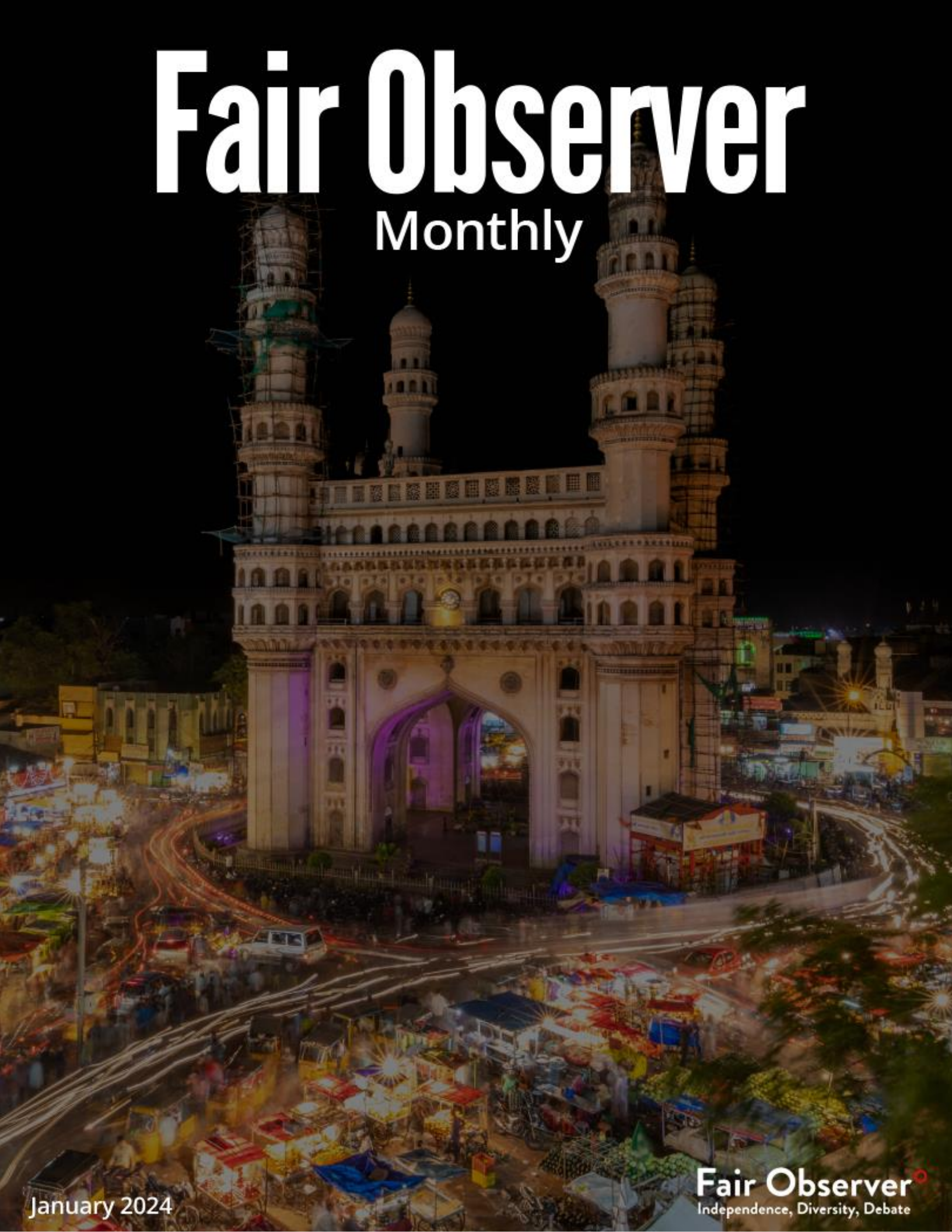


# Fair Observer

Monthly



January 2024

**Fair Observer**  
Independence, Diversity, Debate

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# Fair Observer Monthly



January 2024

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# CONTENTS

<b>About Fair Observer</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Share Your Perspective</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Israel Faces Big Challenges After Three Months of War</b>	<b>8</b>
Gary Grappo	
<b>Taiwan's 2024 Election Between Chinese Disinformation and Democratic Survival</b>	<b>12</b>
David Kuehn	
<b>How to Beat Authoritarian Parties, Polish-Style</b>	<b>14</b>
Malwina Talik	
<b>Justice For All? Victims Are Ignored From Britain to Gaza</b>	<b>16</b>
Alan Waring	
<b>Why South Africa's Poor Vote for the Now Corrupt ANC</b>	<b>25</b>
Martin Plaut	
<b>A Confident Africa Is Spreading Afrobeats to the World</b>	<b>27</b>
LeAnn Glover	
<b>The New Middle East: A Triangular Struggle for Hegemony</b>	<b>30</b>
Ali Omar Forozish	
<b>The Truth About Central Bank Digital Currency: It's Indispensable</b>	<b>33</b>
Alex Gloy	
<b>What Makes a Child Murder Another Child?</b>	<b>36</b>
Ellis Cashmore	
<b>Cultural Genocide? The Reality on the Ground in Xinjiang</b>	<b>38</b>
Patrik Meyer	

---

<b>Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico Is the EU's Latest Headache</b>	<b>41</b>
Daniel Martinek	
<b>India's South Has Wealth, but the North Has the Numbers</b>	<b>43</b>
Subhashish Bhadra	
<b>Republican Governors' Revolt Tests Biden's Willpower Over Illegal Immigration</b>	<b>46</b>
Andrew Morrow	
<b>China Watch: The Chinese Economy Is Now Down, but Not Out</b>	<b>49</b>
David Mahon	
<b>My Experience Working Alongside a Former Member of Hamas</b>	<b>52</b>
Naley By Nature	

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## ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a nonprofit media organization that engages in citizen journalism and civic education.

Our digital media platform has more than 2,500 contributors from 90 countries, cutting across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. With fact-checking and a rigorous editorial process, we provide diversity and quality in an era of echo chambers and fake news.

Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

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# Israel Faces Big Challenges After Three Months of War

Gary Grappo  
January 08, 2024

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**Israel faces formidable external threats and major internal problems. It has yet to figure out how to govern Gaza after the war with Hamas is over. Governing Gaza will require help from the US, European and Arab states. To rope in international help, Israel will have to answer difficult questions about the two-state solution that Benjamin Netanyahu has bitterly opposed.**

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Israel continues to battle Hamas in Gaza, where questions linger over how long its forces will take to genuinely subdue Hamas's stubborn resistance. However, other troubles hover over the Jewish State or lie just below the horizon. How much attention Israel is giving to these remains unclear. But they exert outsize influence over the outcome of the conflict itself.

When Israel launched its offensive in Gaza shortly after Hamas's savage attacks on southern Israel, it may not have been fully aware of the challenges this military operation would bring. That includes both the time it will take its forces to demilitarize Hamas, i.e., eliminate its capability to threaten Israel, and remove it as the governing authority over the densely populated strip of land and its 2.2 million Palestinian inhabitants. While Hamas's authority over Gaza has been nearly neutralized, Israeli authorities have made it abundantly clear that neutralizing Hamas's military capabilities will be a months-long struggle, perhaps extending to the end of 2024 or beyond.

Hamas has had 16 years to entrench itself, literally and figuratively, in Gaza. Its sophisticated social, organizational and infrastructure network is extensive and deep. Furthermore, stepped-up recruitment and training have increased the ranks of Hamas combat forces to more than 30,000.

Israel has claimed to have killed some 8,000 of Hamas fighters. Yet Hamas fatalities are only a third of the number killed by Israeli forces in Gaza. This figure is approximately 22,300 and does not include the estimated 7,000 that still lie buried and unrecovered in Gaza's sprawling mounds of collapsed building rubble. Moreover, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) bombings and artillery shelling have devastated Gaza's landscape. About 300,000 of this strip's housing stock of some 440,000, or 70% percent, and some 18% of its building structures are destroyed. The Wall Street Journal characterized Gaza as a "modern-day Dresden," a reference to the leveling of this German city by the mass bombing of allied aircrafts in World War II.

## Israel's Critics Rising

Beyond the continuing struggle against Hamas, Israel must also contend with an increasingly vocal international community outraged by what it sees as the disproportionate loss of human life and destruction. There have been multiple calls for immediate ceasefires by UN members and even within the UN Security Council. Israel has rebuffed these calls because it sees a ceasefire as inherently advantageous to Hamas. It argues that a ceasefire would preserve Hamas forces and presence in Gaza and, therefore, be tantamount to awarding this terrorist organization a victory. Israel's biggest and most important supporter, the United States, agrees with this Israeli assessment and has blocked various UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire.



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However, America's support for Israel not only in the UN but also on the battlefield with weapons and munitions has caused problems for itself. American policy on the matter has put it at odds with most of the international community and led to claims of hypocrisy and double standards. American critics point out that the US calls for condemnation of Russian aggression against Ukraine but neglects Palestinian cries for support in its struggle against "Israeli aggression."

Since coming into office three years ago, the US administration of President Joe Biden has exerted supreme effort to move America back into the good graces of its allies and the international community, especially the Global South. The Biden administration is making amends for the twin foreign policy disasters of earlier this century: Iraq and Afghanistan. US support for Israel may now be earning America another black eye in international affairs precisely at a time it can least afford it.

However, the goodwill Biden earned in Israel at the start of the conflict may now be paying off. He is responding not only to international pressure but also to domestic pressures, including within his own Democratic party in an election year. Now, Biden and his team are ratcheting up pressure on Israel to rein in its Gaza onslaught. For instance, they are asking Israel to hit targets more precisely and cut down collateral casualties. Israel's announcement earlier this month to withdraw five troop brigades from the battle zone is due in part to American counsel. Going forward, Israeli forces must find a way to do more in Gaza with less. The IDF has to find a way to achieve its aims using less aerial and artillery bombardment, fewer troops, and most importantly, fewer Palestinian casualties.

