



The Diplomatic Envoy

BOAT CRASH IN ITALY LEAVES AT LEAST 65 MIGRANTS DEAD

Catherine Anderson
Staff Writer

A boat thought to have been carrying approximately 200 people crashed off the coast of Italy on February 26, leaving approximately 65 people confirmed dead, reports BBC News. It had sailed from Turkey several days prior and likely carried migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Reuters writes that 14 minors were included among the casualties, according to a local Italian government office. It also reported that 25 Afghan victims had been identified, as well as one Palestinian, one Syrian, and one Pakistani. ABC News writes that at least 81 survivors have been rescued and at least 20 migrants have been hospitalized. It also reports that one survivor was taken in for question-

ing and two others were arrested for allegedly smuggling the migrants.

This tragedy is indicative of a larger migration crisis that has heavily impacted not only Italy, but most of Western Europe in recent years. ABC News writes that Italy is one of the primary landing points for migrants being smuggled across the central Mediterranean and that since 2014, at least 20,333 have died or gone missing while attempting to migrate. At the UN Human Rights Council, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for European countries to do more to help migrants, but Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni stated the only way to mitigate such tragedies is to stop migrant boat journeys altogether, reports BBC.

The New York Times points out, however, that measures other countries

have taken to prevent such journeys have actually led to more dangerous migration habits and more casualties. Greece, for example, has built a fence on its border with Turkey to prevent migrants from crossing the border. Additionally, Hungary has built a wall along its borders, the New York Times continues. Even though the route from Turkey to Italy is longer and more dangerous, these measures have made it the most viable option for migrants. While advocates from Doctors without Borders attribute the recent tragedy and other fatalities to such measures, Prime Minister Meloni and other politicians continue to encourage anti-immigrant sentiments rather than taking on a humanitarian approach, reports the New York Times.

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CHINA PROPOSES PEACE PLAN FOR RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Drew Starbuck
Staff Writer

As the start of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine passes its one-year anniversary, there have been efforts by many actors to come up with a durable solution for peace between the two countries. China has now called for a ceasefire to the conflict and the reduction of military efforts as part of its peace proposal for resolving the conflict. The Associated Press states that the talk calls for “a cease-fire, peace talks, protection for prisoners of war and stopping attacks on civilians, without elaborating, as well as keeping nuclear power plants safe and facilitating grain exports.”

Furthermore, Al Jazeera reports that China

has urged for an end to Western sanctions against Russia, establishing humanitarian corridors for civilian evacuation, and ensuring that steps are taken to secure the export of grain after disruptions caused global food prices to spike last year. The 12-point proposal does not contain many specific policies but reflects China’s consistent position on the conflict and it has garnered international attention. The South China Morning Post reports that, “The debate over China’s peace proposal also carried over to a special meeting of the United Nations Security Council.”

The basis of these proposals lie on many enduring Chinese foreign policy positions such as the consistent guarantee that all

nations’ sovereignty and territorial independence be respected along with a rejection of the “Cold War” mentality by Western nations. NBC News reports on a statement from the Chinese foreign ministry on the plan, “Conflict and war benefit no one. All parties must stay rational and exercise restraint, avoid fanning the flames and aggravating tensions, and prevent the crisis from deteriorating further or even spiraling out of control.”

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JORDAN HOSTS PEACE TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Patricia Salib
Staff Writer

On February 26, representatives from the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government met in Jordan for previously agreed-upon peace talks, reports Reuters. The talks, while initially perceived as successful, were abruptly halted due to increased violence in the West Bank. Reuters further that on February 22, days before the intended peace talks, the violence escalated. In the Palestinian city of Nablus, 11 Palestinians were killed.

Middle East Eye reports that the meeting took place at the Red Sea Port of Aqaba. There are also other reports that both an Egyptian and U.S. representative attended the peace talks in Jordan. Al Jazeera writes, quoting a Jordanian of-

ficial, that Sunday’s “political-security meeting is part of stepped-up ongoing efforts by Jordan in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and other parties to end unilateral measures [by Israel] and a security breakdown that could fuel more violence.” The other main goal that was made clear in the meeting was “security and economic measures to ease” Palestinian hardships.

After the meeting on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted out the conclusion of the meeting, which The Guardian writes “He tweeted that “the building and authorization in Judea and Samaria will continue according to the original planning and building schedule, with no change”, using the biblical term for the West Bank.



Israeli soldiers walking the streets of Palestine. Courtesy of Justin McIntosh (Wikimedia Commons) Creative Commons 2.0

“There is not and will not be any freeze.” This was in reference to the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, deemed illegal by the international community, and a concession the Palestinians had requested for many years. Senior Israeli minister Itamar Ben Gvir commented, “What happened in Jordan (if it happened),

will remain in Jordan,” seemingly disregarding the talks altogether.

Hours after the summit, a Palestinian gunman shot two Israeli settlers, and crowds of settlers have burned and vandalized buildings and cars in different Palestinian Villages all along the West Bank. Israeli soldiers reportedly did not stop the

settler’s actions, according to Al Jazeera. Haaretz discusses the agreements and nuances that were made by all parties that were present at the summit writing, “The Government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority confirmed their joint readiness and commitment to immediately work to end unilateral measures... [including] an Israeli commitment to stop discussion of any new settlement units for 4 months and to stop authorization of any outposts for 6 months.” Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, however, announced there would be no freeze on settlements after the talks.

With the constant escalation of violence, the Atlantic reports that a third Intifada, or uprising, is on the horizon. The Second Intifada, between

2000 and 2005, saw some of the highest death tolls in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. There were reportedly 171 Palestinians killed, including about 30 children, during this time period. The constant escalation of violence leads many to believe that the cycle will continue, causing many Palestinians to believe armed resistance is the only solution. Israeli authorities have also turned to using harsher tactics to crack down on Palestinian dissenters, some of whom belong to various militant factions. The Israeli authorities, however, have been accused of using collective punishments to punish all Palestinians for the actions of a few and many figures in the government justifying violence against Palestinians, reports Axios.

Contact Patricia at patricia.salib@student.sbu.edu

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RUSSIA SUSPENDS NEW START NUCLEAR TREATY WITH US

George Slowey
Staff Writer

On February 21, the Russian Federation decided to suspend the New START Nuclear Treaty with the United States, reports Reuters. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that while he would not be withdrawing fully from the treaty (which does not expire until 2026), Russia will no longer allow the United States to inspect its nuclear sites. Nuclear inspections had already been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a conference was scheduled between the two parties for November 2022 to discuss resuming the inspections. The Russian Federation, however, called off that set of talks for unknown reasons, Yahoo News reports. Experts believe that the cause is likely due to the United States' active support for Ukraine, which Russia invaded

more than a year ago. New START, or the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, is a continuation of the nuclear reduction and limitation treaties that have existed since the United States and the Soviet Union signed START I in 1991, and date back to the SALT I and II talks of the late 1960s, explains the Associated Press. New START was signed in 2010 under the Obama Administration and co-signed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. It limits the number of deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550 in each country, down from 5,000 apiece in the original START I treaty and down from points in the Cold War that saw each country possess in excess of 30,000 nuclear weapons each, according to the United Nations. The treaty was negotiated to last fifteen years, like the original START I treaty. Moscow's suspension of the treaty does

not necessarily mean they plan to start increasing their nuclear stockpile. In his February address to the Russian Federal Assembly, when Vladimir Putin announced his country's suspension of the New START treaty, his grievances included that France and the United Kingdom, two other nuclear powers, were not included. The Kremlin also stated that there were reports that the United States may be planning to develop a new nuclear weapon. The New START Treaty was a massive step forward in the dismantling of nuclear weapons between the two great powers of the Cold War and brought the number of nuclear weapons held by each country down by roughly two-thirds, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. Much like the START I Treaty before it, New START was heralded as an essential step in decreasing the



Presentation of New START by the U.S. and Russian Federation before signing in 2010. Courtesy of US and Russian Federation Presentation on New START Treaty at the CD (Flickr) CreativeCommons 2.0

risk of nuclear war between the two powers that would conceivably start it: the U.S. and Russia. However, Russia's decision to suspend its involvement in this crucial treaty is not something to be worried about at the moment, as the country has not begun

any new nuclear tests or arms stockpiling. Like much of Russia's nuclear rhetoric over the course of its thirteen-month-long assault on Ukraine, it has been interpreted as strategic bluff and bluster. Suspending instead of

withdrawing is a non-action— something Russia can do without any real outcome or consequence—that it can then claim as a diplomatic win. The worst Moscow can do as an outcome of this decision is to remove itself from the New START Treaty, a step it has not yet taken. Experts see this decision as a political ploy to gauge the reactions of the United States and other countries to see how they would respond to a diplomatic move, according to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. More likely than not, Russia will simply not renew the New START Treaty in 2026, putting itself back into the security dilemma that the START treaties were supposed to resolve in the first place.

