



# The Diplomatic Envoy

## MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT AND CALLS EARLY ELECTIONS

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Staff Writer

On October 10, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, announced to the public that parliament would be dissolved. CNBC reports that this will pave the way for an early election, legitimizing the next Malaysian administration. The exact date of the election will be determined by the election committee, states Al Jazeera. According to Malaysian law, when parliament is dissolved for an early election, the election must take place within 60 days of the dissolution.

To adjourn parliament, Yaakob had to put a request through to the constitutional monarch of Malaysia, King Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, or Abdullah of Pahang. According to Channel News Asia, King Abdullah stated that he felt parliament needed to dissolve so

there could be a popular election to reflect the people's will. He was disappointed with the level of political distress in Malaysia and "hoped that the Election Committee will hold an election [soon]."

The urgency for this election stems from the upcoming monsoon season that killed fifty people last year, according to CNBC. If the election is held during monsoon season, the turnout to the polls will be significantly decreased and may not accurately represent the opinion of the people. Monsoons in Malaysia consist of torrential downpour, making it extremely difficult for people to travel and get to polling booths to vote, says National Geographic.

Prime Minister Yaakob has stated that his goal is to keep the government of Malaysia not only respected in the international community, but by

its citizens. The election comes after the dismantling of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the ruling party of Malaysia for nearly 60 years. In 2018, the UMNO lost general elections to the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, a political party founded by Malaysia's former autocrat, Mahathir Mohamad, who ruled Malaysia from 1981 to 2003, explains Brookings. Despite this effort, the UMNO took control again in 2020 after the new coalition fell apart due to internal dissent. In August 2021, the coalition again dissolved, allowing Yaakob, a member of the UMNO, to take the prime minister position, says Al Jazeera.

The reason for such political turmoil in Malaysia is not only the collapse of the UMNO, but also the discovery of the former prime minister, Najib Razak's, involvement in a



Malaysian Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri Yaakob. Courtesy of Firdaus Latif (Wikimedia Commons)

multibillion-dollar scandal. reports that Razak has denied "any wrongdoing," though the court has found him guilty on seven counts involving transferring \$9.4 million to personal bank accounts. This resulted in a sentence of 12 years in prison and a \$46.8 million fine. Although his lawyers have pushed for a not-guilty verdict, they have not prevailed. In addition to the former prime minister facing charges,

the current President of UMNO, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, is also on trial for graft. He also pledged the party's allegiance to Razak, saying it would stand behind him until he received true justice, adds the Associated Press.

Yaakob has also been under pressure from the UMNO chairs to push for an earlier election. In one of its last efforts, the Yaakob administration created its budget for 2023, which included govern-

ment spending of 372 billion ringgits, or \$80 billion, says CNBC. This amount has dipped from 385.3 billion ringgits, or \$85 billion, due to the stagnation of Malaysia's economy. According to Finance Minister Zafrul Aziz, the budget plan is to even out financial needs within the general population. The budget also includes 42 billion ringgits, or \$9 billion, for public welfare, including cash handouts to poor families and communities, according to the Associated Press. The budget will have to be voted on again in 2023 after the elections.

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## DOZENS KILLED BY FLOODING IN VENEZUELA

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Venezuela is currently recovering from a disastrous flood in the city of Las Tejerias. At least 54 people died in floods on October 8 and three more people were found dead in the central Venezuelan state of Aragua, reports Reuters. Many also remained missing as rescue crews searched the wreckage of homes and buildings in the city. The El Pato River flooded as a result of torrential rain. Trees, automobiles, residences, and shops were all destroyed by the ensuing flooding in the town, which is located around 87 kilometers, or about 50 miles, southwest of the capital city of Caracas.

Late at night on Saturday October 8, as mud, rocks and trees tore through the streets and homes, residents of Las Tejerias had only a few seconds to get to safety. Vice President Delcy Rodriguez lamented the loss of life in Las Tejerias as authorities set up shelters and rescue teams were deployed to pull survivors from the wreckage, reports Al Jazeera. She stated that about a month's worth of rain had fallen in just eight hours. As military and rescue officials searched the riverbanks for survivors, Rodriguez said the primary goal of the rescuers was to find victims still buried under mud and boulders throughout the town.

After the floods, res-

idents frantically dug through the thick mud by hand to try to find survivors and loved ones. They were joined by search and rescue dogs along with specialized search teams. Interior Minister Remigio Ceballos said the landslides had been caused by Hurricane Julia, which passed just north of Venezuela, reports BBC News. "There was a record rainfall, as much rain in one day as is usually seen in a month," he said. Many residents have lost their loved ones in this tragedy. According to News360, Ceballos told the TeleSur news channel, "So far, officially, we have 50 people who unfortunately lost their lives and have been handed over to their families."

Reuters reports that Armando Escalona, a 43-year-old taxi driver, was attending an evangelical church service with his family when the flood waters caught them by surprise. He said that he remembers hugging his family for a short while until an unknown object hit his head and left him unconscious. When he woke, he couldn't find his family. "I lost my wife and my 5-year-old son. I can't even talk. We were at the service and everything happened so fast," Escalona said.


Although preventing an event like this is impossible, many blame climate change for this incident and are expressing displeasure with Venezuela's environmental practices

as a whole. The Humanitarian Practice Network specifically calls out Venezuela's environmental practices. They stated, "Mounting evidence suggests that Venezuela is experiencing accelerating, chronic climate shocks and stresses." There are different factors that play into the current situation with climate change in Venezuela, however, many question the competence of the Venezuelan government and if they are focused on the environmental impacts of their practices.

The Harvard International Review has specifically criticized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro for his practices in the oil market. They write, "Venezuela's state-

run PDVSA oil company has been pumping out oil without concerns about contamination. As a result, PDVSA rarely cleans up oil spills regularly." These oil spills lead to severe consequences for Venezuelans, such as water pollution and less successful harvests, which have affected every corner of Venezuela. Ultimately, the lack of environmental oversight from the Venezuelan government will continue to have a negative effect on the country, and broad reforms are required for the country to adequately address the issue of climate change.

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## MEXICO FILES SECOND LAWSUIT AGAINST AMERICAN GUN MANUFACTURERS

**Kaila Engle**  
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On Monday, October 10, the Mexican government revealed that they are filing a second lawsuit against five large gun distributors located in Arizona reports NBC News. Mexico alleges that American gun manufacturers are contributing to arms trafficking in Mexico. The defendants in the case include Sprague's Sports Inc, SnG Tactical (LLC), Diamondback Shooting Sports Inc, Lone Prairie, Hub Target Sports, and



Photo of U.S.-Mexico border. Courtesy of Shaan Hurley (Flickr)

Ammo A-Z. This new lawsuit was filed in wake of the dismissal of their first lawsuit, which was filed in Boston and sued for \$10 billion in reparations. The first suit was filed in August 2021 and the verdict was given in late September of this year. The Associated Press explains that Judge F. Dennis Saylor ruled that Mexico's claim did not provide enough evidence to overcome the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA). PLCAA was passed in 2005 and

was made to provide gun manufacturers and distributors broad immunity from liability and make it difficult for lawsuits to hold the U.S. firearms industry accountable.

This legal action comes in response to the widespread gun violence faced in Mexico today, and the Mexican government's efforts to cut off the illegal gun trade between Mexican Cartels and U.S. manufacturers. According to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, "The Mexican government estimates 70% of the weapons trafficked into Mexico come from the U.S." Al Jazeera reports that the complaint also brought up the argument that in 2019 alone, at least 17,000 homicides in Mexico were linked to trafficked weapons. Mexico has appealed this claim along with filing another lawsuit and has said it plans to go up to the U.S. Supreme Court if need be.

In the Arizona lawsuit,

the Mexican government is asking the defendants to put in place more measures to prevent illegal arms trafficking and have a more well-monitored record of all gun sales as well as pay damages to the Mexican government as retribution for the harmful effects of the gun violence epidemic. Legal advisor Alejandro Celorio reported to Reuters that the lawsuit aims to address the immigration crisis at the border and how a decrease in gun trafficking will decrease gun violence in Mexico. On October 10, Foreign Affairs Minister Marcelo Ebrard took to social media to voice his opinion about the situation saying that Mexico is considering withdrawing their support in the U.S. war on drugs if the U.S. does not support their war on arms reports Barron's.

Arms trafficking is a lucrative business that U.S. companies are earn-

ing significant profits from. The Arms Control Association determined that "In 2021, specialists who collaborate with the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated the annual value of guns trafficked from the United States at more than \$250 million." As of 2020, the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics states that "59.277 million or 21.4 percent of people 12 and over have used illegal drugs or misused prescription drugs within the last year." These numbers show no sign of decreasing, and as this drug epidemic continues to grow the U.S. needs the support of Mexico now more than ever.

Submitting to the ultimatum presented by the Mexican government can be costly for America's image abroad. Whatever the verdict of this second case, the Biden Administration, which has advocated for more gun

regulations, will have to decide whether to support American corporate interests abroad or maintain close relations with its border ally. As the global order moves in a multipolar direction with rising powers like China, Russia, and India wielding more and more influence, it may not be in U.S. interests to ignore the needs of its neighbor.