### **Regional Challenges Abound**

While the much-feared multi-front war has fortunately failed to materialize, Israel finds itself

(or its allies, principally the US) increasingly engaged in security operations elsewhere in the Middle East. Violence has increased steadily in the West Bank as Palestinian attacks and disturbances have become more brazen and frequent at a time when Israel cannot afford to be drawn away from its operations in Gaza. Efforts to quell the West Bank violence have led to the deaths of some 320 Palestinians. This latest uprising is unquestionably stimulated and promoted by Hamas, which has a limited but active presence in the West Bank. Hezbollah has also stirred the pot because it sees disruptions as integral to Iran's "Axis of Resistance" plan to foment and elevate instability in and around Israel. Among West Bank Palestinians there is also palpable frustration with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas. They are tired of the woefully corrupt, inept and disordered PA, and Abbas's Fatah party, which have little to show for their 18 years of governance.

Aside from Gaza, Israel's major concern in its immediate region is Hezbollah. Armed activity, including skirmishes along the Israel-Lebanon border and cross-border artillery shelling, has increased since October 7. While both sides want to avoid an all-out conflict, as occurred in 2006, their behavior to date suggests that the risk of escalation is rising. Israel's risky January 2 drone attack to take out Hamas Deputy Chief Saleh Al Arouri in Beirut could have been just the match to light up a major eruption between Israel and Hezbollah. For now, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has ruled that out, pledging only retributive "punishment" for the attack. But border tensions remain dangerously high.

In addition to the West Bank and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, Israel faces growing attacks from Iran's "Axis of Resistance" proxies in Syria and Iraq. They are increasingly attacking US troops. In the Red Sea, Houthi rebels threaten shipping passing through the world's main

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commercial thoroughfare between Asia and Europe. A US-led, 14-nation coalition, Operation Prosperity Guardian, issued a warning January 3 to the Yemen-based Houthis to halt their attacks on commercial vessels or face unspecified consequences. These are likely to entail armed strikes against Houthi bases in Yemen, potentially reigniting and even expanding that nation's nearly nine-year civil war. Until recently, this war had shown promising signs of coming to some closure, at least as far as foreign involvement was concerned.

As far as Israel is concerned, the Houthis are not an immediate threat. The IDF has indeed launched defensive rockets to down some Houthi missiles headed to Israel but Israeli conflict with the Houthis is eminently manageable for now and unlikely to increase.

While the Houthis are an irritation, its puppet master is a major threat. Iran has used proxies to orchestrate an effective distraction for Israel, which drains the country and its closest ally and supporter, the US. By sending naval ships to the Red Sea, America is now fighting battles on Israel's behalf. Unquestionably Iran's intention is to present the Islamic Republic as the region's genuine leader. Iran will decide to escalate, or de-escalate, the conflicts in southern Lebanon and the Red Sea in accordance with its national interests. Neither the US nor Israel has figured how to neutralize Iranian influence and power in the region. But one thing is clear: increased US military activity will have unpredictable consequences throughout the region and in the US. This is particularly relevant during an already politically and emotionally fraught US election year.

### **And Problems Closer to Home**

Israel's formidable external challenges may pale in comparison to its internal problems. Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces growing unpopularity at home. Some polls indicate that as many as 70-80% want him to resign after the war. In fact, only 15% want Netanyahu to keep his job after the war.

Netanyahu has also suffered a constitutional setback. On January 1, the Israeli Supreme Court's historic ruling overturned the Netanyahu government's contentious judicial reforms. The court struck down the law challenging the "reasonableness" standard, casting more dark shadows over Netanyahu's leadership. While his early exit in the midst of the Gaza war seems unlikely, it cannot be dismissed, especially if the court finds Netanyahu guilty of the charges involving bribery, fraud and breach of trust charges.

Even more important than Netanyahu is the biggest question looming over Israel: What happens "the day after?" At present, the embattled prime minister has stated that Israel will be responsible for maintaining Gaza's security after the war. That will be costly after a war that is estimated to cost Israel 2.00% of its GDP in 2024. This isn't a responsibility that Israel could or would want to shoulder indefinitely. So, if not Israel, then who? Netanyahu has rejected any security role for the PA's security forces, which admittedly cannot even police the West Bank effectively.

There is also the related question of governing Gaza with Hamas out of the picture. Palestinians and the international community will unquestionably reject that role for Israel. This idea smacks of settlement or even annexation, two words that enrage both groups. Note that Israel is unlikely to want to take on the task of governing Gaza either. Running this over-populated, now impoverished stretch of land with a wrecked economy that has effectively been leveled will be an unimaginably herculean task. Imagine the costs

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and the headaches associated with building and operating hospitals, schools, roads, water, sewers and more. Think of hiring all the local staff to carry out these and so many other public administration tasks. This would be a thankless task and a nightmare for Israeli administrators.

### **Managing the Day After: America Has Some Advice**

There hasn't been much public talk within Israel about how the country will deal with Gaza once the war is over. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant recently presented his vision of the day after with Israel assuming control of security and an "Israeli-guided" Palestinian body running day-to-day administration. According to Gallant, the US and other countries would oversee rebuilding.

Gallant's plan, which isn't yet official Israeli policy, may be a start but will require further fleshing out within Israel and among the broader international community. The US, other countries and, most importantly, the Palestinians will need to sign off on this or any other approach if it is to work.

For both security and administration, Israel will have no choice but to turn to the international community, starting with the US. Washington will have a lot to share from its experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Israelis would be well advised to pick the Americans' brains for what to do and, even more importantly, what not to do, which the US learned the hard way.

Rebuilding Gaza will ultimately prove to be a task too expansive and expensive for just the US, already saddled with the accumulated debt of failed nation-building experiments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Enter the Europeans and the Arab countries. Their participation will be necessary, especially in financing the reconstruction of Gaza's razed landscape. Without their willing and

active participation, Gaza will not recover, and Israel will remain with an impoverished neighbor it can't support with an increasingly hostile and largely young population on Israel's borders.

No country, including the US, is likely to pony up anything close to what Gaza will require without a firm commitment from Israel to accept a separate, independent state for the Palestinian people. Recognizing and accepting that reality after the last 15-plus years of fruitlessly trying to dodge or ignore it, may be the biggest challenge for the people of Israel and their leadership.

And even with an Israeli acceptance of two states, questions of governance in the future Palestinian state and who are to be Israel's negotiating partners will be difficult to answer. Hamas, as presently conceived and organized, is unacceptable and the PA lacks the resources, leadership, competence and trust of the Palestinian people. Clearly, a lot of work will need to be done and the Palestinians will need considerable help from the international community to make the two-state solution a reality.

The two-state solution and the various questions it entails can no longer be kicked down a dead-end road.



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# Taiwan's 2024 Election Between Chinese Disinformation and Democratic Survival

David Kuehn  
January 10, 2024

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**In January 2024, Taiwanese citizens will elect a new president and parliament. China, which considers Taiwan a renegade province, is trying to influence the outcome through political, military and economic pressure. China is also attempting to sway Taiwanese public opinion. How resilient are Taiwan's state authorities and civil society actors?**

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**O**n January 13, 2024, Taiwan's 19 million registered voters will go to the polls to elect a new president and parliament. After two terms in office, incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is ineligible for re-election. The DPP's candidate, William Lai, will be challenged by two contenders: Hou You-yi of the Kuomintang (KMT), and Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party.

Since the country's democratization in the 1990s, Taiwan's democracy has matured into a solid democracy. As summarized in the 2022 Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) report on Taiwan, the country enjoys "stable democratic institutions and a vibrant civil society, and does extremely well in guaranteeing its citizens political rights and civil liberties." In particular, the report highlights the quality of Taiwan's "regular, universal and secret multiparty elections, which are usually undisputed and widely covered by the media". Yet, the report also stresses that the People's Republic of China (PRC) pursues a range

of activities and strategies to influence Taiwan's electoral processes.

## China's electoral meddling

Beijing's interest in Taiwan's elections is rooted in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) view that the island is an integral part of China. Free and fair elections in Taiwan challenge this position because they are an expression of the island nation's de facto sovereignty. To sway Taiwan's voters, China pursues a three-pronged strategy that combines political and military pressure, economic means and attempts to sway Taiwanese public opinion. These are specifically aimed at weakening support for Lai and the DPP, who Beijing suspects of working towards de jure independence, and at strengthening the electoral prospects of Hou and the KMT, whose policy platform promises more conciliatory cross-Strait relations.

Ko's position on cross-Strait issues is less clear-cut, but he is of relevance to Beijing because his candidacy means splitting the opposition vote, thus potentially increasing the chances for a DPP win. Earlier plans of Hou and Ko to run on a common ticket faltered due to their inability to agree on who should run as presidential candidate.

On the political stage, China prevents Taiwan's involvement in international organizations that require formal statehood and pressures and entices countries to forego state-to-state relations with Taipei. In the March of 2023, for instance, Honduras switched diplomatic relations to Beijing, leaving Taiwan with the diplomatic recognition of only 13 countries. Moreover, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to conduct aerial and naval drills in the Taiwan Strait. These political and military measures are meant to create an atmosphere of defeatism among the Taiwanese and drive home the inevitability of a unification, coercive if necessary, with the mainland.

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Beijing also employs a mix of economic coercion and incentives, leveraging Taiwan's deep economic integration with the mainland. Since the DPP came into power in 2016, China has repeatedly restricted access to its markets for Taiwanese firms and banned a number of agricultural imports, especially targeting producers from southern Taiwan where the DPP is strongest. At the same time, by offering preferential trade agreements, market access and investment promises in the case of a KMT victory, China seeks to sway the Taiwanese electorate towards voting for Beijing-friendly alternatives.

Finally, China is attempting to shape Taiwanese public opinion and electoral outcomes through online disinformation campaigns, cyber warfare and attempts to influence local media. Chinese content farms and cyber trolls seek to sow dissent and spread false rumors. They attempt to discredit Taiwan's government and to undermine citizen's confidence that Taiwan and its international partners could successfully resist unification. Meanwhile, pro-China Taiwanese influencers and web personalities spread pro-unification messages. As part of its so-called "United Front" program, the CCP sponsors tours to China by Taiwanese local politicians and leaders of cultural institutions. Such tactics aim at undermining trust in the electoral process, the media, political parties, and individual candidates while drumming up support in favor of candidates aligned with Beijing's preferences.

