consensus.

These negotiations are the first concrete steps that have been taken by the Biden administration to rejoin the agreement known as Iran Nuclear Deal – officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). While the Iranian delegation still refuses to hold direct talks with the United States, European officials are performing shuttle diplomacy between the two states to relay communications from the two states by relaying shuttle diplomacy between officials of both states involved – China, Russia, and the European Union – all remaining compliant. Iran justified these infractions as retaliatory countermeasures in response to the large-scale sanction regime imposed on it by the U.S. Thus, as the New York Times explains, Tehran’s goal through the new talks is the complete removal of all American sanctions, while Washington seeks the return of Iranian compliance to the previously-negotiated limits of the JCPOA.

Both sides’ demands, however, will inevitably lead to some tension. The official positions of both the United States and Iran are that neither will shift unless the other acts first. For Iran, this would mean limiting the enrichment percentages of its uranium, which recently reached as high as 20 percent in violation of the JCPOA-imposed limits, according to the Associated Press. Compliance would also mean that Iran would have to allow international inspectors from the United Nations-affiliated International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into their nuclear facilities. In March 2021, Iran enacted a prohibition on all IAEA inspections of its facilities, leaving the world in the dark about its nuclear capabilities. This prohibition startled the remaining JCPOA members and led to an agreement where Iran would keep all the footage from the inspection cameras in its nuclear facilities for up to three months, handing it over to the IAEA if American sanctions are lifted. The United States’ official position demands that these actions, and a myriad of others, must stop before it agrees to lift sanctions and rejoin the JCPOA.

For the United States, meeting Iran’s demands would involve the lifting of a complex and large-scale sanction regime against the Iranian state, its nationals, and its corporations. The Washington Post details how the Trump administration layered new sanctions unrelated to Iran’s nuclear program on top of those related to the JCPOA, to punish other Iranian international transgressions. These sanctions were justified on a range of issues, including alleged support for terrorism to alleged human rights violations. Since the Trump administration often made existing JCPOA-related sanctions more severe instead of issuing new ones to punish additional transgressions, the process of completely removing all sanctions will be complex, if not impossible. Given the accusations of terrorism associated with these layered sanctions, it is unlikely that the Biden administration will be able to find broad support on either side of the aisle to remove many of them.

According to Politico, this current bout of diplomacy is aimed at creating a precise and specific plan on how both the United States and Iran will return to compliance with the JCPOA. Whether these talks will produce their desired result, however, is still yet to be determined.

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