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## OPEC OIL PRODUCTION CUT PUTS RELATIONS WITH US AT RISK

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After gathering for their first in-person meeting in Vienna since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a coalition of oil-producing nations led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, commonly referred to as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), announced on October 5 that they will cut oil production by 2 million barrels per day beginning in November, reports the Associated Press. Head of Americas Analysis at Rystad Energy Claudio Galimberti predicts that gas prices are to increase by roughly 10 percent in the United States, complicating the Biden administration's strategy to achieve lower gas prices ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.

Before OPEC's announcement, gas prices were already rising in several states with ongoing congressional races. The Washington Post reports that just this past week,

prices jumped 62 cents in California and 40 cents in Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska. Falling gas prices over the summer improved the Democrats' electoral prospects, but with the recent spike in gas prices, those gains have been undercut, and Republican polling numbers have vastly improved.

The cuts come despite aggressive lobbying on behalf of the Biden administration. In July, Biden met with the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, despite his claim early in his presidency that he would not meet with the Saudi prince, reports BBC News. However, Biden left the meeting failing to secure any firm energy agreements, Reuters writes. White House officials have suggested that the Biden Administration has not done enough to dissuade the Gulf Arab countries from choosing to cut production.

OPEC's decision to lower the production of oil increases prices, which has led to claims that OPEC is helping fund Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reports Al Jazeera. The increase in oil prices will likely lead to more revenue for the main oil sellers, most notably Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Saudi Arabia's resistance to the Biden administration's efforts has left the White House contemplating a possible re-evaluation of ties with Saudi

Arabia. The chair of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Menendez, has called for the government to freeze arms sales to Saudi Arabia due to their perceived support for Russia and disdain for U.S. interests.

OPEC has defended its actions, claiming that they only intend to stabilize the oil market in light of a recent fall in global energy prices. They have reiterated a commitment to enhancing guidance for the oil market and not driv-

ing up prices as charged.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm has previously suggested that the administration use emergency powers to curb exports as a way to boost domestic inventories. However, leaders of the American Petroleum Institute and American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers have sent Granholm a five-page letter in response, warning that such restrictions would likely backfire and reduce inventory, discourage in-

vestment in increased production, and alienate U.S. allies during a time of war.

OPEC's decision to slash production during the time of war in Ukraine has been seen by many countries, including the United States, as a threat to peace. Such cuts will negatively impact the people of the U.S. with anticipated increases in oil prices. Because of this, the U.S. will likely experience political turmoil, especially in many hotly contested states with ongoing congressional elections. The Biden Administration has warned of severe consequences for Saudi Arabia, which is still extremely reliant on the U.S. for military aid. OPEC's decision to cut oil production will reverberate around the world and the Biden Administration will need to ask fast to receive any concessions from the Gulf petrostates.

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OPEC consists of 15 member countries, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia. Courtesy of Just Click's With A Camera (Flickr)

## XI JINPING HANDED THIRD TERM AT PARTY CONGRESS

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The Chinese Communist party opened its 20th National Congress on October 16. This meeting is expected to be one of the most important in the party's history, as it is anticipated that current Supreme Leader Xi Jinping is being handed a third consecutive five-year term. President Xi Jinping has arguably become China's most powerful president since Chairman Mao Ze Dong. According to BBC News, Xi has held three of the Chinese government's most important positions for the last 10 years, as the Chinese president, Communist Party Secretary, and commander of the Chinese armed forces. Many experts have criticized the authoritarian direction in which Xi has taken China, and his forecasted third term is a strong signal of the continuation of that policy.



Great Hall of the People in Beijing, host of the CCP National Congress. Courtesy of Huangdan 2060 (Wikimedia Commons)

President Xi has strategically amassed power over the years to advance from an equal in a government based on collective leadership to what is essentially a supreme leader. According to Reuters, Xi is in the process of purging the Chinese government of opposition, investigating as many as 4.7 million officials he deemed disloyal or ineffective. Additionally, Xi has been able to main-

tain the Chinese economy on its course to becoming the biggest economy in the world, which has granted him credibility in the Chinese government; however, the Chinese economic miracle seems to be disappearing with growth rates slowing every year, as the South China Morning Post reports. Xi has cemented his power in Chinese politics under the guise of strengthening national

unity, preaching that all ethnic groups inhabiting China's vast territories owe allegiance to one indivisible China whose history stands above ethnic divisions. According to BBC News, everywhere from Tibet to Taiwan, Communist Party officials operate to cement and enforce the idea of one China. These policies, as well as accusations of authoritarian abuse culminating in numerous

human rights violations against ethnic minorities, will likely only increase in intensity as Xi seeks to consolidate his control over unassimilated provinces such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and even Taiwan. Xi's almost guaranteed third term signals the Communist Party's support of the efforts to forge a cohesive national unity by any means necessary.

The continuation of President Xi's tenure has strong implications for the West. Unlike his predecessors, who were influenced by the Dengist ideals that followed pragmatism in order to involve China in the world market, Xi has returned to a Maoist modus operandi where ideology influences policy more often than the other way around, according to Foreign Affairs. Analysts conclude that Xi has pursued a foreign policy with characteristics of the nationalist right, namely in his belief that history is

on China's side and that China needs to develop a more just world order based on its own power. Chinese ideologues under Xi Jinping believe that the United States and the capitalist world will inevitably collapse under the weight of their own contradictions and that China must fill that power vacuum. China's ideological impetus has real implications like its increasingly aggressive foreign policy; something that is likely to continue during Xi Jinping's third term.

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## RECENT BOSNIAN ELECTIONS SPARK RISE IN ETHNIC TENSIONS

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The Bosnian election commission (CIK) has ordered a recount of votes for the presidency of Republika Srpska after questions have reemerged whether peace can remain between the different ethnic communities under a unique government once adapted for peace, but recently, falling short of maintaining order. Other election results from the October 2 election showed that Denis Bećirović won the race for the Muslim Bosniak seat on the country's three-member presidency, DW News reports. Becirovic won 55 percent of the vote over opponent Bakir Izetbegović. For the Croat presidency seat, Željko Komšić defeated his opponent Borjana Krišto with 55 percent of the Croat vote. In the race for the Serb member of the Bosnian presidency, Željka Cvijanović, a close ally of Dodik, won 51 percent of the vote over multiple candidates. Dodik,

who just served a term as the Serb member of the presidency, ran for the separate job of president of the Republika Srpska, the autonomous Serb part of the country. It was in that separate election against his opponent Jeleina Trivić, where the protests and allegations of election fraud occurred. Milorad Dodik has been one of the most powerful politician in Bosnia for years, explains Atalyar. A close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Dodik has been sanctioned by the United States and other nations for allegedly trying to undermine peace and stability in the country. The nationalist politician has repeatedly called for the separation of Republika Srpska from the rest of Bosnia. The country of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complicated political entity, EuroNews details. Because of the Bosnian War, the country is divid-

ed into two political entities: the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska and the mixed Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the Bosnian War, more than 100,000 people died with around 2 million people displaced. The Dayton Accords, which brought the bloody conflict to an end in December 1995, divided the country into the two autonomous entities. Given the region's diversity, the Dayton Accords dictated Bosnia and Herzegovina's state would be collective with the Presidency composed of three members: one Bosniak and one Croat from the Federation and one Serb from the Republika Srpska. This presidency rotates every eight months among the three during a four-year term.

It is important to note that political candidates must register their ethnicity to run for office and citizens may only

vote for a single member of the presidency within their ethnic constituency explains the International Republican Institute. Because ethnic identity acts as a means of political participation, Bosnia and Herzegovina's minority groups, such as the Roma and Jews, cannot run for high office creating a lack of minority representation. This oversight alienates minorities and prevents them from having a voice in the direction of their country. Since the end of the Bosnian War, the country has been economically stagnant, notes Al Jazeera. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has a population of 3.3 million people, seems forever plagued by corruption and ethnic tensions which have impeded efforts to join the European Union, something that three out of four Bosnians want. In a nationwide survey on public perception of elec-

tions, more than 40 percent of Bosnians believed their country's electoral system did not allow for a genuine reflection of citizens' will. While Bosnians anxiously await the electoral recount, observers around the world wonder if political stability can be maintained within a system that divides its citizenry by ethnicity.

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## FORMER MYANMAR LEADER'S PRISON TERM EXTENDED OVER CORRUPTION CHARGES

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Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's democratically elected leader ousted in last year's military takeover, was convicted on two additional corruption charges on October 12, according to The Associated Press.

The new corruption charges, which accuse Suu Kyi of taking a \$550,000 bribe, bring her jail sentence from 23 years to 26 years. Bloomberg explains that since the military junta assumed power in February 2021, Suu Kyi has faced charges ranging from the illegal possession of walkie-talkies to violating the colonial-era Official Secrets Act. Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate, remains on trial for five more corruption charges.