Contact George at george.slowey@student.shu.edu

NIGERIA HOLDS GENERAL ELECTIONS IN AFRICA'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY

Anna Thibodeau
Layout Editor

Nigeria held one of its closest presidential elections in history on February 25. As current president Muhammadu Buhari reached his two-term limit, three main candidates vied for the spot. Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Party (APC), former vice president Atika Abubaker of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Peter Obi of the Labour party were the top three candidates, according to Al Jazeera. Nigerian voters faced several challenges while attempting to vote in this election. Citizens cast their votes on paper ballots, but their identities and votes were then to be confirmed and counted on the brand new Bimodal Voter Accreditation Machines, says the Wall Street Journal. However, many polling centers had to delay opening because they had trouble getting the machines to work, according to Al Jazeera.

Some polling centers also reported equipment failure and machines being stolen. After voting ended, many polling centers lost internet connection and were unable to upload results on time. According to the Wall Street Journal, only one-third of results sheets were uploaded onto the website by Monday morning. Reuters reports all three parties have complained of counting irregularities and some cases of violence and voter intimidation, although voting went smoothly in most areas of the country. Acts of voter suppression were also reported in Lagos, Borno, and Anambra, says Al Jazeera. Despite these irregularities and delays Bola Tinubu was announced as the winner on February 28. According to BBC News, Tinubu received around 37 percent of votes, but with a voter turnout of only 27 percent, Tinubu's 8.8 million votes equals less than 10 percent of Nigeria's 93

million registered voters. Many voters never got to cast their ballots because of the extreme delays and various issues, making this one of the lowest voter turnouts Nigeria has seen since 1999. Tinubu sticks out as a candidate for a few reasons. Firstly, Nigeria is split religiously with a majority Muslim north and majority Christian south. While not required, it is customary that presidential candidates choose a running mate of the other religion, explains the Washington Post. However, Muslim Tinubu chose a Muslim running mate. Tinubu is also not new to politics. The former governor of Lagos is known as a "political godfather" for helping others get into office, says BBC News. According to the Wall Street Journal, he even boasted about helping President Buhari during his campaign but has since distanced himself. According to CNN, Tinubu has also been fighting allegations of graft and

confusion on the campaign trail. During his campaign he abstained from many presidential debates and delegated questions to members of his team, CNN says. BBC reports that in the wake of Tinubu's win, members of the Labour party are looking to annul his victory. The winning party has asked opposition to accept defeat, reports the Associated Press. Labour party supporters have reported feeling frustrated at a "fraudulent" election, and these feelings are not unique. According to a recent Gallup poll, 94 percent of Nigerians view their government as corrupt. According to NPR, two-thirds of Nigeria's population is in poverty and nearly 50 percent of all young people are unemployed. The Nigerian currency's value is at a 40-year low and as the economic downturn continues, cases of kidnapping for ransom keep going up. CNN claims that Buhari leaves a "patchy lega-



Nigerian President-elect Bola Tinubu speaking at Chatham House. Courtesy of Chatham House (Wikimedia Commons) CreativeCommons 2.0

cy" for the next president to handle. Marked by economic decline and insecurity, Nigeria has faced two recessions, Islamist insurgencies, a kidnapping epidemic, herder-farmer conflicts, cash shortages, fuel and power issues, corruption, and poverty all during Buhari's eight-year term, reports Al Jazeera. Gallup reports that 74 percent of Nigerians cannot afford food and 48 percent cannot afford shelter. The Washington Post reports that 52 percent of young Nigerians want to emigrate. Accord-

Contact Anna at anna.thibodeau@student.shu.edu

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Many European countries, including Italy, are further overwhelmed by legal forms of migration as well. According to Politico, last year the European Union, Switzerland, and Norway received approximately 966,000 applications for asylum in 2022. This was a 50 percent increase from 2021 and the highest number since 2016. This is also in addition to the nearly 4 million refugees from Ukraine. Politico continues that this volume of asylum seekers has placed Europe's national reception systems un-

der immense pressure. The strain of migration is felt, of course, not just by these countries, but also by those seeking legal forms of migration. Mamadou Niang, a Senegalese man, has attempted to migrate to Europe three times, writes NPR. He has been deported from Spain twice, and recently was denied a visa by the German embassy. About 4-5 percent of Senegal's citizenry lives abroad, according to NPR, and the nation accounts for a large portion of West African migrants to Europe. This is due, in part, to challenges caused by climate change. According to NPR, climate change



Ninety-eight migrants sailing for refuge. Courtesy of Óglaigh na hÉireann (Flickr) CreativeCommons 2.0

has adversely affected coastal Senegal in cities like Saint-Louis where rising sea levels and overfishing have devastated the economy. Further, sa-

linization, which can ruin the ability to grow crops and kill crops that were already growing, affects approximately 5-9 percent of Senegal's land and

the issue is only expected to worsen, writes NPR. This, then, makes it much more difficult to earn a living as a farmer, which

drives people like Niang to pursue migration. The tragedy in Italy serves only as a reminder of how important it is for Europe to find a more effective means of helping migrants. This means mitigating not only illegal migration but also making legal migration more efficient and attainable. The costs of climate change and war are not confined by borders, and the continent will need to adapt to these challenges to promote prosperity in a rapidly changing world.

Contact Catherine at catherine.anderson@student.shu.edu

US DOE ASSESSES ORIGINS OF COVID-19 WITH LOW CONFIDENCE

Ashley Skladany
Staff Writer

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has recently changed its assessment on the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, citing that the virus "most likely emerged from a laboratory leak" rather than a natural spillover event, according to CNBC. However, the conclusion has been given a "low confidence" rating and has not been viewed as significant among other intelligence agencies due to ongoing disagreements and a lack of evidence regarding COVID-19's origins. A professional in science and international security, Dr. Filippa Lentzos of King's College London told The Guardian that the low confidence rating generally indicates that the information which was used in the analysis has significant concerns or problems with it, making it questionable and unreliable. The ongoing debate about the origins of COVID-19 has been heavily politicized and has become a key point of controversy. The Wu-

han Institute of Virology, which has researched coronaviruses for years, has been at the center of the controversy, with some experts believing that a lab accident could have caused the pandemic, the Associated Press reports. Viral evolution scientist Professor David Robertson at the University of Glasgow raised concerns that the DOE's revision will only contribute to greater "vague rumors" of misinformation that have continued to flood the political spheres. China denies that COVID-19 originated from a laboratory leak, calling the theory a "conspiracy." Another point of contention has been the lack of transparency from Beijing, which has heavily influenced the data and personnel available to the World Health Organization and other agencies. However, the WHO and the Scientific Advisory Group for Origins of Novel Pathogens continue to examine all available scientific evidence to advance knowledge of the origin of COVID-19. While the DOE's recent assessment provides new information about

the origin of COVID-19, it is not a definitive answer. In mid-2021, when Joe Biden asked the U.S. intelligence community to investigate the pandemic's origins, only one agency initially blamed a laboratory accident. Other U.S. intelligence agencies disagreed with the conclusion, and some did not gather enough information to determine the origins of the virus. The DOE's revision reveals "that a single undecided vote" has flipped into the "lag-leak camp," The Atlantic says. Professor Angie Rasmussen of the University of Saskatchewan in Canada finds the new information "weak" and not compelling enough to challenge previous findings. Additionally, USA Today emphasizes several scientific studies have suggested that the virus started with natural exposure to an infected animal. In light of the new information, Republican Senator Dan Sullivan has called for extensive public hearings to "really dig into" determining if COVID-19 leaked from a Chinese laboratory. The Senate Oversight Committee is currently



Wuhan Institute of Virology, a research institute that has studied coronaviruses for years. Courtesy of Ureem2805 (Wikipedia) CreativeCommons 4.0

reviewing the classified information provided by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence regarding the origins of COVID-19. The lack of consensus among experts and intelligence agencies about the origins of COVID-19 highlights the need for transparency and further research on the evolution of viruses and pandemics. President Biden has supported the "thorough, careful, and objective work" by intelligence pro-

fessionals, Forbes writes. Alina Chan, a molecular biologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, emphasizes that it is important for research to be done in a safe and secure manner and be as transparent as possible to the rest of the world for our future benefit. While the U.S. Department of Energy's recent assessment of the origins of COVID-19 suggests that the virus most likely emerged from a laboratory leak, the conclusion

is not viewed as significant among the intelligence community due to disagreements about the origins of the virus. The controversy surrounding the origins of COVID-19 underscores the importance of determining the origins of the virus to prevent future pandemics and staunch politicization.