### **Taiwan's countermeasures and democratic resilience**

Taiwan's government and civil society are acutely aware of these efforts and take steps to counter electoral interference. Taiwan's intelligence and law enforcement agencies are on high alert and the Ministry of Justice promises monetary rewards for tips related to interference in elections. The defense ministry routinely reports on the PLA's

actions and the Taiwanese military's responses, aiming to instill confidence in the Taiwanese public. Other state agencies, including educational institutions, are also involved in bolstering public resilience, for instance through developing and communicating civil defense measures.

These measures are complemented by efforts from within Taiwanese society to counter disinformation. A large, open and diverse media landscape ensures that a variety of perspectives and opinions are voiced, while numerous news outlets scrutinize political narratives and expose misinformation. Civil society actors, including voluntary fact-checking collectives and tech-savvy individuals, address fake news and propaganda and increase media literacy, while grassroots initiatives work to strengthen the public's resilience against external manipulation. All this occurs against the backdrop of a lively democratic political culture, which is marked by a competitive and diverse political landscape and engaged citizens who are resilient in the face of external pressures and blatant misinformation.

Consequently, China's attempts to influence Taiwan's public opinion do not appear to have been particularly fruitful. Polls suggest less than 9% of Taiwanese respondents consider China a credible partner. Moreover, most pre-election polls show Lai as a likely winner of the presidential race, even though the DPP might lose its majority in Taiwan's legislature. While this would limit Lai's ability to pursue his domestic policy agenda, such a scenario is unlikely to mean major changes in the relationship with China, since foreign policy is mainly determined by the president.

That said, China is expected to further increase its activities in the weeks leading up to the election, meaning that ongoing and tireless vigilance by Taiwanese authorities and civil society will be needed. The outcome of the 2024

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general elections will shape Taiwanese politics and cross-strait relations in the crucial coming years.

If Lai is victorious, he is expected to continue the policy of increasing Taiwan's international maneuvering space and intensifying ties with democratic allies. Should Hou win, he has promised to reduce tensions across the strait through greater economic integration. Regardless of the outcome of the elections, however, Beijing's stance will not change, and neither will the prevailing Taiwanese resistance to compromising on their de facto sovereignty.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]



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## How to Beat Authoritarian Parties, Polish-Style

Malwina Talik  
January 11, 2024

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**Last year, Poland's opposition successfully defeated the illiberal ruling party Law and Justice. They did so not by forming a big tent coalition, but by each party speaking to the concerns of each voter. Poland's success can be an example as an unusually high number of elections take place worldwide this year.**

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**2**024 is a “super-election year.” 76 states around the world will hold national elections this year. The stakes are high. Democracy is facing decline, and authoritarian politicians may claim victory in many elections. Yet the future is not set in stone. Last year, Poland's national-conservative and populist Law and Justice (PiS) party seemed set for a third consecutive victory in general elections, yet opposition parties achieved an unexpected triumph. While PiS achieved a plurality of the votes, it struggled to form a government, ultimately losing the overall political battle. PiS's eight years of eroding democratic institutions, values and norms were over. What can democratic oppositions contesting elections this year learn from Poland?

### Don't run under one banner

The democratic opposition often comprises parties with conflicting views. Forming a unified front may be tempting when confronting a common opponent with disproportionate media and institutional advantages. However, recent elections in Hungary and Turkey suggest this is not necessarily a blueprint for victory.

In Poland, the liberal-conservative Civic Coalition (KO) party initially insisted on a united front approach. KO leader Donald Tusk, like PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński, was perceived as a polarizing figure. Other parties were hesitant about being perceived as close to either of them. They feared losing electoral support by making an alliance and rejected the proposal. PiS exploited this, portraying the opposition as divided and unable to govern.

Eventually, the opposition learned to refrain from mutual attacks, opting for an informal united front without a joint election list. Two parties formed a coalition (Third Way) to present a conservative alternative to the KO-PiS duopoly. This approach allowed parties to maintain

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authenticity, providing a broader range of options and reaching specific target groups. While KO and the New Left rallied hundreds of thousands in Warsaw, the Third Way concentrated on engaging voters in rural areas and small cities. This approach also conveyed a sense that the parties' objectives extended beyond simply ousting PiS from power.

### **Mobilize undecided and apolitical voters**

In the face of a seemingly inevitable PiS victory, the Polish opposition was concerned that widespread apathy could deter many from voting. Recognizing a substantial number of disillusioned and undecided voters opposing PiS, both KO and the New Left specifically targeted them. Their focus extended to young women, who, affected by PiS's restrictive abortion and contraception policies, felt the consequences of political decisions on their lives. Non-governmental organizations, human rights institutions and public figures launched multiple campaigns to boost turnout, particularly targeting women. Their objective was to underscore the consequences of abstaining from voting, convey frustration and emphasize the significance of each vote.

The turnout exceeded expectations at over 74%. Women voted in greater numbers, and there was increased participation across all age groups. Interestingly, this heightened political interest may continue beyond the elections, with the new government's proceedings, humorously dubbed "Sejmflix," becoming the second most-watched video on Polish YouTube.

Campaigns involve more than just programs; emotions play a pivotal role. Initially, the opposition struggled to craft a compelling narrative, but a breakthrough occurred after the pro-European rally in Warsaw on June 4, 2023. Half a million people took to the streets in outrage over PiS's proposed law, "Lex Tusk," which would

have hindered Tusk from running in elections. The symbolism of the anniversary of Poland's first partially-free elections on June 4, 1989, accentuated the fight against non-democratic regimes and tapped into the legend of Solidarity, a movement that put an end to communism. The rally's immense popularity surprised the opposition, paralyzing PiS and instilling hope in the public that mobilized voters could change the election outcome.

"The March of a Million Hearts," with white-red hearts emblem, held two weeks before the elections, again gathered hundreds of thousands. Emphasizing respect for PiS voters despite differences, in contrast to PiS labeling the opposition as "Poles of the worse sort," resonated well with moderates.

Despite being de facto anti-government, both rallies fostered a positive, joyful atmosphere, conveying message of a progressive, inclusive and democratic Poland within the EU. This approach helped instill a winning mindset in society and break apathy.

### **How PiS overplayed its hand**

PiS also made its fair share of mistakes. It underestimated social discontent amid ongoing democratic backsliding. PiS also eroded its popularity by engaging in disputes with the EU — a risky strategy in a notably pro-EU society.

Moreover, tightening an already restrictive abortion law into a near-total abortion ban, coupled with subsequent maternal deaths, not only undermined PiS support among women but also mobilized previously apolitical people.

In the campaign itself, PiS made three major mistakes. Firstly, it relied heavily on fierce attacks and almost grotesque fear-mongering, particularly targeting Tusk, whom PiS labeled as a



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“personification of evil” and “the biggest security threat to Poland.” While this may have mobilized PiS’s own electoral base, it led to irritation among opponents and undecideds.

Secondly, the party distanced itself from crucial voter concerns, such as high inflation and housing shortages. This was a break from PiS’s success in other elections, when it understood voter sentiments well and won with popular proposals like child benefits.

Lastly, PiS underestimated the impact of corruption scandals, which seemed to have little effect until the visa scandal broke out during the campaign, catching the party off guard.

### **Is Poland's case a blueprint for stopping authoritarians?**

We must be cautious when drawing conclusions from to other nations. Each political system has its own local factors. Yet the Polish case illustrates how adapting existing tactics to the specific context and learning from the mistakes of others can enable David to triumph against Goliath.

Poland now serves as a laboratory for navigating a post-illiberal period. The challenge for the current government is to succeed in this taxing endeavor without paving the way for a return of PiS to power.

[The [Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe](#) produced this piece and is a partner of Fair Observer.]

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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## **Justice For All? Victims Are Ignored From Britain to Gaza**

Alan Waring  
January 11, 2024

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**The common notion of justice, i.e. the triumph of right over wrong, is remarkably elusive in reality for many people across a wide spectrum of injustices. In Britain, the Post Office relentlessly prosecuted and imprisoned partner shopowners over clerical errors it caused. In Palestine, millions of Palestinians live as refugees across the occupied territories and neighboring countries. Now, Israel is bombarding their hospitals and homes. What hope is there?**

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**T**he essence of justice, as developed over many centuries by judiciaries and governments, is one of fairness, equality, lawfulness and order. Justice is entwined with individual perceptions of morality, ethics, acceptable norms, laws, penalties, standards and methods of implementation. Justice is therefore an essential element of the social contract whereby a population grants its rulers the authority to act on its behalf, provided those rulers protect both the

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individual rights of citizens and the common good and interest.

The espoused system of justice is an ideal, seeking to deliver fair and equitable treatment of individuals, encompassing equal rights, protections and opportunities. However, a lot will depend on the prevailing political ideology and system. Authoritarian states, like Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and others, often fail to uphold justice, despite their claims to the contrary. Individuals with dissenting views or minority identities in these nations may face repression, arrest, imprisonment and even judicial or extra-judicial execution.

### **Justice in war**

In addition to issues of social justice and the array of law-and-order injustices, there is also the issue of justice in the area of armed conflict. A party engaging in war must demonstrate a just cause, justify that war is the last resort after exploring peaceful options, declare war through proper authority, act with good intentions, have a reasonable chance of success, and ensure that the means used align proportionately with the perceived threat and declared objective.

In addition, parties in armed conflict must take the utmost care to prioritize the safety of civilians and to apply humanitarian principles. For example: no deliberate murder or other atrocities against unarmed civilians; no taking of hostages or harming them; no collective punishments of civilians as proxy targets for enemy combatants; no indiscriminate use of bombs, rockets or weapons of mass destruction; no targeting of hospitals, schools, water, fuel and power supplies, food and medical supplies; no denial of safe passage out of combat zones for civilians and priority medical patients; no forced detention, displacement or expulsion of civilians; and no expropriation or theft of land or other assets of the

civilian population, whether by state agencies, interest groups or individuals.