The most recent charges were filed after allegations of corruption by a prominent businessperson who had previ-

ously served a prison sentence for drug possession and trafficking. The businessperson alleged that he frequently delivered cash bribes to Suu Kyi's home in exchange for her giving preference to his company's government tenders, or contract bids, according to Al Jazeera. Suu Kyi's legal team is expected to appeal the decision.

While the businessperson was widely viewed as a questionable witness in Myanmar, the accusations were broadcast on the state-owned television network, Myanmar TV, in what Al Jazeera perceives as an attempt to publicly undermine Suu Kyi's political credibility. The charges against Suu Kyi have the potential to block her from politically challenging the junta.

The military junta has promised to hold an election in 2023, according to NPR. Suu Kyi has little opportunity to influence these elections, howev-

er, due to her inability to address the public. Since she was arrested in February 2021, Suu Kyi has not been seen or heard by the public. Reuters explains that this was made more extreme in October of last year when Khin Maung Zaw, Suu Kyi's head lawyer, revealed the junta had also imposed a gag order on his communications with the public about Suu Kyi.

The gag order details the junta's claims that Maung Zaw's rhetoric could "cause riots and [destabilize] the public peace," Reuters continues. The order also claimed that his communications had made it to "illegal media outlets" that were spreading false information about the junta, Suu Kyi, and the trials. Maung Zaw was known to provide information on Suu Kyi's trial and well-being.

The gag order is just one of many difficulties Suu Kyi's legal team has



Aung San Suu Kyi  
Courtesy of Ctruongngoc (Wikimedia Commons)

face while representing her against a myriad of charges. Myanmar Now reveals that the legal team of The National League for Democracy, Suu Kyi's party, has been representing her, but defense lawyers are frequently barred from court and the team has struggled to transfer power of attorney.

Suu Kyi's case is the most prominent in Myanmar, but she is far from the only person experiencing a slew of charges in the wake of the junta's takeover. In the past

year, NPR reports that at least 15,821 civilians have been arrested and at least 2,343 civilians have been killed by Myanmar security forces. Arrested individuals include other leaders of the National League of Democracy, which won a majority in Parliament in 2020 that would have cemented civilian control over the country. However, members were prevented from assuming their positions by the military, which justified this move with an unsubstantiated claim of voting fraud.

According to The Guardian, human rights groups estimate that over 12,600 people are currently being held by the military, including at least 40 journalists. Journalists, like politicians, have come under severe scrutiny by the junta. This scrutiny has triggered the repeated use of Myanmar's Electronic Transactions Law, which prescribes a pris-

on sentence of seven to 15 years for anyone who electronically transmits "any information relating to secrets of the security of the State." The Committee to Protect Journalists, an American non-profit, has described this application of the law as outrageous and is calling for the release of detained journalists.

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## PRISON RIOTS HIGHLIGHT CONDITIONS IN ECUADORIAN PRISON SYSTEM

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On October 3, 2022, a prison riot in the Cotopaxi Jail located in the city of Latacunga, Ecuador, left 43 prisoners injured and 16 dead, according to Ecuadorian news outlet Ecuavisa. The following day a ninth prison massacre caused by gang violence this year occurred at the Littoral Penitentiary leaving 13 prisoners dead, says Ecuavisa. Meanwhile, in the early morning of October 8 two prisoners were found dead with asphyxiation signs at the Esmeraldas Jail. Prison massacres becoming more common in Ecuador has sparked concerns among numerous international organizations.

CBS News reports that during the Cotopaxi riot that tactical units conducted operations to regain control of the facility, which houses about

4,300 prisoners and is one of the largest prisons in Ecuador. Authorities are still working on identifying the dead bodies from the Cotopaxi riot reports Al Jazeera. The governor of the Cotopaxi province Oswaldo Coronel told reporters that security has been restored. Coronel informed reporters that 14 of the injured prisoners from the massacre had been taken to the hospital



Guayaquil, an Ecuadorian port city.  
Courtesy of Anne and David (Flickr)

according to Al Jazeera. Another prison riot occurred at the Guayas Prison located in the port city of Guayaquil leaving at least 13 people dead according to a statement from SNAI, Ecuador's national prison service, released on October 6, says InSight Crime. The massacre that occurred at the Guayas prison likely was a response to the death of prominent

drug trafficker and money launderer, Leandro Norero, also known as "El Patrón" who was killed during the Cotopaxi prison massacre according to InSight Crime.

The violence occurring in Ecuador's prisons lately consists of gangs competing for power and is often carried out with knives and even sometimes involves beheadings, according to CBS news. Since February 2021, 400 prisoners have been killed due to prison violence. Another prison massacre occurred in July in the city of Santo Domingo located in the province of Tsachilas just two months after the violence at the same institution in May. In July the prison massacre at the Santo Domingo jail took the lives of 12 prisoners and in May the lives of 43 prisoners were lost.

According to Reuters, the Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) stated that Ecuador's prison system suffers from state abandonment, poor living conditions, and inconsistent policies. A delegation from the IACHR visited Ecuador in December after the violent prison clashes across the country in 2022. The IACHR report found that over-crowdedness due to arbitrary detentions and budget cuts lead to weakened security within the prison system according to Reuters. The Ecuadorian government did not comment on the IACHR's findings.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has concluded that the current administration of Guillermo Lasso has no comprehensive policy for the country's prison system. The conditions that inmates endure consist of crowdedness and life-threatening con-

ditions towards inmates as a result of the dangerous rivalry between criminal groups in the prison system. Families of the dead inmates have expressed that the number of those who died in the prison unrest is far higher than statistics show and have been calling for reforms that legally ensure safety for the inmates while serving time in prison. All of the inmate's families have together formed the Committee of Families for Justice in Prisons in order to demand the state be held accountable for decades of negligence according to Al Jazeera. Ecuador's prisons hold a total of 33,500 inmates, which is 11.3 percent beyond the maximum capacity according to official statistics.

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## RUSSIA LAUNCHES ATTACKS ACROSS UKRAINE AFTER CRIMEA BRIDGE EXPLOSION

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Russia struck Kyiv and other cities throughout Ukraine on Monday, October 9 in retaliation for the Ukrainian attack on Russia's Kerch Strait bridge in Crimea a week earlier. In the largest attack since the day of the initial invasion last February, Russia's strikes targeted Ukrainian military and energy infrastructure as well as Kyiv, reports The Washington Post. The Russian military also struck civilian-dense areas, including a university and a playground, according to the Associated Press. Ukraine's Emergency Service reported nearly 100 people wounded and at least 14 deaths during the morning's attacks spanning at least 14 regions in the form of strikes from the air, sea, and land. According to Al Jazeera, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, General Valeri

Zaluzhnyi, reported 75 missiles launched by Russia, although 41 were neutralized by Ukrainian air defenses. These latest Russian attacks may be just the beginning of an escalated retaliation to the Ukrainian counteroffensives. According to CBS News, Putin stated that he is not bluffing regarding his threats to use nuclear weapons, and United States officials have expressed their concern over the potential for nuclear escalation in Ukraine, reports The New York Times. The New York Times goes on to explain that tactical, or small, nuclear weapons, are difficult to use with precision but easy to deploy, making them a good tool to make small areas of land uninhabitable. CBS News explains that the most recent U.S. intelligence estimate claims that Russia has up to 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons, potentially 10 times more than U.S.

tactical nuclear arms in reserves. An attack using nuclear weapons would be the first use of atomic bombs since the U.S. used them on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, according to The New Yorker. Ukraine's attack on the Kerch Strait bridge, also referred to as the Crimean bridge, was a Ukrainian demonstration of power that destroyed a symbol of Russian pride and engineering, Al Jazeera states. Russia previously expressed that heavy defenses surround the Crimean bridge, which Russia depended on to transport military goods and supplies. The Crimean bridge, the longest in Europe, was also a demonstration of Russia's sovereignty claim over Crimea from its 2014 annexation, according to the Financial Times.

Putin may be attempting to revitalize his resources and streamline military power. Al Jazeera states that just days before Monday's attacks on Ukraine, General Sergey Surovikin, a general described as "ruthless," was appointed to lead the Russian war efforts in Ukraine. Ukraine has steadily mounted a counteroffensive, most recently breaking past Russian defenses and advancing along the Dnieper River, yet another vital supply transportation route for Russian troops, according to Al Jazeera. CBS News shares that some, however, view Russia's most recent attacks on Ukraine not as a tactical advance, but instead as aiming only to cause a "humanitarian catastrophe," in the words of Andriy Yermak, an advisor to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Ukraine's recent successful counter-offensive which allowed them to recapture land occupied by Russia, as well as Ukrainian forces' continual advancement, may lead to the collapse of the Russian front in the Donbas,

The New Yorker predicts. One of the only ways Putin would be able to combat Russia's collapse in the Donbas may be through the use of tactical nuclear weapons, the New Yorker goes on to explain. Outside of Russia, the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko announced that he and Putin plan to create a joint force of troops, providing little explanation, CBS stated. Additionally, Belarus has allowed Russia to attack Ukraine using Belarusian land, indicating closer coordination between the two countries in the war effort, Financial Times explains. The Belarusian and Russian joint military force is a threat to Ukraine, who has expressed a plan to attack Belarus. Belarusian defense minister Viktor Khrenin issued a statement, however, claiming "We don't want to fight," according to the Associated Press.