Contact Ashley at ashley.skladany@student.shu.edu

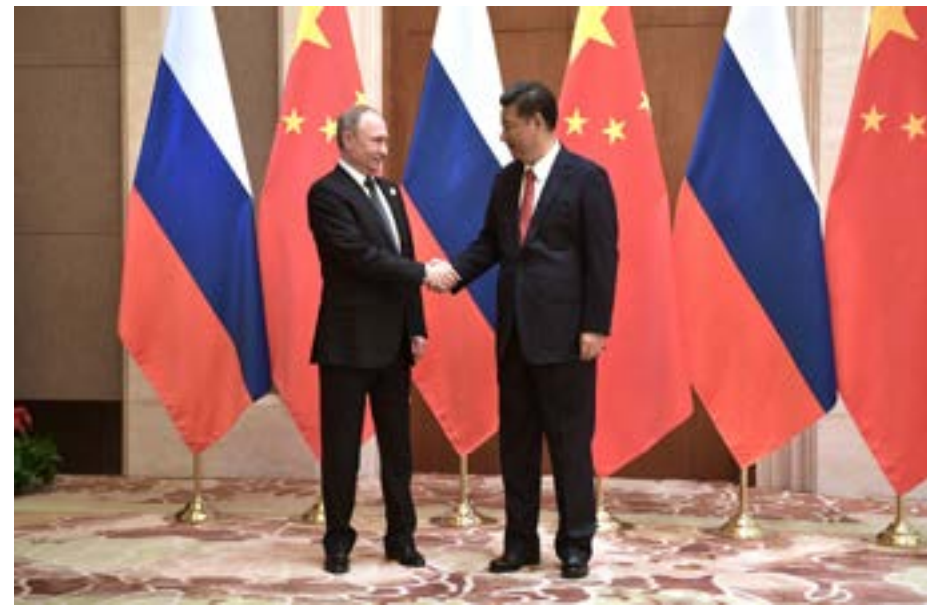
CHINA PROPOSES PEACE PLAN FOR RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

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However, most key players of any potential negotiations have rejected the proposals, including the United States which remains deeply skeptical of any Chinese proposal due to their ties with Russia. POLITICO reports on President Biden's remarks on the Chinese plan, "I've seen nothing in the plan that would indicate that there is something that would be beneficial to anyone other than Russia if the Chinese plan were followed." As Al Jazeera reports, although Beijing claims to be neutral in the conflict, it has boasted of its "no limits" relationship with Russia and has refused to criticize Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. It has also accused the

West of provoking the conflict and "fanning the flames" by providing Ukraine with arms." Similarly, NATO remains skeptical of the proposal as well due to China's proposed neutrality. Reuters reports that NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says, "China doesn't have much credibility because they have not been able to condemn the illegal invasion of Ukraine." Along with this stance, the West remains apprehensive of the support that the Chinese government is giving Russia to avoid Western sanctions. Al Jazeera reports that, "Washington has said China is considering providing weapons to Russia, a move that could intensify the conflict." Not only do Western nations remain wary

of the proposal, but Russia has taken a dim view of the plan. The section on territorial integrity remains a sticking point as Business Insider reports, due to Russian President Vladimir Putin's illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions last September during the conflict. Moscow also retains its hold on Crimea as well from its initial annexation in 2014. The Kremlin's insistence that the plan does not create any of the conditions necessary for peace shows that while tilted in their favor, they expect that their occupation of Ukrainian lands reflect a new territorial reality. On the other hand, Ukraine has shown tentative interest in China's attempts at mediation. On the one-year anniversary of the Russian invasion on Friday, Zelensky



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Courtesy of The Russian Presidential Press and Information Office (Wikimedia commons) Creative Commons 4.0

stated that he did want to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to discuss the plan. His remarks echoed the optimism that China is willing to discuss Ukraine as a good sign, but the Ukrainian government awaits more details and specifics on what Beijing is proposing and what

actions they are willing to take. The context of this proposal remains extremely significant, as the U.S. continually warns that the Chinese government is considering ways of sending Russia lethal aid to support their invasion. Whether or not this proposal will end the

now more than a year long war is unclear, but it shows that appetite for the continuation of war is diminishing even among Russia's purported allies.

Contact Drew at drew.starbuck@student.shu.edu

AFTERSHOCKS CONTINUE IN TÜRKIYE-SYRIA AS AID DELIVERIES CONTINUE

David Babigian
Staff Writer

The death toll from the earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria in February has risen to over 50,000, reports Al Jazeera. In Türkiye alone, 44,218 people have been killed, and nearly 18,000 people have been injured. In Syria, the death toll is 5,914, with over 1,000 injured. Over 1.2 million people have been affected by the disaster, with over 500,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance. The earthquakes have caused significant damage to infrastructure, homes, and businesses, leaving many people without basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter. The number of people affected is expected to rise as the full extent of the damage becomes clear. As Türkiye was still recovering from the earthquakes in the beginning of February, a new, magnitude 5.6 earthquake struck eastern Türkiye on February 27. This caused significant damage to

buildings and infrastructure in the eastern city of Elazig, Al Jazeera reports. The quake was also felt in neighboring province of Malatya and the city of Diyarbakir. The aftershocks have caused further destruction to buildings and infrastructure, and have left thousands of people homeless. The Turkish government has declared a state of emergency in the affected areas and is providing aid to those affected. U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) structural engineer Kishor Jaiswal told CNN that Türkiye has experienced significant earthquakes in the past, including an earthquake in 1999 which mainly affected the southwest part of the country and killed more than 14,000 people. He said that due to that earthquake, many parts of Türkiye have regional building regulations to ensure construction projects can withstand these types of events. Yet, according to Jaiswal, not all buildings have been constructed in accordance with the cur-



Aftermath of the first earthquake in Türkiye and Syria, on February 6. Courtesy of EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (Flickr) Creative Commons 2.0

rent Turkish earthquake regulations. Many buildings could not resist the severity of the shocks because of flaws in the design and construction, especially in older ones. As soon as the earthquakes devastated the region, foreign aid began to pour in. Many aid-based organizations have pledged money and resources to help those affected. UNICEF alone has distributed winter clothes, electric heaters and blankets to nearly

277,000 people affected by the earthquake, including over 163,000 children. However, the aid relief effort has not come without its challenges. In Syria, there are many controversies surrounding how the Assad regime is reacting to this crisis. In an effort to end its decade-long period of global isolation due to sanctions, President Bashar Al-Assad has exaggerated the urgent need for earthquake relief aid, claims the Soufan Center.

This disaster provided Assad with an opening to ingratiate himself to the United Nations and the global community. Ninety percent of the 4.4 million people who inhabit the region in northwest Syria, which is continuously bombed by President Bashar Al-Assad's forces, depend on humanitarian supplies, according to the NBC News. A large influx of humanitarian aid could lead to issues such as aid diversion or weap-

onization by the Assad government. It is important to ensure that these resources are properly distributed to the population that has been devastated by these events. The has asked for over a billion dollars to help survivors in Türkiye and Syria. They appealed for nearly \$1 billion to help more than 5 million people in Türkiye and about \$400 million for the parts of Northwestern Syria that were devastated by the earthquakes. On February 19, the United States announced that it would provide \$100 million in additional assistance for the people of Türkiye and Syria as the humanitarian crisis deepens. With the international community focused on the disaster relief efforts in Türkiye and Syria, it is the hope of all that the relief efforts will minimize the long-term devastation of these unfortunate events.

Contact David at [david.babigian@student.shu.edu](mailto:babigian@student.shu.edu)

MEXICO PASSES CONTROVERSIAL ELECTORAL REFORM LAW

Austin Delsontro
Staff Writer

On February 26 an electoral reform law approved by the ruling party-controlled Congress of Mexico, which has been widely perceived as an attack on democracy, led to tens of thousands of Mexicans protesting against the government, France24 reports. Under the banner of #MiVotoNoSeToca ("Hands Off My Vote"), political and civic organizations joined together in the demonstration, gathering in the Mexico City square of Zócalo, as well as in other cities.

The Associated Press reports that the Zócalo Plaza, which is believed to have a capacity of almost 100,000 people, could not accommodate all the protesters who showed up, causing some to overflow onto nearby streets. Protesters, dressed in the white and pink colors of the National Elec-

toral Institute (INE), denounced the actions of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his supporters who are seeking to reduce the independent body's size and budget. The protest itself is similar to a slightly larger march last November. The reforms, which passed the Senate 72-50 on February 22, are a controversial overhaul of the body overseeing the country's elections, as Al Jazeera discloses. While opponents of the reforms argue that they will undermine democracy, President López claims it will save money and reduce political privileges. The changes, which include cutting the budget of the National Electoral Institute (INE), reducing staff, and closing offices, have sparked immediate opposition. Critics plan to challenge the reforms in the Supreme Court, while numerous protests have occurred. In

December, the president proposed the legislative initiative, also known as "Plan B," after failing to secure enough votes in Congress for a constitutional reform that included more extensive electoral changes. Despite concerns from opponents, the president has repeatedly dismissed claims that the reform package could threaten the integrity of elections, stating that the initiative aims to reduce the INE's large budget and end its privileges. As Reuters explores, President López believes that the reorganization will save \$150 million annually and reduce the influence of economic interests in politics. However, opposition lawmakers and civil society groups have vowed to challenge the changes in the Supreme Court, arguing that they violate the constitution. Since Mexico shifted to a multi-party democracy after ending

federal one-party rule in 2000, the INE has played a crucial role. Critics, however, are concerned about democratic backsliding and declining electoral confidence, a trend also observed in the United States and Brazil. López Obrador has repeatedly criticized the electoral agency, claiming that voter fraud robbed him of victory in the 2006 presidential election. The Independent notes that President López has acknowledged that court challenges may arise against the bill, similar to previous ones that have been filed against his administration's reforms. He views this as a normal occurrence in a democratic system and believes that the measure will withstand any constitutional challenges as none of it violates the law. Despite his current nonchalance about court challenges, he has previously criticized Mexico's judicial

ry and accused judges of conspiring against his administration. As CNN writes, the president, who assumed office in 2018, pledged to address inequality and poverty, disapproving of the supposed high salaries of top INE officials. He has also accused the institution of enabling electoral fraud in previous elections. It is also important to note the relatively high cost of elections in Mexico, as the government is required by law to provide almost all campaign financing. Furthermore, the electoral institute is tasked with issuing secure voter identification cards, which are widely accepted as a form of identification in Mexico, and managing voting in remote and potentially hazardous regions of the country. Despite the massive protest, the second in over three months, Bloomberg reports President López remains

widely popular. Citing a recent poll, 54 percent of Mexicans approve of the president while 45 percent disapprove of him. As for what happens next, the opposition has begun the process of seeking aid from the Supreme Court to nullify the legislation, citing the change as unconstitutional.