The law of war has four guiding principles or requirements:

1. Distinction: distinguish as far as possible between combatant targets and civilians.
2. Proportionality: prevent excessive loss of life or damage incidental to an attack, disproportionate to military advantage.
3. Military Necessity: target only existential and potential military threats.
4. Avoidance of Unnecessary Suffering: prioritize humanitarian criteria.

Regrettably, history shows that observation of the law of war regarding civilians is often more in breach. As Bård Drange suggests, victims may have a long struggle to obtain any justice. Combatants often disregard rules, sought to justify their actions and ignored potential war crime charges. Some even cynically argue that they scrupulously observe the four guiding principles despite compelling evidence to the contrary which they deny. Putin's war on Ukraine and the Israel– Hamas war are contemporary examples.

Of the two identifiable parties to a dispute or conflict, is the position of one wholly just and the other's position wholly unjust. In other words, is justice in war zero-sum? Sometimes such an unequivocal judgment may be warranted, but quite often both parties may reasonably claim to have suffered injustice at the hands of the other. Responsibilities, liabilities and evaluations under agreements, contracts, laws and norms guide judicial decisions, which might differ from public opinions, partisan stances or populist views.

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Nevertheless, in some of the worst cases of injustice, a “zero-sum” argument is precisely what protagonists relentlessly assert. The party with more power typically vehemently asserts its exclusive rightfulness, portraying itself as a paragon of virtue and godliness. Simultaneously, they depict the other party as despicable, pathological liars, entirely untrustworthy and devoid of any redeeming qualities, creating a narrative that attempts to justify their own grievances while vilifying the opposition. Each party may develop an immutable view that justice can only be served by the total annihilation of the other, figuratively if not literally.

In high-stakes disputes, hyperbolic propaganda reigns. In today's world of instant communication and social media, winning the propaganda battle often means claiming an exclusive right to justice, even if, impartially speaking, it is unfounded.

### **Historical injustices**

When we look retrospectively at historical injustices, we encounter at least two main problems:

1. Cognitive, emotional and motivational biasing. The “truth” becomes distorted by knowledge limits, partiality, prejudice and purpose of the observer.
2. Causation, forensic accountability and attribution of blame for events, whether in the recent or more distant past. Whereas it is often relatively easy evidentially to attribute causation, partisan arguments are likely to creep into judgments on responsibility and blame.

Things become far murkier the further back in time one examines. Historical revisionism and

retrospective rationalization are likely to play a part. Parties may well introduce degrees of fiction and exaggeration into their accounts of past or present situations or events in order to bolster their present claims for justice or to deny the claims of others.

The curse of slavery and ethnic subjugation was normalized for thousands of years by many nations. Many argue that assigning blame and seeking reparations from specific nations in contemporary times proves futile and unjustified, appearing more as an act of retribution than genuine justice. Historical regression has no bounds, and for those demanding reparation, who is to say how far back any alleged obligation should go?

For example: Should the UK make reparation claims against the Italian government for the subjugation, including slavery, of its native population for over 400 years by the Roman Empire? Similarly, should it claim against the French government for the Norman invasion and conquest, including quasi-enslavement of the English peasantry, from 1066 onwards?

Should multiple European countries lay claims against Morocco for the kidnapping and enslavement of their citizens in the 17th century by the Barbary pirates? What about all those peoples and countries conquered and subjugated by Spain for centuries in the Americas — aren't they entitled to compensation? The absurdity speaks for itself.

Nevertheless, there are many unresolved injustices in more recent history that warrant serious attention. Health care inequalities, wrongful convictions, wrongful deportations, the Rohingya massacres in Myanmar, the opioid addiction crisis, the political curbing of judiciaries, war crimes in Ukraine — the list is endless.

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From a wide spectrum of injustices, I will examine two topical ones. The two divergent cases illustrate some of the characteristics of injustice and the difficulties faced by victims in obtaining justice.

### **Case 1: The UK Post Office's ongoing Horizon scandal**

The Post Office Horizon scandal, lasting more than 20 years, has been described as “the most widespread miscarriage of justice in UK legal history.” In addition to its own larger stations, the UK Post Office contracted with a substantial number, approximately 9,000, of small shopkeepers, particularly in small towns and villages, to provide postal services within their premises. These sub-postmasters are contractually liable for any accounting shortfall involving “carelessness or error”.

In the late 1990s, the Post Office decided to convert its Horizon IT system for the payment of state pensions and benefits into a comprehensive service. Horizon went live in 2000, and within two months large, unexplained accounting variances were being reported at sub-Post Offices. The Post Office then invoked the contract clause for liability for deficits, asserting that “carelessness or error” on the part of the sub-postmaster was the only possible cause.

The number of such cases escalated, with alleged deficits ranging from £1,000 (\$1,227) to tens of thousands of pounds and, in one case, over £1 million (\$1.227 million). Over the next few years, the Post Office racked up over 700 such alleged cases in which sub-postmasters were coerced into covering alleged deficits and typically were sacked from their Post Office roles. In some cases, the Post Office launched criminal prosecutions for such alleged offenses as theft, fraud and false accounting, and many sub-

postmasters were convicted on the basis of “fool-proof Horizon” evidence and jailed and/or fined.

As the number of cases mounted, both the Post Office and its Horizon software provider Fujitsu steadfastly maintained that the software was “absolutely accurate and reliable” and that all the actions against sub-postmasters with shortfalls were fully justified. Nevertheless, by 2012, a growing number of MPs concluded that both the technical reliability of Horizon and the integrity of the Post Office's and Fujitsu's senior management were in question.

By 2015, the House of Commons business committee summoned the Post Office's chief executive, Paula Vennells, to account for why her previous pledge to resolve the Horizon debacle had not been met. Richard Brooks and Nick Wallis reported that her claim to be running a “caring” business and having “no evidence” of any miscarriages of justice was met by “barely disguised derision” by committee members, one of whom described the Horizon affair as a “shambles”. The Post Office and Fujitsu continued to maintain their “paragons of virtue” position and to deny that Horizon was in any way faulty or responsible for the errors and the false charges, false convictions and all the damage to the lives of the sub-postmasters.

However, in March 2017, the High Court of Justice granted a group litigation order to 555 sub-postmasters to sue the Post Office. Over the next two years, in a series of trials and appeals to overturn judgments against them, the Post Office lost in every instance and came in for excoriating criticism by judges. In one judgment in March 2019, a judge described the Post Office as “aggressive,” attempting “to put the court in terrorem,” seeking to “obfuscate matters, and mislead me,” “obdurate” and guilty of “oppressive behavior.”

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The judge found the contractual relationship to be unfair in its coercive disadvantage to sub-postmasters. The Post Office then attempted to have him removed for alleged bias and, when this failed, they lodged an appeal. The appellate judge rejected this appeal outright, describing the appellants' arguments as "misconceived," "fatally flawed," "demonstrably wrong" and "without substance". He stated that the appeal had been based "on the idea that the Post Office was entitled to treat [sub-postmasters] in capricious or arbitrary ways which would not be unfamiliar to a mid-Victorian factory owner."

Evidence submitted by senior Fujitsu witnesses for the defense was systematically discredited and shown as false, revealing a "party line" conspiracy over many years to hide evidence of the fundamental flaws of the Horizon product that had led to the false charges and convictions. The courts noted that the two organizations had cheated the litigants and lied to them, and that the Post Office's approach consisted in "bare assertions and denials that ignore what actually occurred ... [and] amount[ed] to the 21st-century equivalent of maintaining the earth is flat."

Following the judgments, the Post Office initially agreed to pay £57.75 million (\$72 million) in the settlement, plus its own costs, with the then expected total to exceed £90 million (\$110 million). Taxpayers footed the bill since the Post Office operates as a public entity.

Subsequently, hundreds of other victims sought compensation under related schemes, and in 2023 the government announced that each person wrongfully convicted would receive £600,000 (\$785,000) from the government. However, overturned convictions (93 so far) are a minority, leaving hundreds of other victims denied full justice. Some have already died, some face destitution, and some have committed suicide attributed to the shame and hardship inflicted on

them by wrongful conviction, imprisonment and fines. Justice delayed is justice denied.

In addition, sub-postmasters were authorized to pursue the Post Office for malicious prosecution. More recently, the chair of the Public Inquiry into the scandal cautioned senior officials from the Post Office and Fujitsu that their persistent delay in providing crucial documents might result in criminal sanctions against them. These include perverting the course of justice. Recently, another 50 sub-postmaster victims came forward and have been added to the police investigation into the Post Office for potential fraud and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Many people argue that key figures involved in creating and perpetuating the scandal over so many years should be prosecuted on indictment. The most prominent would be the disgraced former chief executive (and former priest), Paula Vennells, who sanctioned the long-term policy of prosecuting the sub-postmasters and contributed to the cover-up by deliberately misleading and not cooperating with a parliamentary committee over several years of their inquiry into Horizon.

## **Case 2: The Israeli–Palestinian conflict and territorial rights**

If ever there were a case of national and individual injustice, the long-standing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and their respective rights must surely rank among the most thorny and intractable. I can only attempt to identify the essence of such an immensely complex problem and address the main injustices claimed by each party. Further, I will discuss the most fruitful prospect for a way out for both parties to obtain some justice and peaceful coexistence.

On October 7, 2023, armed Hamas terrorists from the Palestinian enclave of Gaza carried out a coordinated attack on Israel. Over 1,200 civilians

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were killed and some 240 were taken hostage. The sheer savagery of the Hamas attack shocked and enraged the world. People of all ages, from young children to the elderly and incapacitated, were killed, tortured and wounded in a frenzy of depravity.

In response, Israel launched a defensive campaign to root out and destroy the entire Hamas organization and military capacity in Gaza. At time of writing, the tragic toll on the Gazan civilians has reached at least 23,300 dead and a further 59,400 injured, along with an estimated 7,000 missing, according a January 10 Al Jazeera television broadcast citing Gaza's health ministry. As the Israeli campaign continues, these numbers will certainly increase.