As of now, it is not predicted that Russia will use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, The New York Times reports. They share that Moscow is quick to use the threat of atomic weaponry to scare Ukraine. However, Russia has a history of empty threats when it comes to the use of nuclear weapons, including in 2014 during Russia's invasion of Crimea. According to The New Yorker, many experts believe that a deterrence preventing Russia from deploying nuclear weapons may be their fear of increased U.S. military involvement in the war.

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## US SWAPS TWO VENEZUELAN CONVICTS FOR SEVEN AMERICANS

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The United States freed two relatives of the Venezuelan President, Nicolas Maduro, in exchange for seven Americans last Saturday, October 1, in what has become the largest prisoner swap of President Joe Biden's administration, says NPR. The swap included five American Citgo Petroleum executives who were held for almost five years, along with U.S. Marine veteran, Matthew Heath, and another U.S. citizen, Osman Khan. They were freed in exchange for the First Lady of Venezuela's nephews who were imprisoned in 2017 for cocaine smuggling charges, reports United Press International. In a statement on the day of the release, Biden commented that the detainees were wrongfully imprisoned and will soon

reunite with their families, according to UPI. The Guardian reports that the physical transfer took place in St. Vincent and Grenadines following conversations that began in March with Caracas. The newly freed Americans were in good health according to Reuters. The seeming shift in relations with Venezuela comes after a hostile Trump administration imposed strict sanctions on the South American nation. Washington makes the agreement under increasing pressure to focus on Americans held captive abroad like, WNBA star Brittney Griner and former Marine Paul Whelan, who were subject to the Russian criminal court's 99 percent conviction rate, NPR highlights. Since making the deal, however, the U.S. confirmed on Wednesday, October 5, that it does not plan on lifting sanctions



Venezuelan president, Nicolas Maduro, with the First Lady.  
Courtesy of Aeneus of Troy (Flickr)

unless Venezuela takes steps to restore free elections, notes Bloomberg. Another reason for the Venezuela swap urgency is because the recent international sanctioning on Russia heavily influences global energy prices. Venezuela is one of Russia's most important allies in Latin America and this agreement may impact how that relationship unfolds. Reuters states that an increase of Venezuelan oil to the global market has

the potential to aid in replacing previously Russian-dominated supplies. Maduro, who was narrowly elected in 2013 after the death of President Hugo Chávez and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), took control of Venezuela fully in January 2021 amid alarming economic and humanitarian crises. Throughout the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, Maduro has resisted U.S. and international pressure to step down.

Juan Guaidó was the National Assembly president elected in 2015 who has led the opposition to Maduro. Guaidó was once regarded as interim president by almost 60 countries—including the U.S., which ceased recognition of Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate president in January 2019, under the Trump administration. Citgo, headquartered in Houston, is majority-owned by PDVSA, the Venezuelan state-owned petroleum company. Their employees, Tomeu Vadell, Jose Luis Zambrano, Alirio Zambrano, Jorge Toledo, and José Pereira, had been detained by Venezuela in 2017 and sentenced to prison ranging from eight to 13 years in 2020. The executives and Citgo maintained their innocence against accusations including embezzlement, money laundering, and conspiracy. Time says that at least

four other Americans are still detained in Venezuela, including two men who—like Khan—were arrested for allegedly illegally entering the country through Colombia. In his statement, President Biden encourages Americans to remain hopeful about those wrongfully detained abroad: "know that we remain dedicated to securing their release," TIME reports. The administration also pointed to an executive order from the summer that sought to press new costs on nations that jail Americans without proper cause. Additionally, the executive order notes a warning indicator that is designed to warn U.S. citizens about traveling to countries—like Venezuela—that have a pattern of unfair detentions, according to Politico.

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# MOLDOVA

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The world's eyes are on the war in Ukraine—escalatory threats by Russian leaders indicate that Moscow is open to using tactical weapons, indicating the conflict has reached a tipping point.

Often ignored in this situation, however, is Ukraine's closest neighbor: Moldova. Moldova, a country of 2.6 million, is just a border away from extreme violence and has taken in hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

According to Reuters, global protests aimed at rising inflation and unaffordable gas prices have reached Moldova. Euractiv reports that Russian gas companies have threatened to stop gas supplies due to alleged Moldovan nonpayment, worsening the state of the country's struggling economy and angering political groups that criticize Moldova's dependence on Russian energy. Protests have broken out across the country. In Chisinau, the capital, an

illegal tent city grew large enough to block traffic.

President Maia Sandu called on parliament to grant security forces special powers to shut down the street protests that began September 19, Radio Free Europe reports. According to Radio Free Europe, Sandu directed her complaints at pro-Russian leaders, accusing local administrators of "sabotaging the country's stability," and stating that "betrayal of the motherland will be severely punished." The tent protest, which blocked traffic on Chisinau's busiest road, was finally cleared by police, reports Balkan Insight. Daily protests outside of the presidency building and parliament have continued.

These protests differ from the others in Europe, as they are not largely populist. Rather, they are the cunning political work of an exiled billionaire aligned with Russian interests, Ilan Shor. Balkan Insight states that Shor fled to Israel after a 2017 conviction for stealing more than a billion USD, roughly one-sixth of Moldova's yearly GDP,

from private banks. Despite his exile, Shor is intimately involved in Moldovan politics. Various domestic news outlets have alleged that Shor and his party, the Ilan Shor Party, orchestrated the protests by busing in dozens of people from outside cities and paying for their participation with money, food, and drinks. Shor's manipulation underscores the complex political dynamics within Moldova, a country whose brief history has been marred by corruption scandals and ineffective governance.

These ongoing issues have stemmed from Moldova's deep ties to both Russia and Western-facing Romania, according to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. While much of Moldova is ethnically Romanian, the country was declared the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic after World War II by the Soviet Union. During this period, thousands of ethnic Moldovans and Romanians were exiled and had their culture suppressed, inhibiting the formation of a Moldo-

van nationalist identity.

Upon the collapse of the USSR, Moldova experienced strong pulls from both Romania and Russia, but particularly from Russia. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace continues that Russia has long expressed a desire to keep Moldova close. Attempts to control the country have included "periodic threats to use economic leverage," moves to "bring Moldova into Moscow's integrationist schemes," and even "a recent alleged assassination attempt" upon an oligarch.

After Moldova declared independence in 1991, there were calls by many ethnic Romanians to make Moldova into a Greater Romania. In response, Russian and Turk minorities launched their own secessionist movements, creating the Transnistrian Republic and Gagauzian autonomous region in 1990. According to CNN, roughly a little under a fifth of Moldova's population lives in Transnistria, and the region has its own military. Independence

Day, Moldovan-Cyrillic language, and government.

According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Transnistria's existence has never been particularly troubling to ordinary Moldovans until now. Transnistria is strategically important to Russia given its proximity to Western Ukraine, and it has roughly 1,500 troops stationed there.

The troop presence in Transnistria has allegedly caused significant tension between the two countries. According to TRT World, Moscow accused Moldova of messing with Russian troop rotations and supplies in July, warning the country that further provocation would result in conflict. On a grander scale, Russian troop presence in such proximity to Western Ukraine raises logical concerns that a third offensive could be launched from Transnistria.

Domestically, tensions are rising in Moldova, and it seems recent protests are merely a symptom of the challenges the small country will soon face. The

Times of Israel reported that Sandu, who is pro-West, has not shied from criticizing Russia and Putin's war on Ukraine. Sandu's government, along with Ukraine, officially applied for European Union membership this summer, a move that allegedly angered Russia.

These protests and escalating tensions have set the stage for a serious domestic conflict in Moldova. Without the greater economic and political support of the European Union, it will be difficult for Sandu to justify isolation from Russia, especially with winter coming. Expedited admission into the EU and access to member state's energy reserves are crucial to ensuring Moldova no longer needs to turn to Russia.

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# IRAN

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The death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman in Iran, has sparked massive, ongoing protests in Iran. Mahsa was killed in Iranian custody on September 16 after being detained by the Iranian morality police for "inappropriate attire," according to Reuters.

The protests, now in their fifth week, have been blamed on a myriad of failures by the Iranian government. According to Reuters, the government blames Iranian Kurdish dissidents for the protests, as well as the ensuing deaths. Tensions between the two groups have been especially heightened in Kurdish-majority regions, given Amini's background and the claims made by the Iranian government.

These claims have been undermined by the unity of Iran's ethnic mi-

norities. Reuters reports that protestors have been chanting "Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Lors, are together" in an act of solidarity. Iran has seven ethnic minority groups, in addition to Persians who make up the majority of Iranians. Human rights watch groups have often reported that all Iranian minority groups suffer from oppression, but the Iranian government denies these claims.