Contact Austin at austin.delsontro@student.shu.edu

ISRAELI AIRSTRIKE IN DAMASCUS KILLS FIVE

Anthony Samaniego
Staff Writer

On Sunday, February 19, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted an airstrike against Damascus, the capital of Syria, leaving at least five people dead, 15 wounded, and damage to residential buildings, according to Al Jazeera. The raid hit a building in the central Damascus neighborhood of Kafr Sousa. The attack hit a residential area in the heart of the city, Al Jazeera reports, a densely populated district that is close to Omayyad Square. According to CBS News, around 12:30 a.m. local time, people reported hearing loud explosions in the capital over a central area of the city. CBS News continues that the Syrian Arab News Agency stated that Syrian Air Defens-

es were "controlling hostile targets in the sky around Damascus." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based war monitor, reported that the 15 people killed in the airstrike included at least one woman. Israeli officials claim that the IDF only carried out airstrikes on targeted sites connected with Iranian militias and the Lebanese militant group known as Hezbollah. The strikes damaged buildings that were connected to a medieval citadel in central Damascus and an applied arts institute housed there, according to CBS News. Samer Abdo, an engineer from Kafr Sousa whose apartment building was hit during the strike, was forced to clear debris from his apartment after the Israeli air raid. Abdo told the Associated Press that his family woke

up in terror when the buildings began shaking from the bombings. Mohamed Dulo, another resident from the neighborhood, described not understanding why the area was targeted, according to CBS News. Director General of Antiquities and Museums Mohamad Awad informed the Associated Press that the equipment and machinery inside the residential buildings that was destroyed during the attack was hard to acquire due to the U.S. embargo on Syria and the country's ongoing economic crisis. There was no immediate response from Israel on the reason for the airstrike, with an Israeli military spokesperson refusing to comment to the press when asked about the airstrike. CBS News explains that the strikes hit a parking garage located under a building, killing



Damascus, Syria skyline at sunset. Courtesy of Vyacheslav Argenberg (Wikimedia Commons) Creative Commons 4.0

ten civilians and Syrian troops. Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad stated that the Israeli airstrike on Damascus should be considered a "crime against humanity" as the attack took place less than two weeks after the February 6 earthquake that killed more than 5,800 people across Syria, says Reuters. In recent months,

Iranian militias during its airstrike, reports there were no Iranian deaths following the Israeli airstrike on Damascus.

Contact Anthony at [anthony.samaniego@student.shu.edu](mailto:samaniego@student.shu.edu)

AFRICA

Megan Gawron
Editor-in-Chief

Telecommunications channels are rapidly developing across Africa, providing new opportunities for interconnectivity. Foreign Policy explains that China has been a driving force behind this development for years, providing vital assets for expanding broadband access, semiconductor use, and artificial intelligence (AI) development. While this expansion is a critical part of economic and cultural development, it poses a clear risk to data privacy.

Between 2012 and 2019, 10 African nations—from Ghana to Madagascar—have passed laws to protect data privacy. For example, Kenya passed the Data Protection Act in 2019, which created the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner to regulate how personal information is processed, according to Baker McKenzie. These countries have made significant



Banking apps are enabling access to people in rural areas. Courtesy of Tinkoff Banking (Wikimedia Commons) Creative Commons 4.0

progress toward more comprehensive privacy laws, which was spurred by accelerative digitization during the pandemic. As of 2023, 30 countries in Africa have enacted laws like this. However, this is still a relatively untouched subject in Africa's other 24 nations.

In Nigeria, privacy advocates became particularly concerned when biometric data was collected and used at 98 percent of polls during the country's elections in February. Biometric Update reports that Nigeria uses a Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) during election cycles. The BVAS is meant to ensure election integrity, but

requires citizens to provide their fingerprints and use facial recognition systems in order to cast their votes. Reuters continues that this poses a clear threat to data privacy by acting as a tool of mass surveillance. With little cybersecurity protection and few options for recourse, privacy advocates worry that the 93 million Nigerians who voted in last month's election are at risk of identity theft and data monitoring. Nigeria currently does not have a data privacy bill.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace warns that, without adequate data privacy regulations, marginalized groups will face high risks

to their livelihoods. In Nigeria, over 40 million people live in rural areas with little to no access to banks. The expansion of mobile banking has been revolutionary for these underserved regions by enabling banking where traditional infrastructure does not exist. However, lack of data privacy and security regulations have enabled rampant fraud. Participation in a digital economy always carries risks, but these risks are exacerbated when adequate protection members are either not in place or not enforced by the government.

Breaking Defense explains that there is another risk associated with inadequate privacy regulation: digital authoritarianism. In Zimbabwe, the government formed a partnership with CloudWalk, a Chinese company, to develop AI that would create a national database for facial recognition. While the government characterized this as an attempt to revolutionize how

the country approaches digitalization, privacy advocates have referred to this work as "the autocrat's new toolkit."

In February, Ghana celebrated Data Privacy Week, with the Data Protection Commission announcing that it would crack down on nearly 300 institutions that are failing to protect data, Business Ghana reports.

For countries like Ghana, which has created several initiatives to protect citizens' privacy, increased digitalization provides significant growth opportunities. Tech Target explains that while people traditionally view privacy regulations as solely pertaining to personal and national security, there is also a significant economic opportunity to be had. Focus on data privacy has recently ramped up in both Europe and North America, in part as a response to fears of Chinese data monitoring. Tech Target continues that requiring domestic businesses to increase their privacy standards will en-

able these companies to be more competitive in the international market, as new privacy standards must be met in order to conduct trade. As a result, increasing privacy requirements is becoming a large part of expanding business in a rapidly modernizing world.

Data privacy is rapidly expanding in Africa, a trend that is likely to continue. The recent emphasis on regulation presents opportunities for expansion and protection. However, for the countries that are lagging behind, the risks they face only continue to increase while digitalization creates new dangers for the unprotected and underprepared.

Contact Megan at megan.gawron@student.sbu.edu

EUROPEAN UNION

Sophie Ulm
Staff Writer

The European Parliament, the European Union's legislative body, recently announced that it is banning TikTok, a video sharing app, from its staffers' phones, according to Al Jazeera. The European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union, has also announced that it will be banning the app. This comes as the app and its parent company, ByteDance, based out of China, have come under Western scrutiny over concerns about the Chinese government's access to information gained from the app.

Representatives for TikTok and the Chinese government have denied these concerns. According to Reuters, TikTok spokespeople have spoken out against the ban, claiming that this move is being made "on the basis of fears rather than facts" and goes against the fight against misinformation. The European Union is not the only group tak-

ing this step against the app, as both the United States Senate and the Canadian government have adopted similar bans.

Despite prior bans of TikTok in Western countries, the European Union's ban did come as a surprise to many members of the European Parliament. According to Politico, many countries are uncertain of where this move came from, and have reached out to the European Parliament to inquire more about the ban. Though there have been recommendations against apps by the European Union in the past, there have never been any bans on apps comparable to the planned move against TikTok. This also poses an issue given that many government leaders and agencies run TikTok accounts with large followings. The European Commission has cited the action as being necessary for data protection concerns.

TikTok has been working to step up their security features, The Guardian

reports. The app's plan, entitled Project Clover, aims to move their data storage to Ireland and Norway, and increase the vetting of any data stored outside of Europe. Currently, TikTok keeps its information stored in the United States and Singapore. This move in data storage would be accompanied with further monitoring by a European cybersecurity firm, mirroring a similar plan that the app has proposed in the United States. These plans are aimed at easing restrictions against the app, though many governments are still uncertain of who has access to the data being collected by the app and what data is collected.

The European Union sets out three guidelines for the acceptable use and collection of data: contractual necessity, consent, and legitimate interest. According to Brookings, one of these three criteria must be met in order for the collection and use of data to be viable. Contractual necessity

NORTH AMERICA

Andrea Hebel
Managing Editor

As the West embraces a new reality of digital interconnectedness amid the rise of new social media platforms, governments are scrambling to reconcile the protection of the data privacy of their citizens with the rights of companies, all while navigating the policy and security complications of foreign tech companies. This has become especially pertinent with the rise of video sharing platform TikTok, which is owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance. According to The New York Times, countries across the world have started initiating bans of the app over fears that the company gives the Chinese government access to sensitive user information, such as location data, and actively uses its platform to promote misinformation.