Israel insists that it has fully followed and respected the law of war and humanitarian requirements, especially the protection of civilians, despite the exceptionally high number of casualties. However, many independent observers, including UN bodies, the UN Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, warn that both Hamas on October 7 and Israel in its subsequent Gaza campaign appear to have committed war crimes. Indeed, some Israeli officials and others have asserted that there is no distinction between Hamas terrorists and Palestinian civilians, even babies and young children and have likened them all to non-humans who must be eliminated. Extremists such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah talk in similar terms about Israeli Jews.

The campaign so far has effectively destroyed most of the homes, buildings and infrastructure of the entire North and Central Gaza, including any means to sustain life such as fuel, water, power and food supplies. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), claiming that Hamas was hiding in tunnels underneath public buildings, have attacked hospitals. By December, only 9 out of 36 hospitals

in Gaza were functioning, with the remainder teetering on closure for lack of fuel and power.

Nearly two million Gazans have been internally displaced. The IDF initially coerced the inhabitants of North Gaza under threat of bombardment to abandon their homes and flee to the relative safety of Central Gaza, and subsequently South Gaza. In both cases, however, Israeli bombardments and ground attacks are the daily norm.

Millions of refugees are now packed into South Gaza. They lack adequate access to shelter, basic facilities, food, water or medical assistance. Prior to October 7, over 500 trucks per day carried essential supplies into Gaza over the Rafah Crossing from Egypt. Now, after no trucks for many weeks, that number is just 120 a day, adding to the unavoidable image of the IDF laying a siege and punitive bombardment to kill, wound, terrify and starve the surviving population into quiet submission. Israel vehemently denies this, insisting that it was all down to military necessity, that any civilian casualties and "inconvenience" are simply unavoidable collateral damage and that Hamas is fully to blame for all this.

Only with great reluctance and following sustained pressure from the US and other allies did Netanyahu finally agree to a short temporary ceasefire and a limited flow of essential supplies into Gaza. What comes next in the IDF campaign in Gaza can only be speculated. Once Hamas remnants in North Gaza had been greatly reduced, the IDF turned to relentlessly attacking Central and South Gaza, although it had previously designated the latter as a safe zone for refugees from Central and North Gaza. And to what end? What comes after? Political scientist John Mearsheimer questions Hamas termination as being their sole objective and suggests far uglier additional Israeli objectives. South Africa went further and laid charges at the International Court of Justice against Israel for crimes against humanity and genocide.

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Far-right Israeli cabinet ministers, such as Avigdor Lieberman, Amihai Eliyahu, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, are pushing an extreme Zionist line. On January 3, 2023, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich publicly expressed their desire to expel Palestinians from Gaza. In their minds, only the elimination of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza will ensure freedom from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah attacks. The Times of Israel has described the policies and stance of the Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party, to which Ben-Gvir and Eliyahu belong, as “neo-fascist” and likely to make Israel an international pariah. For the far right, a convenient by-product of Palestinian expulsion would be an Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) finally almost free of non-Jewish contamination — not only Palestinians but other Muslims as well as Christians and Druze.

Anyone doubting they have extreme views need only consider what Eliyahu said in an interview on Radio Kol Barama on November 5, 2023, which included taking back control of Gaza and moving in Israeli settlers, a position he has since repeated. On the Palestinian population, he said they “can go to Ireland or deserts...the monsters in Gaza should find a solution themselves.” When asked if Israel should drop a nuclear bomb on Gaza to flatten it and kill all the inhabitants, he replied “That is one of the options”. While possibly merely emotional venting, its pathological origin is unmistakable.

Potential expulsion of the Palestinian population into tent cities in Egypt’s Sinai Desert had already been considered in an Israeli cabinet concept document prior to the October 7 Hamas attack. Although subsequently played down by Netanyahu as only a “what if?” document, it indicates a predisposition to regard the Palestinian population as an unwanted and disposable nuisance without rights. It also indicates that Egypt would either be expected to comply readily or be coerced by threat or blackmail, all unlikely to succeed.

## **How did Israel and Palestine get to this point?**

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has its roots in 1947, when the British administrative mandate from the League of Nations in 1922 ended. For 400 years under the Ottomans, the land of Palestine had been a patchwork of intermingled Palestinian and Jewish-owned land and communities, with Palestinians being the larger population. In 1922, census data showed Palestinian Muslims as 78%, Christians as 9.5% and Jews as 11.4% of the population. By 1944, the census data show Muslims as 61%, Christians as 7.8% and Jews as 30.4%. This is a reflection of immigration by Jews from other parts of the world as well as the birth of sabras, or indigenous Jews.

Jewish immigration into Palestine came in waves starting in 1881, encouraged by the Zionist movement. Zionism is a cultural-nationalist ideology that uses racial, religious and political ideas to further its aims, the primary one being to create a permanent Jewish homeland in Palestine. This home aims to promote aliyah (“going up”), urging the Jewish diaspora, scattered across centuries due to conflicts, expulsions and anti-Semitism, to return to their historical biblical and pre-biblical homeland of Eretz Yisrael.

Chaim Weizmann, an esteemed scientist and influential early Zionist leader in Europe, effectively championed the Zionist movement. He successfully persuaded Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary during the onset of the British Mandate, to support the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Crucially, the short Balfour Declaration also stated: “It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”



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As mentioned earlier, Jewish immigration to Palestine surged until the conclusion of the British Mandate in 1947. This influx provoked increasing concern and discontent among Palestinians, who feared that the sheer volume of immigrant Jews and their land acquisitions could lead to the eventual domination of Palestine.

Following the British departure in 1947, a swift civil war ensued, resulting in the triumph of the Jewish population. This victory led to a mass departure of the majority of Palestinians — estimated at a minimum of 750,000 — across borders into Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, whether coerced or fleeing for safety. Much of their land was expropriated.

On May 14, 1948, the Jewish Agency in Palestine formally declared the creation of the State of Israel, which the Arabs call al Naqba (“the Catastrophe”). Both mass expulsions and voluntary departures of equally fearful Jews from Arab states that strongly objected to the creation of the Jewish state continued for years.

Israel emerged victorious in subsequent wars forced upon it by Arab states in 1967 and 1973, acquiring significant territories from the enemy nations. To date, Israel has steadfastly refused to allow the return of Palestinian refugees, now numbering 5.9 million, of whom the plurality are internally displaced in Gaza (26%) and the West Bank (15%), with the remainder in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Both Jewish and Palestinian roots in Palestine trace back several thousand years, encompassing the area delineated as the modern state of Israel, which includes Palestine. Thus, both ethnicities can claim a roughly equal general right to live in the same ancestral homeland under the principles of *jus naturale* (natural law), *jus sanguinis* (law of bloodlines), *jus soli* (law of birthplace) and *jus gentium* (law of nations). This equal coexistence

was clearly intended by Balfour in his express wording about the rights “of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”, i.e., no community could claim exclusive rights. An inclusionary multi-ethno-religious model with no exclusively Jewish land rights was also proposed by the founding father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl.

In the 1990s and up to 2005, there was a hopeful phase marked by potential reconciliation, setting the stage for a two-state solution that acknowledged peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine, acknowledging their respective land rights. However, after 2005 this momentum took a sharp turn in the opposite direction. Modern Zionist ideology has increasingly adopted an uncompromising denial that Palestinians have any right to be in Eretz Yisrael and supporters have adopted a narrative of exclusionary nationalism. To bolster their claim of an exclusive Jewish right to exist in Israel, hard-line Zionists also include a justification of *jus divinum* (law of God), which asserts that God promised Abraham the land to the Jews alone. This steadfast nationalist assertion has underpinned Israeli government policy for years, particularly escalating under the authoritarian leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu and through the enactment of the 2018 Jewish Nation-State law.

One obvious problem facing the *jus divinum* argument is that, unlike other *jus* arguments, it is not testable against objective facts or data as it relies on beliefs and faith. It is self-serving. It requires everyone to accept that “the truth” regarding exclusive land rights is what today’s ultra-Zionists say it is.

Israelis and Palestinians both have entrenched positions on land rights whereby each regards the other as an unwelcome “cuckoo in the nest.” Does either side have a convincing case?

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Professor Chaim Gans of Tel Aviv University has provided a detailed analysis and evaluation of Zionist justice and the right of return of Palestinians in which he concluded that both Israelis and Palestinians had substantive rightful claims to exist in the same territory. Of possible options to resolve this conflict, he concluded that territorial separation was the most likely to succeed and that he made this “as a factual prediction, not just a moral argument.”

Yet various attempts since the 1960s at a two-state solution failed, and it has been stagnant since 2007. Ironically, the Hamas attack on October 7 has spurred international clamor from the US, the G7 and other allies for a two-state solution being the only viable long-term option. Thus far, Netanyahu has totally rejected it, but it may be his only way of ensuring continued US support for Israel.

### **Justice for all?**

That Hamas carried out a monstrous war crime on October 7 is beyond dispute, as is Israel’s absolute right to take defensive measures against further such attacks. However, the impassioned cries of Israeli victims' families and loved ones, especially about the plight of hundreds of hostages taken by Hamas, have to compete with the shock-and-awe video portrayal day after day of all the carnage of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Israel’s friends and allies strongly support going after Hamas and its fellow travelers Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah, all of whom they see as a hideous bunch of criminal psychopaths who must be eliminated. However, those same friends and allies are increasingly alarmed that Israel's methodology is extremely reckless in relation to civilian casualties and infrastructure. Many observers question whether the emerging evidence simply supports the official Israeli line that its campaign methods are all necessary,

proportionate and humanitarian. Does the Hamas war crime warrant other war crimes in response?

A large majority of American under-50s apparently does not think so, thus putting both President Joe Biden’s current staunch support and longer-term US policy on Israel in question, as well as the US’s international standing. Israel’s vast propaganda machinery seeking to control “the truth” and portray its might-is-right onslaught on the entire Palestinian civilian population of Gaza as being just, righteous, virtuous and civilized only plays well outside Israel to a limited and diminishing audience.