The protests have evolved from calls to get rid of mandatory veiling to the end of Islamic Republic leadership, according to the Wall Street Journal. There has also been a recent shift in the parties that are protesting. Early on, it was primarily small businesses and retail shops that closed and joined the protests, but members of Iran's oil industry are joining the protests and striking in southern Iran.

More subtle forms of protest have arisen in hospitals, reports CNN. As Iran has cracked down on the protestors, the use of force has skyrocketed

and led to increased injury among protestors. In hospitals, doctors are risking their lives to treat these patients. Undercover police have been visiting emergency rooms looking for protest victims and doctors who are helping them, CNN continues. Many doctors have come forward condemning this practice, calling for medical treatment to be protected as a human right in Iran. Facing danger at hospitals, some protestors have reached out to doctors online and over social media.

Despite the scale of the protests, Iranians question whether they will change anything. Time reports that the protests, though not the largest the nation has ever seen, are occurring in areas that have previously been government strongholds. Regions like Naziabad, Fallah, and Valiasar are known within Iran for producing Basiji, state-sponsored paramilitary groups who



Protest sparked in solidarity with Mahsa Amini. Courtesy of PersianDutchNetwork (Wikimedia Commons)

are called in to break protests up, yet these are locations of some of the most active protest grounds.

The protests have indicated a lack of morale in both Iran's military and broadcasting sectors. One video that has arisen from the protests shows police walking besides protestors, rather than confronting them. Time reports that many military members are asking themselves what their work is for when the government is experiencing persistent corruption.

On October 8, the state-owned television network was comman-

ded by protestors. The press reported this as a hack, though a spokesperson for the news station pointed out that this was not possible, Time continues. According to the spokesperson, since the broadcast is not online, the coverage had to have been the result of internal penetration. The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is the government's main propaganda arm, and this slip of control underscores the Iranian government's slipping control over its citizens.

Another issue Iran

faces in the growing protests is the involvement of children. According to CNN, the average age of those arrested in the protests has shifted to 15-years-old. Iran's Education Minister, Yousef Nouri, acknowledged this, stating that the Iranian government has been detaining minors and sending them to mental health facilities. Human rights workers have said that these facilities are meant to indoctrinate the minors rather than help them.

Amnesty International has documented the death of at least 23 children, reporting that 16 percent of the protest deaths have been children. Human rights groups have indicated that children are being targeted for attack.

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# PAKISTAN

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On October 11, a school van driver was killed, and a student was injured in a shooting by an unidentified assailant in Mingora, a town in Pakistan's Swat district. This act of violence sparked massive outrage and the largest protests in the district's history, with more than 15,000 people attending, according to Al Jazeera, marking the sixth protest in almost 2 months.

VOA reports that protestors agreed to disperse after 40 hours of negotiations with local government officials. These negotiations produced assurances that the victims' families would receive financial compensation, and that all possible steps will be taken to arrest the shooter.

This massive uproar is aimed at the government, with protestors calling for officials to take greater measures against the region's uptick in violence.

Many locals accuse the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) of being responsible for this increase in violence, as the Swat district was once a stronghold of the TTP. Highly religious residents previously ardently supported the organization, and citizens worry the group is still influential even though its grip on power has eased, according to Foreign Policy.

In the past 15 years, the Swat district has seen greater development, more local tourism, and the establishment of various educational institutions and sports pitches, leading to a sharp decline in support for the TTP. While police have ruled out terrorism as a motive in the school van shooting, as they believe it was a targeted attack, no person or group has claimed responsibility for the crime.

The protests in the Swat district come 10 years after Malala Yousefzai was shot in Mingora by a TTP member. The attack was an assassination attempt motivated by



Daral River in the Swat Valley in Pakistan. Courtesy of Jawadqada (Wikimedia Commons)

her activism. Yousefzai, who is an advocate for the education of women and girls, went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 and found the Malala Fund, an organization that invests in various activists who champion girls' education. Yousefzai recently returned to Pakistan for the second time since the attempt on her life to visit a region that suffered from extreme flooding that has caused over \$30 billion in damages. In Sindh province, she has spoken with girls who were forced out of schools due to the flood-

ing, urging them to return to school as soon as they are able and calling on officials to mitigate education loss and reinstating schools as learning centers, according to the Malala Fund.

Elsewhere in Pakistan, in the capital of Islamabad, city officials are preparing for other protests. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan was set to face trial on charges of contempt on September 22, reports Bloomberg. Khan is facing charges for comments made against a female judge and police officer in August. If Khan

is convicted of contempt, he would be ineligible for political office for 5 years, eliminating him from the political sphere.

According to Reuters, the charges against Khan will most likely be dropped. Despite Khan's legal troubles, he has continued to hold rallies, urging his supporters to hold massive protests in the capital. Khan pushed for snap elections, which would cause the national elections scheduled for 2023 to be held a year early. This would allow Khan to regain a seat in a political office after he was removed from the role of Prime Minister after a no-confidence vote in April. In by-elections held on Oct. 16, Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won six of eight available National Assembly seats available, reports Al Jazeera. Imran Khan claims that this is a show of the nation's support for him and is planning to intensify demands for early polls.

This political turmoil comes at a time when the nation is facing disaster on many fronts. The south of the country is still recovering from the flooding, leaving many displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance. The Swat district in the north is facing public outrage at a rise in violence. Additionally, the value of the rupee has plummeted, and inflation is on the rise, despite Pakistan recently securing a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These factors lay the groundwork for great unrest in Pakistan, making the next few months crucial for the peaceful future of the nation.

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# HAITI

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Political instability, rising gang violence, and a cholera outbreak have reached a breaking point in Haiti, resulting in weeks of anti-government protests. BBC News reports that protests throughout the country have turned into looting, with police firing tear gas into crowds. The crisis has led the Haitian government, headed by Prime Minister Ariel Henry, to request foreign assistance to quell the increased violence.

Protests have been ramping up since mid-September, when Henry announced a plan to suspend natural gas subsidies, which will cause fuel prices to nearly double, says The New York Times. However, the movement quickly broadened into a greater rejection of Haiti's dire economic situation. The ongoing crisis has left citizens suffering from

widespread food insecurity, worsening violence, debilitating inflation, and a lack of basic services.

Gasoline shortages have worsened since one of the country's most powerful gangs seized an important fuel terminal in protest of Henry's policies. Their actions prevented the distribution of almost 11 million gallons of natural gas, according to Al Jazeera. The Associated Press reports that the terminal has been repeatedly broken into by armed men since the incident. Rising prices and low fuel supply have led to the closure of gas stations, hospitals, grocery stores, and schools.

BBC News adds that Haiti's protests have turned deadly, with at least one person dead and several others shot because of the chaos. Protestors maintain that the victim was killed by police. Gang-controlled highways, protestors blocking streets, and peo-

ple looting warehouses have made the transportation of food and other resources difficult, leaving food and other resources in scarce supply.

The protests have been marked by Haitian demands for Henry's resignation, with protestors decriing his call for international assistance as unnecessary foreign intervention and accusing him of not caring about the Haitian people. According to Foreign Policy, Henry has been considered an illegitimate leader by many Haitians since his appointment following the assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse. Moïse had selected Henry to be prime minister shortly before his death, but Henry had not been sworn in prior to the assassination. The country has not elected a replacement for Moïse, as a November 2021 election was delayed indefinitely due to rising political instability throughout the country.

The government's call for foreign intervention has been met by international support, Al Jazeera adds, with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres calling for the deployment of a special international force. The Associated Press reports that the U.S. and Canada jointly sent supplies to help bolster the Haitian police's fight against gang violence, amid review of the Haitian request to send foreign troops.

To many Haitians, however, the introduction of international forces brings back memories of a dark history with the UN. This is especially relevant as Haitians face a new cholera outbreak, caused largely by a shortage of clean water. According to PBS, the last UN peacekeeping mission to Haiti was marred by allegations of sexual assault by peacekeepers, as well as the introduction of cholera into Haiti's largest river from a

UN base's sewage runoff. The subsequent outbreak killed 10,000 people. The Associated Press says that the Pan American Health Organization suspects there are more than 560 new cases of cholera in Haiti, already recording at least 35 deaths.

The New York Times reports that Haiti's descent into chaos has led to increased calls for international assistance from other Caribbean countries, many of whom face migrant crises of Haitians fleeing to their borders. Bahamian Prime Minister Philip Davis told local media in July that Caribbean leaders were considering talking directly with gang leaders to find a solution to Haiti's political crisis, calling the country a "failed state." Dominican President Luis Abinader has advocated to build a wall between the two countries, which share the island of Hispaniola, calling the chaos in Haiti a "national security threat."

A month into protests, Port-au-Prince resembles a war zone, as gangs, police, and protestors clash in the streets. As the country continues to collapse into political instability, made worse under the leadership of Henry, a humanitarian crisis only continues to worsen.