CBS News reports that the U.S. and Canada have both recently passed new measures banning the use of TikTok on govern-

ment-issued mobile devices, despite ByteDance maintaining that they do not hold user data in China or share it with the Chinese government. Nevertheless, federal employees in the U.S. have 30 days from the passage of the new measure to delete the app from their phones. The new bans in North America join similar measures that were enacted in the EU and Taiwan, and total bans of the app in India and Afghanistan.

The New York Times adds that the federal ban comes as two dozen states have already enacted similar restrictions for government devices. Numerous bills in Congress have sought to either outright ban or give President Biden the authority to terminate use of the app for the entire country.

Though numerous bills of this type have been in the works for months, recent efforts have been intensified following meetings between congressional investigators and a former TikTok employee, who shared



Surveillance balloon spotted flying over Myrtle Beach in February. Courtesy of Russotp (Wikimedia Commons) Creative Commons 4.0

his fears that efforts by the app to protect U.S. data are insufficient and flawed, according to The Washington Post. ByteDance has undergone a costly restructuring plan in an attempt to address privacy concerns and appease Washington lawmakers, however, the whistleblower claims that these changes do not go deep enough.

Canadian lawmakers have also launched an investigation into whether TikTok's data collection methods are in line with Canadian privacy laws, according to Reuters. This investigation comes as

Sino-Canadian relations are already tense, following recent accusations of Chinese efforts to influence Canadian elections and increased air surveillance since the discovery of several unidentified flying object over North American airspace.

Despite claims that TikTok's Chinese ownership poses a threat to data privacy and security, governments singling-out of TikTok has raised questions from users as to what sets ByteDance apart from other social media platforms that also collect copious amounts of user data. BBC News

continues that many users, especially young people, see little need for a ban. Many students who attend colleges that have banned the use of TikTok on campus Wi-Fi simply circumnavigate it by using a VPN and fail to see how TikTok differs from other social media networks. Though support for a ban has risen in popularity amongst older populations, reaching above 50 percent, Gen Z has largely shrugged at the ban.

The concept of banning TikTok, or any other platform, also raises questions about the balance between protecting first amendment rights and protecting consumers. Many rights organizations are strongly condemning the prospect of a ban. The ACLU published an open letter urging Congress to vote no on the bill, arguing that banning an entire platform would be unnecessary censorship of the American people and that banning an app simply because it is Chinese in origin is a violation of the Berman Amendment.

ByteDance is reportedly exploring options to sell TikTok to a U.S.-based company to avoid a ban, should its current plans fail to satisfy lawmakers, according to Forbes. However, even U.S.-based social media companies, such as Meta, have dubious records on data protection, as explained by The Washington Post. The balance between the protection of the first amendment rights of citizens to use the apps and platforms of their choice, and the protection of those same citizens from having their data used in ways that threatens their privacy and security, is a balance that governments have yet to figure out.

Contact Andrea at bebel@student.sbu.edu



The proposed ban to TikTok is unlike any other seen in the EU. Courtesy of Stikywork (Wikimedia Commons) Creative Commons 4.0

service, most often demographic information to focus their marketing. Consent requires that a person be told what their information will be used for, as well as being given the option to decline

without punishment. Legitimate interest is more difficult to define, as it includes situations where information is needed and overrides the previous two. The most common example of this is anti-fraud technology.

Parliament with little difficulty has been criticized for the lack of transparency in the collection and use of data by the U.S. Courts in the European Union have questioned past uses of data by the U.S. government, including the collection of data on foreign citizens uncovered in 2013 by Edward Snowden, and the fact that most U.S. data collection is based on guidelines set up in executive orders that are subject to change by future presidents.

Contact Sophie at sophie.ulm@student.sbu.edu

The European Union is also looking for more transparency in data collection from the United States. A recent deal that CPO Magazine reports was expected to pass through the European

MEXICANS CAN PROTEST THEIR GOVERNMENT WITHOUT US INVOLVEMENT

Hamzah Khan
International News Editor

“There’s currently more democracy in Mexico than in the United States,” stated President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (Amlo) of Mexico after the U.S. State Department criticized a new law passed by his government, which critics say would weaken the electoral system, reports Deutsche Welle. On February 26, tens of thousands of Mexicans came out in Mexico City to protest the controversial electoral overhaul law passed by Amlo’s party, reports the Associated Press.

With democracy seemingly on the decline around the world, including in the United States, the Mexican president’s statements may not be so far off from the truth. Part of the strength of Mexico’s democracy, however, stems from the very institution Amlo has just weakened with his new law. The law passed by the Mexican Senate by a 72-50 vote margin, would reduce funding for the National Electoral Institute (INE), which has conducted independent

elections in Mexico since 1990. Before the introduction of an independent electoral commission, Mexican elections were rife with controversy and corruption as the country was subjected to one-party rule for nearly 70 years, according to Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera further states that the INE was not immune from its own controversies, however, the greatest of which occurred in 2006 when Amlo lost the presidential election by a razor-thin margin of 0.6 percent. His party filed election lawsuits and requested recounts, but the INE (known then as the IFE) denied his party’s petitions. This led to weeks of mass protests in Mexico from Amlo’s supporters, who alleged fraud and mistrust in the electoral system was reignited. Amlo was later elected in 2018 in a landslide victory, leading his popular Leftist coalition, Morena, to win majorities in Congress, reports BBC News. Amlo was a popular former mayor of Mexico City and led a populist campaign that denounced the high salaries of federal bureaucrats, like INE commissioners, and called

for more money to be spent on the poor. Even today, according to the Council of the Americas, his popularity remains at nearly 60 percent, one of the highest for a Mexican president in recent years.

Amlo is term-limited, however, and won’t be able to run for reelection. Despite his popularity, leftist leaders in Latin America have faced challenges from the establishment institutions in their countries and have faced coups in countries like Honduras in 2009 and Bolivia in 2018. The Intercept and Guardian both report that both these coups were supported by the U.S. government, so Amlo’s response to the U.S. State Department is understandable. Even in Peru, former leftist President Castillo faced impeachment attempts from the political establishment from the beginning of his presidency after defeating the right-wing daughter of the country’s former fascist dictator, according to Reuters. While Castillo’s subsequent actions of suspending the parliament to avoid another impeachment were unjustifiable, Amlo

continues to support the former president and has denounced his ousting as a coup, reports Reuters. While Amlo’s fears may be justified, one thing remains clear: the U.S. has no leg to stand on to defend democracy in Latin America. The single greatest obstacle to democracy in Latin America over the past 50 years has been U.S. interventions, usually to overthrow popular leftist presidents, explains Harvard’s ReVista. Now is it a coincidence that the U.S. denounces Amlo right after, as Reuters reports, he decreed that his government would nationalize large lithium reserves in the country, an element critical to producing electric vehicles? Even if it is a coincidence, there is no doubt that it would spark fear in the Leftist president’s mind. The United State’s hypocrisy is on full display as it criticizes Mexico’s electoral changes but has yet to denounce Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s own massively unpopular judicial overhauls, according to the Associated Press. The United State’s unfettered support for



Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Courtesy of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Presidente de México (Flickr) Creative Commons 2.0

Apartheid Israel and other authoritarian regimes across the Middle East shows the weaknesses in the Biden administration’s supposed support for democracy worldwide.

Mexicans, and in fact citizens of every country, should be free to protest their own governments without U.S. interference. Amlo’s actions should be criticized as the moves he has taken will only weaken faith in the country’s electoral system. His accusing the protestors of Narco links does not help his claim either, according to CNN. The threat to democracy should also not

be overblown, however, as Amlo has not as of yet acted outside the law or tried to stifle political dissent by cracking down on protestors. Mexican citizens will be allowed to make their voices heard at the next election, and while Amlo’s opponents can point to recent electoral changes as reasons for potential losses, the fact remains that Amlo is still incredibly popular. At the end of the day, voters, not protestors, will render their judgment on the president’s actions.

Contact Hamzah at hamzah.khan@student.sbu.edu

THE WORLD HAS AN INFRASTRUCTURE PROBLEM, NATURAL DISASTERS ARE REVEALING IT

Melissa Myrtaj
Staff Writer

On February 6, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Türkiye and Syria with more than a 100 km rupture between Anatolian and Arabian plates, according to BBC News. Reuters reports that the epicenter of the earthquake was about 26 km east of Nurdagi, Türkiye and radiated northeast to central Türkiye and Syria. Eleven minutes after the first hit, there was a 6.7-magnitude aftershock followed by a 7.5-magnitude quake hours later, and an additional 6.0 spasm in the afternoon, adds Reuters. One of the deadliest earthquakes of the decade, the disaster has civil defense members and rescue teams working hard to compensate for the lack of infrastructure and equipment necessary to handle the quake’s aftermath. In Syria, residential complexes built for people

who were displaced within Syria were ruined by the earthquake, according to Al Jazeera. Complexes in Salqin and Harem in the Idlib countryside and al-Atareb and Jenderez in Aleppo, complexes in the opposition-controlled region, were destroyed. The quick building collapses in the Idlib and Aleppo countryside were partly due to the attacks the area has endured over the past 10 years, Saria Bitar, a civil engineer and head of Haithi Hayati Volunteering Group in the northern city of Idlib, told Al Jazeera. Bitar explained that the buildings’ infrastructure in Aleppo was not strong enough for the earthquake, especially after suffering military strikes under Assad’s regime.