Nevertheless, an often-overlooked section of Israeli society abhors what is being done in their name. With the current raw emotions and clamor for vengeance against Hamas and proxy vengeance against Palestinian civilians, their voice is suppressed and unheard. Yet, when the current rage and vengeful blood-lust among both sides subsides (as it surely will), calm and constructive thinkers, trust-creators and peacemakers will be needed.

Both Israelis and Palestinians must redirect their focus from the past and look ahead to create a mutually beneficial new framework. If the British and Irish governments and the Irish Republican Army could reach an agreement in 1998, ending an almost century-long armed conflict and paving the way for a shared, democratic future for Northern Ireland's communities, then there's hope for a similar creative approach between Israelis and Palestinians — if they are both prepared to compromise in the spirit of 80% of something is better than 100% of nothing.

Terrorist groups such as Hamas and their destructive and murderous ideology can no longer have any license or sanctuary anywhere, least of all as self-imposed and unaccountable “protectors” of the Palestinian people. The tyranny of Hamas

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and similar groups must be dismantled. So too must the despotic authoritarian rule of Netanyahu and his far-right cabinet, accused of establishing an elective dictatorship in Israel. This includes allegations of suppressing judicial independence, endorsing unlawful and violent land seizures of Palestinians, Christians and other minorities by Israeli settlers and perpetuating oppression against Palestinians over many decades.

Will Israelis and Palestinians clear out their respective dystopian blackguards? Will they reject zero-sum? Will they have the strength of character, the moral backbone, the determination and a sufficient capacity to compromise and persevere?

Academics such as Prof. Gans and Prof. Mearsheimer, diplomats such as former Bosnian ambassador Emir Hadžikadunić, the US State Department and a consensus of world leaders and governments agree that a two-state solution is now the only viable way out for both parties. Without a just settlement, what is assured is perpetual conflict, bloodshed and misery for both.

[[Madelyn Lambert](#) edited this piece.]

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## Why South Africa's Poor Vote for the Now Corrupt ANC

Martin Plaut  
January 12, 2024

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**The African National Congress is failing to deliver basic services to its citizens. Led by corrupt, dishonest and incompetent leaders, the party relies on past glory and fear-mongering falsehoods about the opposition to retain its hold on power.**

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**I**n spite of its dismal record, the majority of black South Africans will most likely support the African National Congress (ANC) when the general election is held later this year. The ANC's record is one of failure: a failure to provide jobs (about 60% of the country's youth are unemployed), of failing to keep the lights on or even water flowing out of taps in parts of the country and of failing to curb corruption. Sadly, corruption in ANC-ruled South Africa has become pervasive and endemic.

Who can forget that Jacob Zuma, the former president, faces 700 allegations of corruption, fraud, money-laundering and racketeering charges but is yet to be tried in court? Instead, the ANC has finally admitted this week that the party lied to parliament when it described a publicly-funded swimming pool at Zuma's private villa as a "fire pool" installed as a safety feature!

This year's election will be tougher for the ANC than the earlier ones. Most recent polling shows that the party will get fewer than 50% of the votes. In South Africa's proportional representation system, this means that the ANC will have to look for allies to continue governing. One outlier poll

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suggests that the ANC's vote share would fall to just 33%.

### **Rural realities and why the ANC pitch resonates**

The black African population, upon which the ANC relies, still turns out and votes for the party, particularly in the rural areas. Under apartheid, the countryside, termed "homelands" or "Bantustans" were dumping grounds for black Africans. They could only legally leave these arrears if they could get one of the rare tightly-controlled permits. Today no such restrictions apply and there has been a migration to the cities. Yet the rural areas are still home to a third of the population.

It is here that the people still vote for the ANC in huge numbers. They have not forgotten the party that led the fight to liberate them from apartheid. The ANC-led government also brought electricity to remote areas of the country, built homes across hillsides and, above all, provided them with social security benefits. Entire families, often unable to find work, came to rely on the small, but vital payments to family members who are disabled or retired.

The maximum monthly state pension stands at 2 090 rand per month. That is just \$122, but it keeps whole families from destitution. Maintaining this pension is vital and the ANC understands this well.

When elections come around, the ANC plays to all its strengths. The party still derives legitimacy from its decades-long opposition to the apartheid government and its previous great leaders, especially Nelson Mandela. However, the ANC's primary appeal is simple: it warns the poor that they will lose their social security if another party comes to power. This is untrue but truth no longer matters to the ANC in its pursuit of power.

The ANC has employed this cynical tactic over several elections. A survey by the University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA) carried out in the run-up to the 2014 election indicated that just under half of voters were not aware that the social grants that they received were theirs by right.

The centre's director, Leila Patel, said the finding was "worrying" as it meant that these voters — 49% of the respondents — were not aware of their rights. The potential for political abuse is large, given that just under 16-million grant beneficiaries are receiving social grants amounting to R121bn this year. Agriculture MEC [Member of the Executive Council – provincial Minister] in KwaZulu-Natal, Meshack Radebe, for example, said in April that "those who receive grants and are voting for the opposition are stealing from the government". He said that those who voted for another party should "stay away from the grant", as if social grants were gifts from the ruling party. In fact, these grants are funded by taxes in order for the government to meet its constitutional obligation to provide social protection.

Summarising the study, Professor Yoland Sadie described the role of social grants in deciding voter behaviour as important, possibly decisive.

...social grants can provide an incentive for people to vote for the ANC, since a large proportion of grant-holders who support the party do not think that "they will continue receiving the grant when a new party comes to power." A majority of respondents also agreed 'that they would vote for a party that provides social grants'. Therefore, in a situation where one party has dominated the electoral scene for such a long time, and without having the experience of other

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parties being in power, it is difficult for voters to ‘know’ whether these benefits will continue under a different party in power – particularly if the official opposition has the legacy of being a “White” party.

## Opposition tactics in 2024

The electorate has no shortage of parties to choose from in these elections. There will be more than 100 new political parties on the ballot, including ActionSA, the Patriotic Alliance, Rise Mzansi. For the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance [DA], this will pose a challenge. The DA has its roots in the white, Progressive Party. For many years it fought apartheid with its sole Member of Parliament, Helen Suzman putting up doughty resistance to racist legislation. Bitterly attacked by the government for her stand, she won widespread international appreciation for her performance from 1961-1974.

Since the end of apartheid, the DA has gone through several leaders, some of them black. Today John Steenhuisen is leader of the party and, officially, of the opposition. As a white politician he can (and is) dismissed as representing an ethnic minority.

The DA has made no secret that it is organising a coalition of opposition parties to challenge the ANC. What Steenhuisen calls the “moonshot pact.” The ANC has used this to suggest to the electorate that, if elected, the DA will return to the policies of apartheid. ANC national chairperson Gwede Mantashe hinted as much when he accused Steenhuisen of organising “apartheid parties” to remove the ANC from power. “Steenhuisen is trying the impossible. He’s trying to organise all apartheid parties and parties of Bantustans to form a group that will defeat the ANC,” Mantashe said.

To resist these allegations the DA has now hit back. It is targeting the issue of benefits and grants, using a Tweet.

Steenhuisen is making a well targeted pitch. All South Africans know that their electricity supply has collapsed, the police seldom answer calls for help and unemployment has hit families hard. Will this pitch erode the ANC vote among key constituencies, including the rural communities? It is too early to tell.



Born in South Africa, **Martin Plaut** is currently senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and holds the same post with King’s College London. He studied at the Universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Warwick before joining the Labour Party as secretary on Africa and the Middle East. In 1984 he joined the BBC, working primarily on Africa.

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## A Confident Africa Is Spreading Afrobeats to the World

LeAnn Glover  
January 13, 2024

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**African artists are winning global fame with Afrobeats, combining Ghanian Highlife and West African percussion with rock and jazz roots. These artists sing of liberation and the will of a young and confident Africa to make the world listen. As they grow their economies and shake off colonial ties, African nations are taking their place on the world stage.**

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The 2020's decade is already well underway, and with it a cultural movement of epic proportions has emerged from the African continent. It is redefining not only the music landscape but even the political one. The resounding melodies of Afrobeats have transcended the barriers of language and geography. Listeners from around the world are tuning into this African genre, ushering in a kind of musical diplomacy.

Singers like Ayra Starr, with her soulful voice and introspective lyrics, King Promise, with his silky-smooth melodies, and the incomparable Burna Boy, whose Afro-fusion mastery knows no bounds, have captivated global audiences. Their popularity has spread to countries such as the United Kingdom, Portugal, and the United States. Worldwide streams amounted to 13.5 billion in 2022.

Afrobeats, from the rich musical heritage of Africa, fuses traditional rhythms with modern influences to create an irresistible tapestry of sound. With roots that stretch across the continent, Afrobeats encapsulates the vibrancy of Ghana's Highlife — a genre that combines elements of rock and jazz — and the pulse of West African percussion from neighboring countries.

### **Music with a message**

Afrobeats conveys messages of African liberation and culture. Songs like “Zombie” by Fela Kuti critique oppressive regimes, while “African Giant” by Burna Boy celebrates African resilience and unity. “Jerusalema” by Master KG (featuring Nomcebo Zikode), though not strictly Afrobeats as it also borrows from gospel-house, became a global anthem of hope during the COVID-19 pandemic. This musical renaissance has united Africa, reclaiming its narrative and breaking free

from the chains of colonial history. Afrobeats artists shed light on the beauty of Africa and the African experience. They also challenge stereotypes, such as the idea that hip-hop has negative influences on youth.

Emerging artist Ayra Starr's profound voice captures the complexity of young adulthood, offering solace to a generation navigating their identities. Africa is, after all, the youngest continent in the world. Starr expresses that with confidence anything is possible for young people, even the unimaginable. In her song “Sability,” she sings, “Espiritu Fortuna, I go make you jo dada, shey you getty the power, sweetie passy amala ketu.” In other words, “we are blessed beyond our knowledge to make any of our dreams come true.” In her lead single “Bloody Samaritan,” Starr dismisses those who underestimate her because of her age and gender, reiterating that change can be made at any age, sector, and in any region of the globe.