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## GUN VIOLENCE AND ITS VICTIMS: THE STORY OF SABIKA AZIZ

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Group of YES students before going to the United States. Courtesy of US Embassy, Jakarta (Flickr)

Gun control in the U.S. has long been a heated political issue at the center of multiple controversies in the country. Guns have taken the lives of multiple innocent students in schools, and now the effects are reaching beyond Americans. In the United States, controversial gun policies led to the death of a 17-year-old Pakistani youth ambassador, who came to the U.S. hoping to change American views on Islam and her.

Sabika Aziz came to Texas through the State Department's Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Program, known as YES. According to The New York Times, the YES program brought about 900 students from different countries worldwide to attend high schools across the American

states. The purpose of the program was to share the positive side of the U.S., including the diversity and security that attracted Sabika. Importantly, school shootings were not what these students or their families were expecting. According to the Washington Post, Shaheera Jalil Albasit, Sabika Aziz's cousin who encouraged her to apply to the program, was unaware of the risk, saying, "I did not know what I would be sending her off to. Nor did Sabika's parents when they made the taxing decision

to send her off on a journey as Pakistan's student cultural ambassador." Immigrants like Sabika Aziz and their families possess an idealistic view of the U.S. as do many people around the world. Just months after Aziz's departure to the U.S., her family learned the hard way that their daughter had died, and that America is not the ideal country they imagined. Instead, it failed to protect their child. More appalling are the occurrences of school shootings committed by students that

are more common in the U.S., a relatively developed country, than in Pakistan. According to the New York Times, Sabika's friend echoed this sentiment, asking, "How a young student could both acquire such guns and smuggle them so easily into school, even in Pakistan, where gun laws are lax? Even if someone attacks a school, it's someone from the outside."

Somehow, an underdeveloped country like Pakistan has better gun regulations than an influential world power. Parents from countries like Pakistan send their children to the U.S. to achieve the American dream of better education and economic opportunity, and yet parents in the U.S. fear sending their own kids to school because of gun violence.

America's refusal to implement gun control took away the life of this international student in

2018. Four years have passed since Sabika's parents lost their child, a country lost its citizen, and a dream lost its dreamer. Even after these four years, the incidence of mass shootings has not decreased. The Ground Report indicates that there were 693 mass shootings in 2021 and 140 in 2022. America's gun death rate is twenty-six times that of other high-income countries, according to Everytown Research & Policy.

It has taken decades and thousands of victims for the U.S. to implement any serious progressive measures toward gun control. On June 23, 2022, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which requires gun sellers to run background checks, was passed in the U.S. Senate by a vote of 65 to 33 and signed into law by President Biden on June 25.

Regardless of this progress, Sabika's sto-

ry is not the only example of international students becoming victims of American gun culture. Two educators share their concern for their international students in University World News, explaining that "many parents and, increasingly, students, are asking themselves, in some countries more than others. What kind of society and situation are we sending students to? What if, God forbid, they were to become victims of the U.S.'s never-ending orgy of gun violence?"

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## HOW UKRAINE'S POSSIBLE NATO ACCESSION WILL CHANGE EASTERN EUROPE

George Slowey  
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Volodymyr Zelenskyy visiting NATO in December of 2021. Courtesy of NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Flickr)

In the midst of the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has formally requested to have his country's application for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership fast-tracked, reports Politico. After months of consideration by Ukraine and its western allies, it seems that the war-torn country has finally decided where it wants to be in the future. Western allies have already been providing Ukraine with aid, both military and humanitarian, making the decision to join NATO a no-brainer. Whether or not the other NATO countries will accept Ukraine is another matter altogether.

Should Ukraine continue with its wish to join the NATO bloc, it will need to gain the legisla-

tive approval of all thirty members—thirty-two if Finland and Sweden clear the final roadblocks of Hungary and Turkey and join NATO. Russia, naturally, is furious. According to European Pravda via the Russian news agency RBC Daily, Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Aleksandr Venediktov stated, "Kyiv perfectly understands that such a step will mean a guaranteed escalation to the Third World War.

The NATOs themselves understand the suicidal nature of this step." The quick pace of Ukraine's application process to NATO raises a great deal of questions for the future of Eastern Europe, how it might destabilize Russia, and whether Article 5 of the NATO Charter would be invoked once Ukraine joins NATO. Article 5 has loomed in the background of European politics ever since Russia invaded

Ukraine in 2014. Essentially, the Article provides for collective protection: if one member nation is attacked, the rest will provide defense and return the world order to peace. Article 5 being invoked could lead to war in Europe on the scale of the World Wars, which hasn't been seen for three-quarters of a century.

However, there is currently no language allowing Article 5 to be invoked in support of a non-member country, and Ukraine's admission to NATO will take several years, as they must obtain approval from multiple member countries, each with their own agendas. The likelihood, therefore, of Article 5 being invoked is low.

Regardless, in the event that Ukraine is admitted to NATO, both the United States and the region of Eastern Europe will benefit. Ukraine joining NATO will fundamen-

tally change the balance of power in Eastern Europe for the better. The nation will represent another bulwark of democracy that, with additional monetary and military aid packages, can be brought into the modern age. The latest aid package consisted of 500 million Euros of support from the European Union, reports Ukrinform. The EU also has plans to train an additional 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers, Euro News adds. These efforts, along with the equipment donated over the past eight months, have made Ukraine's military more advanced and a more powerful fighting force. The goal is for Ukraine to use these tools, along with other technological and infrastructure advances, and emerge from this conflict as an intact, sovereign nation, ready to bring new ideas and technology to the world stage. A power-

ful Ukraine means a more democratic Ukraine, one that can advance reforms and serve as a model of democracy for Eastern Europe. If Ukraine is able to succeed, it could become Russia's greatest fear: a strong, democratic country on its doorstep. Still, it will likely take years for the NATO process to go through with Ukraine as countries try to navigate the politics of welcoming a nation at war into the military alliance. But it is important to remember that for a truly democratic Eastern Europe, and for the hope of a democratic Russia in our lifetime, the accession of Ukraine to NATO will provide a powerful stepping stone for that goal.

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## THE QUESTION OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE: THE NEXT BREXIT?

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Scottish Parliament building, located at the foot of Calton Hill. Courtesy of G Laird (Wikimedia Commons)

On October 9, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon said she wants to hold a referendum in October of next year for Scottish Independence. The United Kingdom government has not agreed, but the UK's Supreme Court will hear arguments on Tuesday on the legality of Scotland's administration voting for independence without the government's consent. Sturgeon states that if she loses the case, she will make a de facto plebiscite on Scotland gaining independence, according to Associated Press. Scotland, England, and the majority-English UK government have a long history of rejecting Scottish independence and repressing Scots in the country, but it seems with recent events such as Brexit, a free Scotland may be more favorable to those who live there.

Scotland has been a part of the United King-

dom for three centuries, though those three centuries were far from peaceful, rather mired in oppression, invasion, violence, and an Anglo-centric rule. In fact, there's even reason to suspect that Scotland's "Union" with the United Kingdom was less autonomous than believed today. Scotland united with England in 1707 as the Kingdom dealt with severe financial struggles and a dislike for the way the Union of Crowns governed Scots. Experts also say that the formation of Great Britain came from short-term pressures instead

of a want for a lasting Union. The Smithsonian Magazine explains. Prior to its union, Scotland had its own very clear sense of national identity and culture that were very different from England's. To this day, Scots often speak Scottish-Gaelic and have their own dialects of English. Scotland also fought against England multiple times as England began to treat Scotland like a feudal territory and massacred those fighting for independence against the invaders, continues the Smithsonian Magazine. Scotland also had very few representatives in the newly formed Great

Britain and most Scots believed their representatives were sold out by the English the Smithsonian Magazine continues.

While Scots were given more of a voice in the British Government, the government in London does not have the interest of Scots at heart. Most notable is the UK vote in favor of Brexit. Most Scots voted against leaving the European Union, according to BBC News. Scotland also benefited from trade with the EU and the updated infrastructure it brought, reports The Guardian. To many, this confirms that the UK government does not have Scotland's interests at heart, and thus, remaining within the UK for economic reasons would be counterintuitive, according to a publication by the Scottish Government.

Scotland had also been dissuaded from leaving the UK because they believed the UK would stay in the EU, the Guardian continues. Despite some

economic challenges Scotland would endure if they were to leave, such as theorized devaluation and high interest rates, The Guardian explains, Scots' dissatisfaction with the UK and their lack of representation in the government seems more pressing. The Scottish Government also explains through its report that many similarly sized countries to Scotland often outperform the UK in its current state. The question then becomes whether the UK's economic systems and systems of government are hindering Scotland and limiting its autonomy, or aiding it.

Scotland's Independence is a much-debated topic in Scotland, the UK, and abroad. No matter the situation, however, Scots deserve full say over their independence and how they want to be governed. The Anglo-centric government of the UK does not benefit Scotland and the other territories within the UK, and either it should be restruc-

tured or Scotland should be free to vote and leave the UK. Given the UK's past and continued treatment of those in territories that may want to leave the UK, however, the international community should aid Scotland in its quest for self-determination. Countries such as the Republic of Ireland have also left the UK and have succeeded well as an independent state. Thus, Scotland may be able to succeed as an independent state, but only if given the autonomy to do so.