However, the quick collapses are rooted in the infrastructure of the region not accounting for natural disasters in the building processes of the residential complexes. Al Jazeera further explains

that the complexes in northwestern Syria lacked technical and engineering regulations like the absence of a sufficient number of metal rods in the buildings’ foundations, as well as not digging the foundations deep enough to ensure that they will be sturdy. The structures that survived the earthquake were buildings whose construction was supervised by engineers who aligned their work with international criteria.

The failure of infrastructure led to the collapses, but the absence of the equipment necessary to save people from the fallen buildings has resulted in further deaths. The countries do not have the machinery to lift the collapsed ceilings, especially in buildings that were four or five floors high. Rescue teams and locals worked two days straight lifting roofs to save families. Abu Muhammed, a resident in Jinderes, Syria, told Al Jazeera that

dozens of families could have stayed alive if heavy equipment had been available, but they all died due to the extreme cold and being cut off from food and water. This earthquake is something the countries did not plan for and has created irreversible damage to the families in the region.

As for Türkiye, Al Jazeera reports that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan acknowledged the shortcomings of his government’s response, saying, “In the first days, we were not able to conduct work as efficiently as we wanted to in Adiyaman, for reasons such as the destructive impact of the tremors, adverse weather and challenges due to the damaged infrastructure.” He added, according to BBC News, “For this, I ask forgiveness.”

In Türkiye, like in Syria, the buildings did not comply with government standards, said Eyup Muheu, president

of the Chamber of Architects of Türkiye. According to the Associated Press, Builders tend to use lower quality materials, fewer professionals to oversee projects, and avoid regulations to cut costs. Also like in Syria, the government’s aid in these areas does not reach where it needs to in order to combat the disaster. The United Nations has said at least 1.5 million people have been made homeless in southern Türkiye, with more than 500,000 homes needing to be rebuilt, reports Al Jazeera. BBC News adds that where the aid does reach, it does so slowly, as Adiyaman resident Mehmet Yildirim explains, “I did not see anyone until 2:00 pm on the second day of the earthquake.”

As of February, Al Jazeera reports that more than 41,000 people have died in Türkiye and about 5,800 in Syria. This is the irreversible damage from a natural disaster

the Turkish and Syrian governments could have relieved by following proper guidelines instead of focusing on relieving the costs at the time. This is an opportunity for the governments to establish a new norm for infrastructure, implement active policy reform to close the gaps in unsupervised construction, and fix the buildings that do not meet government or international standards. This can be the catalyst to change policy and take lead in preventative measures to secure the safety of the people living in their country and to ensure the governments are ready to be there quickly and adequately to provide.

Contact Melissa at melissa.myrtaj@student.sbu.edu

THE TALIBAN: A SUFFOCATING NIGHTMARE FOR UNMARRIED WOMEN

Pranali Jain
Staff Writer

It has only been a year and a half since the Taliban took over Afghanistan. But for the Afghan women living in this nightmare, 18 months becomes an eternity.

The Taliban’s control of Afghanistan has been detrimental to most Afghans. Radio Free Europe states millions of families have been struggling to survive in a crashing economy in what was already one of the world’s poorest countries. The absence of a proper meal and electricity in tandem with the harsh cold and drought has made an already disastrous situation worse, BBC News writes.

According to Human Rights Watch, the Taliban has also stopped public welfare programs, pensions, and other humanitarian support for the citizens. This is partly due to a lack of funds after Western countries sanctioned Afghanistan’s central bank reserves, which prevents money from

circulating in the country. Afghans have been forced to resort to desperate survival measures, going as far as selling their kidneys or their children, particularly daughters, to buy a meal for their families, Radio Free Europe says. The consequences, though, are significantly worse for women. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, they promised to respect women’s rights. However, according to The Associated Press, that promise was short-lived, as women and girls were banned from obtaining secondary education within a month of the Taliban’s takeover.

Moreover, since May 2022, the Taliban has been slowly yet steadily suffocating women through heavy restrictions on various aspects of women’s lives, from education and employment to social interaction and leisure. BBC News reports that between May and November 2022, women were required to wear a burqa and a niqab in public places, allowed

to travel only with a male companion, and banned from universities and educational institutions past the sixth grade as well as parks, gyms, and places of employment. These bans have become prison sentences for the 14 million women and girls in the country, HRW reports. RFE states that economic sanctions imposed on Afghanistan’s government had already proved to be a significant obstacle to getting foreign aid inside the country. To make matters worse, the ban on women’s employment paralyzed the only source of support the Afghans had under Taliban control – humanitarian aid from nongovernmental organizations.

Al Jazeera explains that female aid workers play a crucial role in serving women in these conservative communities, especially when it comes to recognizing their needs. With millions already suffering, the prohibition on women serving as aid workers meant that the Co-operative for Assistance

and Relief Everywhere (CARE), the International Rescue Committee, and other nongovernmental organizations were forced to halt operations. Though women are able to work in a limited capacity in healthcare, NGOs pulling out has had an especially devastating impact on the most vulnerable Afghans – widowed and single women.

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could pursue babysitting, farming, or cleaning households, for example. However, with the current ban coupled with high inflation, widowed and single women have no avenue for survival. RFE highlights that women-led households are only able to consume, if they are lucky, a fraction of the food they used to before the Taliban came into power.

While 95 percent of all Afghan citizens suffer from hunger, according to RFE, 100 percent of female-led households struggle with access to food. With a ban on women’s employment, education, and mobility, widows and single women suffer the most as they do not possess the only key to some sort of relief in the Taliban’s Afghanistan — a male relative.

According to The Conversation, single women and widows have no source of income. Before the Taliban took over, women who did not have a university education worked in the informal employment sector; they

restriction put forth by the Taliban. The international community widely recognizes the dystopian reality of the 38 million people in Afghanistan. Efforts are underway to implement training programs and development assistance so Afghans can sustain themselves instead of relying on food imports and foreign aid.

Nevertheless, tomorrow every Afghan citizen will wake up to another day of suffering under the Taliban. As for widowed and single women, this unpredictable nightmare seems to have no end in sight.

The walls are closing in on unmarried women, and the probability of survival for Afghans, especially those in women-led households, is diminishing with each new

restriction put forth by the Taliban. The international community widely recognizes the dystopian reality of the 38 million people in Afghanistan. Efforts are underway to implement training programs and development assistance so Afghans can sustain themselves instead of relying on food imports and foreign aid. Nevertheless, tomorrow every Afghan citizen will wake up to another day of suffering under the Taliban. As for widowed and single women, this unpredictable nightmare seems to have no end in sight.

Contact Pranali at pranali.jain@student.sbu.edu

INDIA’S NEUTRALITY AT G-20 IS JUSTIFIED

James Murray
Staff Writer

At a recent G-20 summit held in Bengaluru, India on February 25, leaders from 20 different nations met to discuss the current effects of the Russia-Ukraine war. According to the Associated Press, on the one-year anniversary of the war, tensions flared in the room, as leaders failed to reach a consensus on the official wording of a document describing the ongoing war. China and Russia’s representatives objected to the document, which included paragraphs from the previous summit’s “Bali Declaration.” The Associated Press further explains that when asked why they required certain wording to be removed from the document, Russian and Chinese representatives responded that they “just didn’t want it anymore.”

This year, Delhi holds the presidency in the

G-20, making this summit of greater importance than many of the ones held in years prior. Despite being united by the opposition of western practices, India, China, and Russia disagree heavily over the war in Ukraine. Because of the disagreement over the Bali declaration’s wording, Delhi released a chair’s summary specifically noting “different assessments of the situation” in Ukraine, reports BBC News.

Due to the controversial nature of the war in Ukraine, Delhi is playing the middleman to avoid further conflict, attempting to make a compromise over the wording in the document. This is because India, despite the war in Ukraine, “views Russia as a partner,” reports Deutsche Welle. This approach reflects Delhi not wanting to step on the toes of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, fearing damage to their multilateral diplomatic and

economic relationships. China has additionally ramped up its diplomatic efforts, suggesting an interest in peace through a “12 point document detailing steps towards peace for the conflict in Ukraine,” reports The New York Times. China’s backing of Russia and simultaneous ambitions for peace seem contradictory, which complicates its relationship with India.

While the war in Ukraine is incredibly important for the future of the international system and will have serious consequences based on the outcome, it is not the only important issue unfolding in the world. India is facing backlash and intense scrutiny for focusing the G-20 summit on topics such as “the inequalities and developmental challenges that many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America face today,” reports DW. Yet, as a leader for the global south,

India is doing its job in putting issues important to the developing world in the spotlight as much as the prevailing issues in the global north. Western perspectives often put more emphasis on events and problems happening in the north over the varying issues in the south, so it isn’t wrong for Delhi to emphasize what is needed in different regions of the world. In addition, the West demanding that India takes a stand against Russia and China is likely making matters worse, as India was one of 32 countries that recently abstained in a UN General Assembly resolution in favor of calling Russia to pull out of Ukraine.