Hailing from Ghana, King Promise has already etched his name in the annals of Afrobeats history with his melodic prowess. His dulcet tones dance over Highlife-infused rhythms, creating a signature sound that radiates joy and nostalgia. Promise's rise exemplifies the genre's power to forge connections, both within and beyond borders, while recognizing the vast culture of Africa. His popular songs, such as “CCTV,” “Terminator,” and “Selfish,” not only showcase King Promise's musical talent but also resonate with diverse audiences. Through these tracks, he infuses elements of traditional African sounds with modern beats, creating a unique sonic experience that celebrates the continent's rich musical heritage and helps break stereotypes.

A conversation about celebrating cultural heritage would be remiss without paying homage to Burna Boy. His ascent from the streets of Port Harcourt to the Grammy Awards is a testament to



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the Afrobeats' transformative impact. Burna Boy's genre-bending and socially conscious Afro-fusion lyrics have redefined modern African music. Songs such as "Different" speak of the joy and uniqueness each country has in identifying as African. Unapologetic anthems like "Another Story" and "African Giant" touch on shifting from false narratives (i.e., colonialist perspectives) and standing true to one's origin. In "Another Story," Burna Boy sings, "They wanna tell you o, tell you o, tell you o/Another story o, story o, story o." He has become a symbol of African pride and resistance.

### **A confident, growing continent**

As Afrobeats shapes the world's perception of Africa as a cultural trendsetter, it also emblemizes Africa's transformative growth into a political and economic force on the global stage. The African Union's efforts to foster unity and cooperation among member states are yielding tangible results, as seen in initiatives addressing regional conflicts, economic development and sustainability.

Some notable examples of sustainable practices include promoting renewable energy sources, implementing waste reduction and recycling programs, and advocating for responsible land use and conservation efforts. The African Union has been actively supporting eco-friendly agricultural practices, such as agroforestry and organic farming, to ensure long-term environmental health and food security for its member states.

In the realm of trade and investment, the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) heralds a new era of intracontinental commerce. The AfCFTA aims to boost intra-African trade and economic integration. The increased interconnectivity opens up African economies, entrepreneurs, producers and artists not only to each other, but to the world. This exposure

has increased demand for African products, and African music, both within the continent and internationally. With its vast resources, youthful population and burgeoning economies, the continent is poised to make its mark on the global dynamic.

Afrobeats' meteoric rise serves as a poignant backdrop to Africa's emancipation from the remnants of colonialism. The "winds of change" are in the air, and former colonial powers must now reckon with a new Africa that demands recognition and equality. African nations such as Mali and Burkina Faso are asserting their sovereignty by marking an end to the "Francafrique" strategy in which France dominated post-independence relationships with its former colonies. Channeling the same spirit that enlivens Afrobeats — bold, unapologetic and eager for liberation — into their diplomatic negotiations, these nations are in pursuit of a true partnership across the African continent, free from neocolonial undertones.

The world is "recognizing that Africa's story is no longer one of marginalization, but of unyielding strength and promise."

[[Young Professionals in Foreign Policy](#) produced this piece and is a partner of Fair Observer.]

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]



**LeAnn Glover** is an unwavering advocate for human rights, climate change and education issues in the developing world. Her journey from Ghana to her current role reflects her commitment to addressing critical global issues.

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# The New Middle East: A Triangular Struggle for Hegemony

Ali Omar Forozish  
January 16, 2024

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**The Middle East is witnessing a new cold war between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. All three military powers see themselves as the legitimate successors to historical empires that once ruled the region. They are now competing to define the shape of a new Middle East.**

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A seismic shift is underway in the heart of the Middle East. The region is currently defined by the competition between three formidable powers — Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. The situation is a kind of cold war with the three powers locked in a struggle for influence across the Middle East. This regional cold war is intricately tied to these countries' historical claims of hegemony. Each nation, with a legacy as the center of Islam and a history of great empires, asserts its legitimacy to shape and rule the region.

## **Iran: an enduring pillar of hegemony in the Middle East**

Iran's claim to legitimacy is deeply rooted in a history that spans millennia. The land known today as Iran has been home to a succession of influential civilizations and empires, each leaving its mark on the country's cultural and intellectual makeup. From the Elamites, who rival the Sumerians as one of the oldest civilizations in world history, to the Achaemenids, Parthians, Sassanids and Safavids, Iran's rich history fosters a profound sense of pride and identity in its people.

Iran has often been the seat of power for empires stretching across the Fertile Crescent and into Central Asia, a heritage which serves as a foundation for Iran's claim to leadership.

Furthermore, Iran draws strength from its religious legitimacy as the epicenter of the Shia branch of Islam. Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution toppled the pro-Western monarchy and founded a theocratic republic. This revolution gave Iran religious authority as the hub of Shia Islam, which has many adherents in nations such as Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain and Yemen.

Beginning with the Islamic Revolution, Iran has exported its revolutionary ideology to fellow Shia communities. It has created a network of allied non-state military actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and various groups in Iraq and Palestine, strategically extending its influence. The Quds Force, which was led by the late General Qasem Soleimani, plays a pivotal role in coordinating these proxy militias. This force solidified Iran's ideological foothold beyond its borders.

In addition, Iran has been a major supporter of Hamas, the Palestinian armed group that controls Gaza. Hamas carried out a sudden attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and capturing more than 200 hostages. Iran supplied Hamas with money, arms and training, as well as operational and strategic guidance for the operation.

Iran is also a substantial military power in its own right. The Islamic Republic maintains approximately 610,000 active-duty personnel, 350,000 reserve personnel and 150,000 paramilitary personnel. The military structure comprises two main branches: the regular armed forces, encompassing the army, navy and air force, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a parallel force directly accountable to the

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Supreme Leader. The IRGC possesses ground, naval and aerospace units, in addition to the Quds Force and the Basij, a volunteer militia.

Iran's military arsenal includes a spectrum of ballistic and cruise missiles, with some boasting a range of up to 1,200 miles. Drones, submarines and cyber-warfare capabilities further enhance Iran's military capabilities.

Notably, Iran adopts a strategic approach relying on asymmetric and unconventional warfare tactics, employing swarm tactics, proxy forces, and sabotage to counterbalance adversaries' conventional superiority. Illustrating this strategy, Iran has recently employed missile and drone attacks to target US bases in Iraq, as well as targeting Israel-linked ships. Meanwhile, Iran's proxy forces like Hamas and Hezbollah serve to harass and deter these adversaries.

### **Saudi Arabia: the conservative powerhouse**

If Iran is the revolutionary force in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is the conservative one.

Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam. It was here that the Prophet Muhammad was born and received his revelations in the 7th century CE. The two holiest sites in Islam, the Great Mosque of Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, are both in Saudi Arabia. For this reason, the Saudi monarch styles himself as "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques." This historical and religious connection grants the nation a profound moral legitimacy to exert influence over the Middle East.

The two mosques serve as focal points of the annual pilgrimage, known as hajj. Making the pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime is a religious duty for Muslims. By hosting millions of pilgrims yearly, Saudi Arabia strategically deploys its religious influence to further its political objectives and propagate its ideological stance.

During the formative period of Islamic civilization, Saudi Arabia was the center of the Caliphate. It served as the seat of the first four caliphs who governed the expanding Muslim empire from 632 to 661 CE. Following the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the last Islamic caliphate after World War I, Saudi Arabia again asserted itself as the heart of Islam, without laying claim to the title of caliph. Saudi Arabia championed Wahhabism — a strict and conservative interpretation of Sunni Islamic teachings. This ideology, considered by its adherents the pure and authentic form of Islam, underpins Saudi Arabia's historical and religious claims.

Saudi Arabia also enjoys the support of a major non-Islamic power, the United States. The US has emerged as Saudi Arabia's foremost partner, providing robust military support. The roots of this alliance trace back to 1945 when the nations signed a pivotal agreement granting the US access to Saudi oil in exchange for military and economic aid. This agreement, known as the Quincy Pact, was forged by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdulaziz Al Saud aboard the USS Quincy in the Suez Canal. It marked the beginning of a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries.

Over the years, this strategic partnership has deepened, encompassing cooperation on counter-terrorism, regional security and energy. The United States has supported Saudi Arabia in various conflicts, such as the Iran–Iraq War, the Persian Gulf War and the ongoing Yemen Civil War, as well as in confronting the threats posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS.

As the primary arms supplier to Saudi Arabia, the United States furnishes military training, intelligence, and logistical support, aligning its interests with Saudi policies in the region. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United States accounted for

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79% of the total arms imports by Saudi Arabia from 2016 to 2020. This alliance positions Saudi Arabia as a key American ally and a counterbalance to Iran's influence in the Middle East.

### **Turkey: Ottoman Heritage and a unique foreign policy**

The third factor in the Middle East is Turkey, a powerhouse boasting the largest economy in the region and the second-largest population.

Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East is anchored in its Ottoman heritage. The Ottoman Empire, centered in Turkey, was the dominant Islamic power and caliphate — both the religious and political leader of the Muslim world until its dissolution in 1924, following Turkey's defeat in World War I.

The Ottoman Empire ruled the Muslim world from North Africa to Iraq and extended deep into Europe. It was a diverse and multicultural society. This environment promoted coexistence among various ethnic and religious groups through a system of relative tolerance and autonomy.

Turkey's historical legacy not only gives its people a sense of pride and identity but a perceived right to leadership and influence in the Middle East. Viewing itself as the rightful successor of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey sees itself as having a special responsibility and role within the region, encapsulated in its foreign policy vision of New Ottomanism, tempering Turkish nationalism with a pan-Islamic focus.

Like Iran, Turkey is a sizeable military power with a large population. Turkey boasts approximately 510,000 active-duty personnel, complemented by 380,000 reserve personnel and an additional 150,000 paramilitary personnel. Turkey is also a member of NATO, which affords

the nation access to the collective defense and security mechanisms of the West.