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## IRANIAN PROTESTS MARK A TURNING POINT FOR THE COUNTRY

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The death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman, while in the custody of the Iranian morality police has sparked nationwide protests and outcries of support from all across the globe. The protests have a remarkably different feel to them, evidenced in part by the endurance of the demonstrations throughout the past month. Reuters states that these protests represent the first major challenge to Iranian leaders in years. In fact, furious protestors are calling for the death of Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, chanting "death to the dictator." According to the Wall Street Journal, students have continued to rally outside universities

across Iran, with female students waving their veils as a sign of protest. These protests are different from previous ones in the past decade which were focused on economic concerns and price hikes. The focus of these protests is oriented more toward a revolutionary stance focusing on human dignity and overwhelming discontent with the regime and desire to see them out of power. The visceral nature of the chants and the public support lend credence to the notion that these protests are remarkably different than previous protests against the regime. When protests erupted in 2019, the government responded brutally, arresting thousands and killing at least 321, although some estimate the death toll to be even higher, according to Amnesty International.

The Iranian regime, in the face of enduring and widespread resistance, has deployed familiar tactics used consistently since 1979. Security forces have been recorded using tear gas and live ammunition in several different regions across the country, especially in the Kurdish-dominated areas where protests have been particularly consistent. At least 100 people have been reported dead as a result of the protests, according to France24. Al Jazeera also reports that the government has instituted restrictions on internet usage meant to dissuade public gatherings and prevent images and videos depicting violent repression from being publicized. Protestors, however, have found ways around these tactics, including interrupting state broadcast media.

According to Politico, in order to elude crackdowns, the movement has been forced to evolve from "spontaneous mass gatherings" to more dispersed protests. Also exceptional about these protests is the involvement of bazaar traders in Tehran. The Grand Bazaar in Tehran, the capital city of Iran, remains a major economic center in Iran where the merchants apply their trade. The regime has counted on the bazaar merchants for their backing and influence within the nation's economy to shore up their support. However, Reuters notes, many bazaar traders have shuttered their shops in recent weeks as a sign of support for Iranian women, though state media claims the closings are due to fear of damage and looting. According to BBC News, traders

have also set fire to a police kiosk and challenged government security forces. The support of the bazaar merchants along with the enduring nature of the protests from the youth and female population of Iran clearly signifies the exceptional nature of these protests. The Associated Press spoke to six different female activists in the Kurdish-Iranian city of Sanandaj about the repressive tactics that the regime has used. They claim the government has used live ammunition, beatings, arrests, and internet disruptions to prevent the coordination of protestors. However, the activists note that protests continued in spite of the Iranian regime's attempt to suppress them and designate the demonstrations as the actions of foreign adversaries such as the

United States. Remarkably, despite all the efforts of the ruling government of Iran and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the protests have persisted for a month and a half across the nation in the greatest challenge to Iranian central authority since the overthrow of the Shah during the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

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## REFLECTIONS ON SHU'S NEW RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY COURSE

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Just prior to the start of Russian war on Ukraine, Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International Relations introduced a new course titled Religion, Race, and International Relations (DIPL 6350), bringing the questions of the soon-to-develop conflict to the forefront. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has put religion at the forefront of the war. This is especially true considering Ukraine's split from the Russian orthodox church eight years ago, which 70 percent of the Ukrainian population belongs. Since the rule of Prince Volodymyr I of Kyiv in 988, religion has played a significant role in the political history between Ukraine and Russia. This is evident in the current religious demographics of Ukraine, which boasts 80 percent of Ukrainians affiliated with an Ortho-

dox denomination, 10 percent belonging to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, one percent Muslim, of which a majority are of Crimean Tatar Heritage, and around 20,000 protestant groups. The religion's role in the Russo-Ukrainian war is amplified by Putin's claim that Ukraine is an inalienable part of Russian history, culture, and spiritual space. Most Ukrainians contend this claim ignores Ukraine's long history of independence, which is a fundamental part of their national identity. Most pertinent to the religious debate is the prohibition of attacks on religious sites by international law, resulting in many civilians taking up shelter in churches. At least 183 spiritual sites have been severely damaged by Russian forces in at least six regions of Ukraine: Chernihiv, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Luhansk, and Zhytomyr. The response by Ukrainian

theologians is an increasing development of a "theology of war" and a "theology of peace," rather than debating whether a given war is just. Religion, Race, and International Relations, a graduate level course, tackles this running debate alongside other prevalent issues involving the intersection of these three titular topics. As part of the course, taught in the Spring 2022 semester by Rev. Brian Muzas, students were privileged to experience a guest speaker series. The course was divided into two sections: The first part featured distinguished guests from the U.S.-Pakistan Interreligious Coalition (UPIC), Dr. Junaid Ahmad and Rev. Robert Chase, while the second part hosted Caritas Internationalis' Joe Donnelly and Brianna Fitzpatrick. Dr. Ahmad explained that UPIC, a religious and intercultural coalition that serves as part of the School of Diplomacy and



Rev. Brian Muzas, instructor of DIPL 6350. Courtesy of Seton Hall University

International Relations, aims to shatter harmful stereotypes with an agenda working towards transformational change in both societies. In his guest lecture he said, "It is an interfaith movement striving for peace against war post 9/11 backlash upon Muslims in the US, UPIC is essentially a civil society organization and a grassroots movement that addresses the religious divide."

Rev. Chase explained the role that morals and ethics in faith play in politics. He imparted the lessons learned in religious diplomacy and advised students to "Listen instead of telling what to do, be genuine, create intersection, honor the other, think the best first about the other person, expect the unexpected, treat potentially violent situations with tenderness." As explained in the syl-

labus, this course offers the "students the opportunity to explore the causes of the nature and consequences of the key issues that hinge on the interplay between religion and race in history at both the practical and theoretical levels." The course "deeply discusses the intersection of religion, race, and international relations throughout history by providing guiding questions that help students answer questions such as what is the best way to live? What is the relationship between religion and society? Whether religion is a strictly private matter or how it affects the way we live together in society?"

This course promises its future students a deep dive into the scholastic interplay between religion, race, and international relations to prepare students to be policy game changers of the future generation.

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## ON-CAMPUS GROUP SUCCESSFULLY SCREENS SHU PROFESSOR'S FILM

Christopher Benítez Cuartas  
Associate Editor

The documentary film "Mayor Mohamed" was screened on October 22 in Schwartz Hall, viewed by a full house. The screening was organized by Scholars 4 Syria, an on-campus advocacy group for the Syrian opposition. "Mayor Mohamed" premiered at the Brooklyn Film Festival in June 2021 and was also screened at the Montclair Film Festival. The 2021 film, which focuses on Mayor Mohamed T. Khairullah of Prospect Park, is directed by professor Jeffrey Togman of the political science department. At the end of the screening, Khairullah made a surprise appearance, entering the auditorium to rounds of standing ovation. A Syrian immigrant and a Democrat, Khairullah is mayor of Prospect Park, a small North Jersey suburb approximately half

an hour from Seton Hall University's campus. The film covers his 2017 reelection campaign against a Republican opponent who aligns herself with Trumpian populism and accuses Khairullah of attempting to impose "Sharia law" on account of his faith. At the same time, Khairullah organizes and gathers funds and needed material to send to his native country, engulfed in a civil war, to aid citizens whose hometowns were levelled by Russian air strikes. The film documents the mayor's journey with his wife and youngest daughter to reunite their family, which was impacted by the strikes. In the documentary, Mayor Khairullah emphasizes pride for diversity and the concept of America as a "nation of immigrants" in his interviews, campaigning, sessions, and conversations with his constituents. The film also follows Intashan Chowdhury, a

young aide who the mayor describes as his "right-hand man," with Chowdhury calling Khairullah his "second father." The film closes with Chowdhury being sworn in as borough administrator. In a pre-screening interview with the The Diplomatic Envoy, Togman said the film was inspired by the unfolding of current events in Syria. He emphasized, "I don't make films about people, I make films with people, and so [Mayor Khairullah] was interested in the project and that's how it took off." Togman had a clear purpose in directing the film, explaining that the documentary could help Americans better understand the situation in Syria. He described wanting "to find people who could act as a bridge... I was looking for Syrian Americans who were connected, part of the American community, and knew how to communicate with

Americans." By involving people who were familiar with the situation in Syria, he hoped to accurately convey it to Americans. When discussing his film's impact on the community, Togman explained that after watching it "people will appreciate the blessings we have when we complain about our coffee, our parking spots: simple things. There are people that have much, much dire needs who have to really struggle to get them." The mayor and the professor were asked about the impact this film can have on future generations of Americans when taught about the polarization of today. Togman insisted that it was up to today's students to combat it. He said, "This is like a drop in the bucket of all the things you come across...The torch is being passed; It's up to you." The mayor commented similarly on the power of media, especially relating to his time spent in Tur-

key and Syria. Khairullah described the times he had been stopped by Syrian government minders, commenting "Right there, you're not dealing with law. You're dealing with factions, and your life could be worth only the bullet they put in your head...The fact that such film can convey the truth—and some people don't want that truth to come out—I think is important."