Despite being overwhelmingly in favor of peace in Ukraine and using global institutions to work out international issues, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed some pessimism at the G-20 summit. In a recorded statement, Modi

explained, “The experience of the last few years – financial crisis, climate change, pandemic, terrorism, and wars – clearly shows that global governance has failed,” reports Al Jazeera. This pessimism reflects the unfortunate state of global affairs occurring right now. Despite international law, condemnations of war, human rights abuses, and even talks of genocide, an international system this separate makes it difficult for global institutions to agree on political issues. Further adding to a bleak outlook on the situation, Modi added, “We should not allow issues that we cannot resolve together to come in the way of those we can,” implying that the war in Ukraine cannot be solved through international cooperation.

While this may seem like a darker way to look at the situation, Prime Minister Modi may be correct. The G-20 summit should be utilized to

increase the possibility of solving problems together in multilateral dialogue. There is little point in bickering over the categorization of the war in Ukraine if it is obvious that Russia is going to object to the way it is being described. This fruitless debate over wording is a waste of time, time that should be dedicated to other issues in the Global South, or at least to more solid peacebuilding efforts. All nations should strive for an end to the war in Ukraine, because, as Eurasia Review reports, “the continued destruction in Ukraine will only damage the world’s prospects for recovery in the post-Covid era.”

Contact James at james.murray@student.sbu.edu

CHATHAM HOUSE: IS EUROPE PREPARED TO SUPPORT UKRAINE?

Sophia Alicea
Staff Writer

On March 1, Chatham House tackled whether Europe is ready to face the hardships of Russia's war in Ukraine. The Chatham House of the Royal Institute of International Affairs is a renowned international affairs think tank based in London. They aim to create sustainably based solutions to foreign policy questions by facilitating thought provoking dialogue. The event was organized by the Eastern European Studies Centre (EESC) and invited minds from throughout Europe to speak. Among the guests were Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, speaker of the Lithuanian parliament; Tomas Janeliūnas, Chief Research Programme Officer for EESC; and Žygmantas Pavilionis, Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lithuanian Parliament. The speakers first addressed whether Europe is equipped to handle

a protracted conflict in Ukraine and whether the European military sector can resupply North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations' own defenses while supporting Ukraine. According to Janeliūnas, the effects of the conflict, such as high energy costs, are felt throughout Europe, while NATO members and the defense industry are under pressure to replenish their weapons stockpiles. Europe has just enough natural gas in reserve to get through the winter, and Ukraine is still receiving humanitarian and military assistance. The possibility of longer-term European commitment and providing more advanced weaponry to Ukraine is a topic frequently avoided. However, recent German compromise allowing Ukraine tanks suggests that Ukraine will receive sustained military support from important providers. Janeliūnas claims that although Russia's economy and military will weaken, Russia is still a threat.

Janeliūnas emphasized the shift in Russian intentions, which he believes are crucial to examine. Russia's invasion in Ukraine was initially a simple sweeping operation of territory, but is now a total war between Russia and the West. Čmilytė-Nielsen stressed this progression towards total war as troubling, as it may become a war between the West and authoritarianism. The European Union (EU) reacted swiftly by placing sanctions, among other actions, on Russia. Additionally, within a week of the invasion, the United Nations General Assembly strongly denounced Russian aggression. Nonetheless, there were 35 abstentions, and only a few governments in Asia—Singapore, South Korea, and Japan—strongly supported Ukraine. China, India, and Indonesia have all resisted choosing a side. Additionally, according to Dr. Alex Vines, Director of the Chatham House Africa program, the change has been felt

throughout much of Africa. He points out that 51 percent of the countries that abstained from voting at the UN to condemn Russia's invasion were African nations, representing a partial return to the Cold War position of many African countries. Before Russia's invasion, European nations, including France and Germany, struggled to adjust to the region's changing geopolitical landscape. The acts of Russia have fundamentally altered how Europe views its security stance. According to Jamie Shea, an associate fellow in the Chatham House International Security program, Germany revisited security policy within foreign policy for the first time in decades. Panel experts discussed the environmental, food, and energy crisis facing Europe. In response to the Russian oil and gas supply disruption, Europe took looked for alternative gas sources and sped up its transition to renewable energy. Due to the breakdown of the supply of

pipeline gas from Russia, Germany and some of its neighbors now obtain their energy from sources such as Asia, the Middle East, and sometimes Africa. Russia and Ukraine are two of the world's largest producers of sources such as petroleum and fertilizer. The conflict has disrupted supplies for both industrialized and developing nations. Finally, the expert panel examined a "new Ukraine" and international law's relationship with the West. Ukraine has continued to operate despite over 14 million displaced persons and attacks on infrastructure, energy, and transportation. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has come to represent this solidarity and defiance. Prior to Zelenskyy, Ukrainian internal politics were highly polarized and the public accused officials of corruption. The panel explains that Zelenskyy's strength lies in his ability to gain support for reform, eradicate corruption, and promote

peace. Although repeatedly postponed, official recognition was offered to Kiev by the EU, making restricted membership possible in the future. According to Orysia Lutsevych, a research fellow and head of the Ukraine Forum in the Russia and Eurasia program at Chatham House, the cornerstones of a Ukrainian victory are restoring territorial integrity, enforcing war criminal justice, and forcing the Kremlin to pay for devastation. It would seem premature to discuss war crimes, compensation, and punishment. The Russian Federation will be held accountable for its actions, said Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at a Chatham House event. "This is the only tool of civilization that is available to us to ensure that in the end everyone who made this war possible will be brought to justice," he added.

Contact Sophia at sophia.alicea@student.shu.edu

CHATHAM HOUSE HOSTS DIALOGUE ON ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEFENSE

Alexander Lee
Staff Writer



Member of Ukrainian Parliament Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze
Courtesy of Heinrich Böll Stiftung (Wikimedia Commons)
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On March 8, Chatham House hosted a panel consisting of female guests in the defense sector. Speakers included Dr. Andrea Ellner, a Lecturer in the Defense Studies Department at King's College London; Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, a senior member of the Ukrainian Parliament and a strong advocate for the role of women in the armed forces; Dr. Hanna Ketola, a Research Associate at the University of York; and Colonel Hannah Stoy, the Deputy Assistant Chief of Personnel at the headquarters Field Army. Dr. Ellner first gave a brief history on Transatlantic militaries, including military ethics. She points out that throughout history, many have believed that women could not do certain things—particularly military service. However, since the end of the Cold War, women have had more oppor-

tunities in the military. Women were given access to combat role. Including women in aspects of military operation such as combatting insurgencies broadened the recruitment pool of potential fighters, the panel explains. The United Nations (UN) called for more women to be involved in the armed forces and in peacekeeping operations. For Dr. Ellner, broadened inclusion of women within the military is only effective if military culture is transformed so a spectrum of solutions to conflict can be seen through

the lens of gender, which will lead to a culture that can resolve problems in a more nuanced method. Klymush-Tsintsadze spoke specifically about the impact of women in the current war in Ukraine. She noted the increase in women in the armed forces is due to the need to fill the ranks. Of the 60,000 women serving in Ukraine's armed forces, 5,000 are involved in direct combat operations. Of those, 105 were killed in action, over 100 were wounded in action, and 50 are missing in action. Although the women de-

fend the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine with the same resolve as men, Tsintsadze explains, women in Ukraine's military are still encountering a glass ceiling, as they are still being told that certain roles are "not for them." Women also did not have any presence on either the Ukrainian or Russian negotiation teams during the early stages of the war. Dr. Ketola spoke about women in insurgency and asymmetric warfare. She questioned whether women are truly being utilized in military movements, and whether women view their efforts as being a valuable contribution. Another factor she mentions is the common false assumption that female fighters share a common agenda, when in fact they might not have such intentions. Further, women in insurgencies are often categorized as noncombatants or merely women associated with armed groups. Women ex-fighters can change gender

norms as they now have access to many of the same services and similar status as male ex-fighters. Colonel Stoy shared a brief overview of her career, which began when she was 14 years old. She joined the Royal Signal Corps, aiming to get close to action and adventure. While she was at Sandhurst Military Academy, she watched the unfolding of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States, and knew that the event would change her military career profoundly. She deployed to Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq in 2003 and 2004. During her time in the service, she found that she did not encounter many barriers to her service. She believed that hard work and good results would advance her career. She is a strong believer that women should be included in all aspects of the military, including design and in strategy. Toward the end of the event, speakers shared

Contact Alexander at alexander.lee2@student.shu.edu

ITALIAN EMBASSY HOSTS WEBINAR ON CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Ashley Skladany
Staff Writer

The Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the Department of Communication Studies at Ben Gurion University co-hosted a webinar on March 3, titled "Crafting the Future of Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Age." The webinar was part of the Italian Embassy's Digital Diplomacy Series and examined how digital technologies are transforming the practice of cultural diplomacy with cultural content. The panel consisted of experts in the field who explored the potential of the metaverse, avatars, and visual representations in digital and cultural diplomacy and how they can interfere with the way the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cultural institutions, or embassies engage in cultural diplomacy. Moderated by Ilaria Poggiolini, Professor of International History at the University of Pavia, the panel featured Corneliu Bjola, Associate Professor of Diplomatic Studies at the University of Oxford; Allegra Baistrocchi, Consul of Italy

in Detroit; Franco Bevione, CEO of Wedoo LLC; and Ilan Manor, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communications at Ben Gurion University. The speakers discussed different viewpoints such as the scholarly, theoretical, and practical sides of diplomacy and the private sector. The presentation touched on the potential, risks, and challenges of using the metaverse for storytelling in cultural diplomacy. The metaverse was defined as a network of three-dimensional virtual worlds where users can experience different activities through their digital egos or avatars. During the webinar, Baistrocchi highlighted the "Love IT Detroit" project, which uses cultural diplomacy to promote Italy in areas of the United States through design. The project includes a physical space in downtown Detroit and a metaverse. Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Italy in Washington, D.C., support this program. Baistrocchi stated

that the project is under construction for a new metaverse that will be launched in September with a theme of sustainability. She intends to use these tools to change the narrative of Italy and start conversations about things that Italy is not known for, such as recycling and efficient use of resources. Manor discussed how different digital environments are governed by certain logics and how digital cultural activities need to be tailored to the logic of the digital environment. Manor advocated for global cultural institutions to think globally and act locally, recognizing that different nations can accommodate different forms of digital technologies. Bevione emphasized the potential benefits cultural diplomacy can have on the private sector, as well as the broader impact it can have on society. Bevione demonstrated a new tool that can be used to create avatars and enter a virtual world and highlighted the huge interest in this emerging



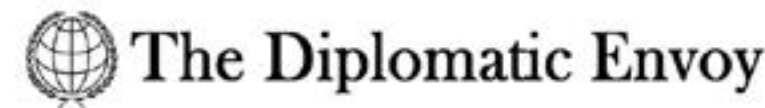
Palazzo della Farnesina, home to Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Courtesy of Simone Ramello (Flickr)
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technology among developers and content creators. The webinar also addressed the digital revolution in cultural diplomacy, which has been brought on by the mass embrace of digital technologies by cultural institutions and accelerated by COVID-19. Cultural institutions have adopted a host of digital technologies ranging from virtual museums to AI-generated art and immersive exhibitions. These technologies offer new ways of

reaching audiences and can be more cost-effective than offline activities. The "Crafting the Future of Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Age" webinar offered a valuable discussion on the potential of digital technologies for cultural diplomacy, highlighting the benefits and challenges of the metaverse and avatars. The speakers emphasized the importance of tailoring digital cultural activities to the

digital environment and the potential for cultural diplomacy to have a significant impact on society as it aims to bridge connection between nations and promote interests of each country. The webinar provided insights that will be crucial as cultural institutions continue to navigate the ongoing digital revolution in cultural diplomacy.

Contact Ashley at ashley.skladany@student.shu.edu



CONTRIBUTORS

- Alexander Lee
- Andrea Hebel
- Anna Thibodeau
- Anthony Samaniego
- Ashley Skladany
- Austin Delsontro
- Catherine Anderson
- David Babigian
- Drew Starbuck
- George Slowey
- Hamzah Khan
- James Murray
- Megan Gawron
- Melissa Myrtaj
- Patricia Salib
- Pranali Jain
- Sophia Alicea
- Sophie Ulm

MEGAN GAWRON
Editor-in-Chief

ANDREA HEBEL
Managing Editor

HAMZAH KHAN
International News Editor

SHWETA PARTHASARATHY
Opinion Editor

CHRISTOPHER BENÍTEZ
CUARTAS
Associate Editor

MADELINE ROWE
Campus News Editor

ANDREA GONZALEZ
Digital Editor

ANNA THIBODEAU
Layout Editor

KATHERINE DORRER
Communications Liaison

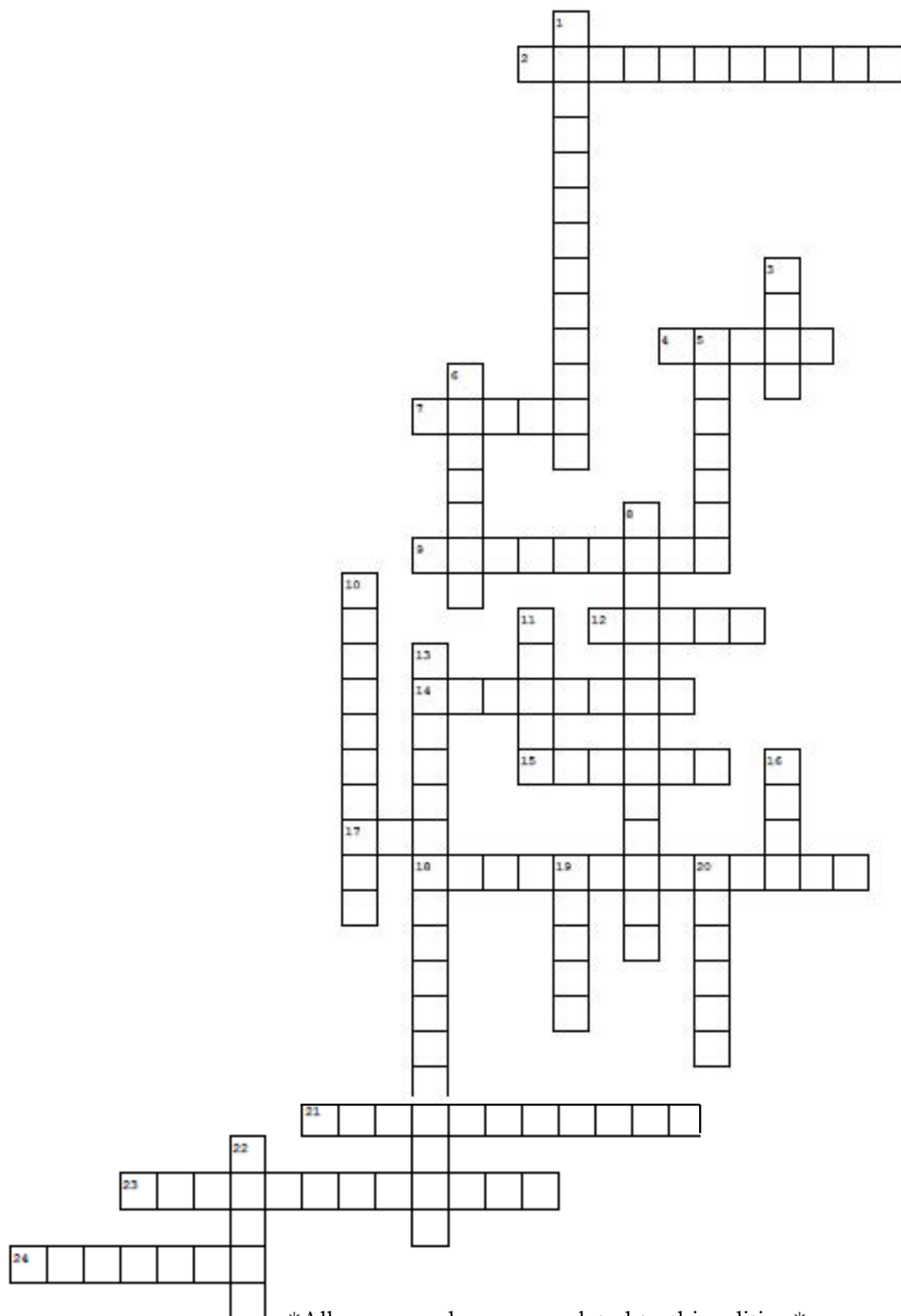
DR. COURTNEY SMITH
Faculty Adviser

This publication is made possible through the generosity of the Constance J. Milstein, Esq., Endowed Fund.

The views expressed in *The Diplomatic Envoy* are those of the writers and are not intended to represent the views of the School of Diplomacy, Seton Hall University, or the CJM Fund.

For more information on sources, go to blogs.shu.edu/thediplomaticenvoy

March Edition Crossword



All crossword answers related to this edition

Created by Anna Thibodeau using <https://www.crosswordlabs.com>

Across

2. Surprisingly popular 3rd party Nigerian candidate
4. ____ Institute of Virology which has studied coronavirus strains for years
7. Biblical term for the West Bank
9. TikTok parent company
12. Russian nuclear treaty with the U.S.
14. Palestinian word for uprising
15. Telecommunication channels are developing across this continent
17. This country has publicly rejected China's Russia-Ukraine peace plan
18. Program that uses cultural diplomacy to promote Italy in the U.S.
21. Colors of Mexico's INE
23. Renowned international relations think tank
24. African country adversely facing effects of climate change

Down

1. President of Syria
3. New voting system causing privacy concerns in Nigeria
5. This country is currently facing 14 million displaced persons
6. Country recently hit by two earthquakes
8. This country recently introduced zero-tolerance for sexual assault in its military
10. Nigerian President-elect
11. This country has called for a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire
13. Cultural diplomacy is now facing a digital...
16. Nickname for Mexico's president
19. This country stayed neutral at G-20
20. App threatened with bans worldwide
22. A primary landing for migrants from the Mediterranean