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## LEBANON AND ISRAEL NEGOTIATE US-BROKERED MARITIME DEAL

James Murray  
Staff Writer

Both Lebanon and Israel were on track to accept the terms of a U.S.-brokered maritime deal, until a new development on Thursday, October 6 when Israel rejected some amendments proposed by Lebanon. Al Jazeera reports that Lebanon made specific amendments to the terms of the deal to avoid any "misunderstandings." After evaluating the amendments' potential effects, Israel rejected these changes, leaving the negotiations at another impasse. With Israel's promise to extract gas despite the agreement being unofficial, the Mediterranean may potentially be seeing another conflict between Hezbollah and Israel if talks completely fall through. Beirut and Tel Aviv were closing in on a maritime border deal pitched by the United States that could help increase economic

prosperity and strengthen security for both nations. The deal was presented to both Prime Minister Yair Lapid of Israel and President Michel Aoun of Lebanon, by Amos Hochstein, a U.S. State Department envoy and senior advisor for energy security on Sunday, October 2, reports Reuters. The agreement would create new borderlines and change ownership of gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea, including the Qana and Karish Fields. The deal has promising economic implications, including the ability for Israel to export energy to other countries through expanded exploration in the Karish fields. The Israelis will be able to sell gas to the European Union, to which they have aspired for a decade. The deal also gives Lebanon access to potential gas exportation through the Qana field, previously held by

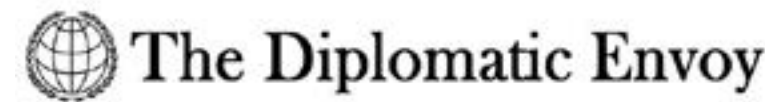
Israel, and the chance to pull their economy from the depths of recession. According to The New York Times, Chevron, the second-largest U.S. oil and gas company, and several smaller businesses are already producing gas from two larger fields off of Israel's coast. The deal itself is critical to de-escalating hostility between both Lebanon and Israel who have been at war multiple times and lack official diplomatic relations. Not only is the historic deal critical for unlocking Israel's economic potential, but it also enhances its security. According to The Wall Street Journal, the deal would secure international recognition over the disputed borders and could potentially deter another war. Both parties initially showed positive reactions to the U.S.-brokered plan. According to The Wall Street Journal, the

prime minister of Israel proclaimed, "This deal strengthens Israel's security and Israel's economy." It has even gained the support of the Iranian-backed, Lebanese militant group, Hezbollah. When talking to the Associated Press, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah commented on the border agreement saying "God willing, if it reaches the desired and best result, it would be the result of national unity, cooperation, and solidarity." The surprising positive reactions from both sides including positive statements from both Lapid and Nasrallah present hope for better future relations between the countries, and at the very least, the avoidance of direct conflict. While promising, the maritime border deal comes with security and economic complications. For Israel, this comes in the form of threats from Hezbollah. Hezbollah,

a group that has fought several wars with Israel, is said to have tens of thousands of rockets currently aimed at Israel and threatened the state several times as the deal was being finalized. According to ABC News, Israel set up a gas rig at its designated location at the Karish field. Israel says the field is part of its U.N.-recognized exclusive economic zone, while Lebanon insists Karish is in a disputed area. Additional minor conflicts between Israel and Hezbollah include a recent disarmament of Hezbollah drones that flew over Israeli territory. Threats to the official finalization of the deal come not only from militant groups, but also from the domestic parties within Israel. The maritime deal comes at a time when Israel is proceeding with another election this November, their fifth in the last four years. Opposition leader and ex-

prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu isn't obligated to honor the new deal if his coalition wins this fall. Netanyahu believes that the American-mediated deal puts Israel at a disadvantage because it gives away the land rights of the Qana region in the Mediterranean to Lebanon. In a statement, Netanyahu voices both his confidence in his coalition to win the election and his disapproval of the deal. The ex-prime minister retorted "We will win the elections and cancel this shameful agreement," reports the Wall Street Journal.

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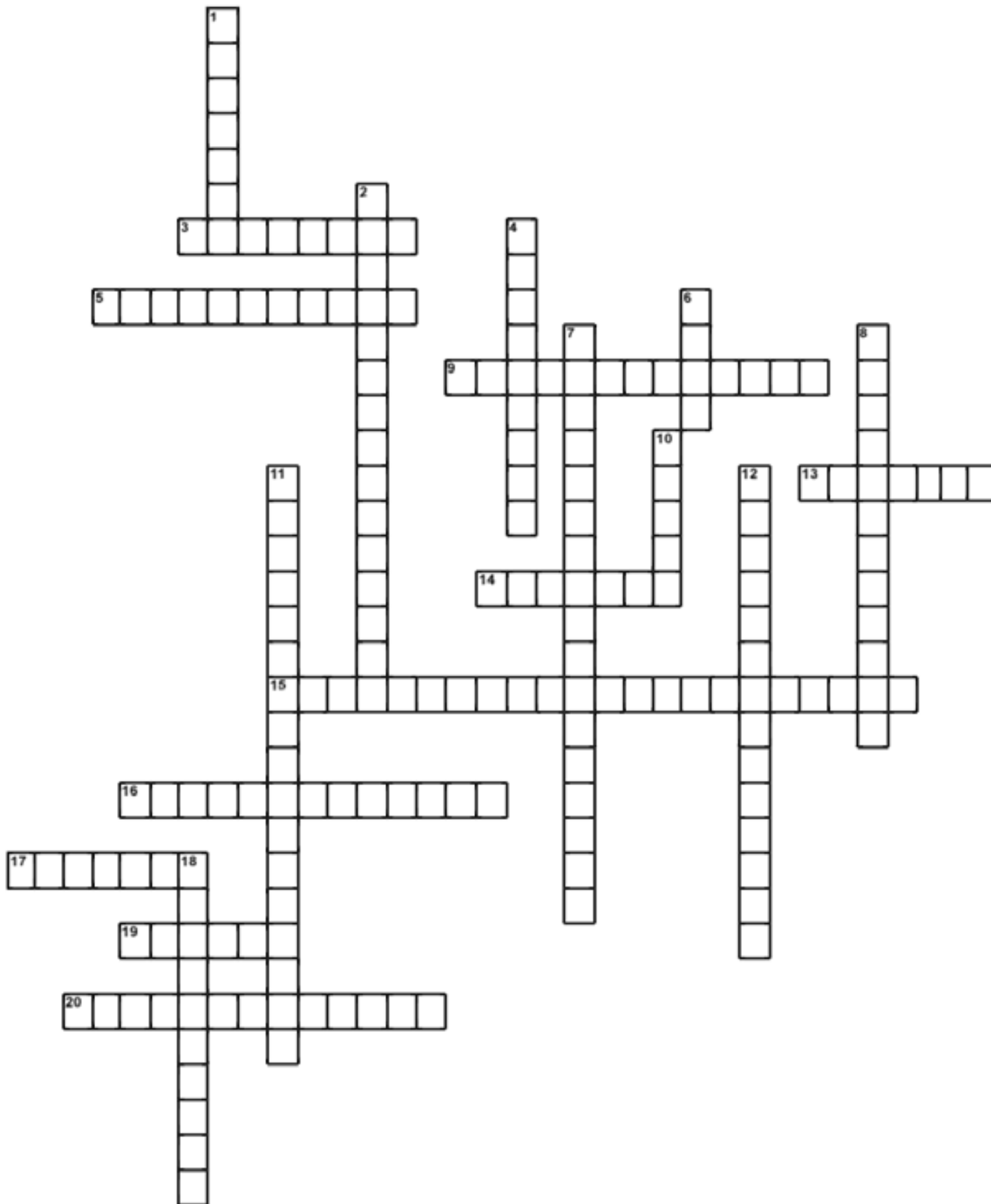
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For more information on sources, go to [blogs.shu.edu/thediplomaticenvoy](https://blogs.shu.edu/thediplomaticenvoy)

## October Edition Crossword



\*All crossword answers found within this edition\*

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

### Across

- 3. A Kurdish-Iranian city
- 5. Venezuelan city recovering from massive floods
- 9. This may affect Malaysian voter turnout
- 13. Minority group being targeted in retaliation to Iranian protests
- 14. Country bordering Ukraine
- 15. Location of U.S.-Venezuelan prisoner swap
- 16. Belarussian Defense Minister
- 17. Haiti is facing an outbreak of
- 19. Region annexed by Russia in 2014
- 20. Governor of Cotopaxi region

### Down

- 1. Town located in Pakistan's Swat district
- 2. Winner of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize
- 4. Supreme leader of the CCP
- 6. Coalition of 15 oil producing nations
- 7. Prince of Saudi Arabia
- 8. Film directed by Seton Hall professor Jeffrey Togman
- 10. Act made to make lawsuits against American gun manufacturers more difficult
- 11. Malaysian Prime Minister
- 12. Venezuelan President
- 18. Haitian Prime Minister