Employing its hard power, Turkey has intervened militarily involvement in various countries, notably Syria, Libya and Iraq. In these theaters, Turkey has lent support to various factions in order to counter adversaries such as the Assad regime, the Haftar forces and Kurdish militias. This military intervention serves as a tangible expression of Turkey's commitment to shaping regional dynamics.

Turkey strategically deploys proxy forces to bolster its alliances and extend its influence. Entities like the Syrian National Army, the Government of National Accord in Libya and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt serve as instrumental proxies, trained and supported by Turkey to align with its strategic objectives.

The spirit of cold war unmistakably pervades the current geopolitical landscape. The outcome of the struggle between Iran Saudi Arabia, and Turkey will shape the future of a new Middle East.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]



**Ali Omar Forozish** is currently a student of economics at Anadolu University. With a degree in modern politics, his work focuses significantly on liberal democracy, the end of history, feminism and political ideologies. As a political analyst and human rights activist, from 2017 to 2019, he worked exclusively with several socio-cultural associations in Afghanistan.

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# The Truth About Central Bank Digital Currency: It's Indispensable

Alex Gloy  
January 17, 2024

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**Many observers are suspicious of Federal Reserve-issued digital currency. They see it as a way for government to extend its control over money. But the government doesn't need digital currency to control money. What it does need is a way to make risk-free, public money available to individual consumers in an increasingly cashless society.**

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**N**ot a day goes by without someone penning an article about the looming dangers posed by central bank digital currency (CBDC). If you need a primer on CBDC, check out my piece on money creation for Fair Observer. This short YouTube video by The Wall Street Journal is also a good place to start:

Let's take a look at the CBDC critic's arguments.

**“The government wants to control what I spend.”**

This claim seems to stem from the potential programmability of CBDC. There are some very limited use cases where this could be possible. In some of these, frankly, it would even be desirable.

Take, for example, the US food stamps program, or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). In 2023, about 42 million Americans received financial aid for the purchase of select food items at a cost of \$120 billion. To avoid the

stigma associated with actual “stamps,” the program often comes in the form of a pre-loaded debit card, or Electronic Benefits Transfer (ETB). Alcohol and tobacco products cannot be purchased with ETC. Imagine the public outcry if US taxpayers were to finance alcohol and tobacco addictions!

Today, governments already control spending; I was unable to buy a t-shirt from the Wikileaks store with my US credit card. In 2022, a Canadian judge froze access to donations for striking truckers. Yet, no CBDC was necessary to enable government control.

One could ask why the government would wait for CBDC to control our spending when it is perfectly able to do so already now.

**“The government can make my money go away with a click.”**

It might not be a bad thing to be able to create money with an expiration date.

US stimulus checks during COVID were meant to cushion a drop in economic activity. However, rather than spending the additional income, many recipients chose to increase their savings instead. The personal savings ratio jumped from 7 to 32% — the highest level since at least 1960. Consumers reduced their credit card balances by \$150 billion.

A reduction in debt does not help boost consumption. It would therefore make sense to require any stimulus checks to be spent within a certain time frame to increase the efficacy of such programs. A programmable CBDC would help achieve this aim. Those “free” CBDC dollars would come with an expiration, just like many gift cards, airline miles or even public transportation tickets. To suggest that this is driven by nefarious intentions is missing the point.

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Additionally, stimulus payments could be limited to those with a high propensity to spend — lower-income households. The US CARES Act reduced stimulus payments for those with incomes above a certain threshold. A CBDC could make administration of such limitations less cumbersome.

One area of real concern, however, is the potential for negative interest rates. To combat the threat of deflation, the European Central Bank (ECB) lowered its deposit rate into negative territory from 2014 until 2022. Some commercial banks began charging large deposits negative interest. However, this applied only to bank deposits. Negative interest rates cannot be applied to physical cash. With CBDC, central banks could impose negative interest on currency, too. (From the viewpoint of a central bank, the ability to pass on negative interest rates is an advantage.) It should be pointed out, however, that prolonged deflation is a rare occurrence. This is especially true for fiat monetary systems, which have an inflationary bias by design.

### **“CBDC is not real money.”**

According to the US Code, “US coins and currency (including Federal reserve notes ... ) are legal tender for all debts, public charges, taxes, and dues.”

Critics claim that CBDC cannot be legal tender since it is not mentioned in US code. According to this logic, even bank deposits are not “real money,” and wiring monthly payments would not repudiate your obligation towards the mortgage company (unless the company agrees to accept such payments). But why would anyone insist on payment in legal tender only? What would be the purpose? How cumbersome would it be to deliver coins and banknotes, in person or via courier, and then to prove that delivery has successfully occurred?

The relevant section of the US Code was established in 1965. Lawmakers could not have anticipated improvements in payment systems in the following 50 years.

Besides, even if the current statute did exclude CBDC, it would take a simple act of Congress to change it.

As of early 2024, however, there are several noteworthy efforts in the Congress and state legislatures aimed at limiting or preventing the introduction of CBDC. These efforts primarily focus on restricting the Federal Reserve's ability to develop or issue one.

Republican Senator Ted Cruz, member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, introduced one such bill. This legislation seeks to prohibit the Federal Reserve from developing a direct-to-consumer CBDC, which could, allegedly, be used as a financial surveillance tool by the federal government.

Similarly, Senator Mike Lee, also a Republican, reintroduced legislation aimed at preventing the Federal Reserve from reshaping the US financial sector with the implementation of a CBDC.

In Texas, a Senate Concurrent Resolution expressed opposition to CBDC. In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill prohibiting the use of CBDC in the state, claiming, amusingly, that CBDC would “threaten FinTech innovation.”

Similar legislative efforts are underway in states like Louisiana, Alabama and North Dakota. These bills largely focus on concerns about privacy and government surveillance, as well as the potential for increased control over financial transactions and individual freedoms. The topic of CBDC has become increasingly partisan, with most of the opposition coming from Republican lawmakers.

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However, no bills other than Florida's have advanced as significantly in the legislative process.

### **Advantages of CBDC**

CBDC has various advantages over the use of cash, as John Kiff, a former senior financial expert for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), describes. Cash needs to be printed at significant cost due to security requirements. It also requires regular distribution to bank branches and ATMs. Consumers must obtain cash, often paying a withdrawal fee. Cash must be carried in sufficient quantity for payment at points of sale. Businesses need to be equipped with registers, constantly having to restock change while depositing larger bills into vaults. Commercial banks need to sort out damaged banknotes and send them back to the central bank for destruction. At all those stages, physical money needs to be counted.

In many countries, banking customers face significant monthly service fees. Meanwhile, CBDC could be held in a digital wallet, provided by an app for mobile phones, and provided free-of-charge.

CBDC is more than just more efficient. As time goes on, it will become indispensable.

What if you were told that you would never be able to withdraw the money in your bank account? In aggregate, this is true. US deposits at all commercial banks amount to around \$17 trillion. There are around \$2.3 trillion in currency in circulation, of which an estimated 70% is held abroad, leaving less than \$700 billion for domestic purposes. The amount of deposits exceeds the amount of “cash” by a factor of 25.

Intuitively, we understand the bank does not have all our money in “cash” in its vault. We rely on the assumption not every customer would want

to withdraw all the money at once. And that we could, up to certain daily limits, withdraw cash at our pleasure.

You, as a customer, have become an unsecured creditor of a private institution. In other words, from the bank’s perspective, customer deposits are liabilities. When you make a withdrawal, you exchange that unsecured claim against a private institution into a claim against the central bank. Private institutions can go bankrupt; the central bank cannot.

This option of a 1-for-1 exchange into public money is what keeps our entire private monetary system functioning. More than \$300 trillion in global monetary claims outstanding are supported by less than \$30 trillion in major central bank assets. Thus, 90% of money outstanding is of private origin, consisting in deposits credited by commercial banks to customers, rather than public money like cash or central bank deposits.

Since individual citizens cannot open accounts at the central bank, withdrawing cash is currently their only way to access public money. As the use of cash continues to decline, citizens lose that access. People in a cashless society would not be able to convert any private money into public money. Your bank deposits will remain in the private banking system forever. The “peg” with risk-free public money is gone.

This is an important reason why central banks need to issue digital versions of public money. Money should be a public good. CBDC is necessary to keep it that way.

[Alex Gloy is a member of [Digital Currency Think Tank](#).]

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]



**Alexander Gloy** is an independent investment professional with over 35 years of experience in financial markets. He worked in Equity Research and Sales, both in Investment and Private Banking for Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse, Sal. Oppenheim and Lombard Odier Darier Hentsch. He focuses on macroeconomic research, analyzing the impact of global debt and derivatives on the stability of our monetary system.

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## What Makes a Child Murder Another Child?

Ellis Cashmore  
January 18, 2024

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**The killing of transgender teenager Brianna Ghey in northern England has reopened a debate that periodically comes back but has never been satisfactorily answered. What motivates children or adolescents to kill others?**

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**L**ike a monster serially rebirthed, child murder appears after periods of decline. It unfailingly strikes terror and panic into entire societies. The murder of children by other children is a crime that transcends time, space, logic and other finitudes that criminologists are used to. There is a dreadful counterintuitive senselessness about children who kill other children: Motives are either absent or barely intelligible. The gain or reward the murderers take from the deed are just not available to the senses. At least, the senses of most sentient beings.

On February 11, 2023, two teenagers murdered 16-year-old Brianna Ghey by stabbing in Culcheth, England. The killers have been called wicked, devilish and, most regularly, evil. None of these descriptions are in the least bit convincing. People just keep gasping, “Why did they do it?” The nowadays fashionable and utterly simplistic “hate crime” is easy on the intellect but of no use to understanding.

### Two youths’ macabre experiment

Brianna was born a male in Birchwood, in the north of England. She had not undergone any gender reassignment surgery but identified, dressed and referred to herself as a woman at the time of her murder.

Her killers were both 15 at the time of the murder. Labeling their motive as transphobia is convenient, but misleading. One of the killers, a male known in court as Y, had a grim curiosity that led him to use dehumanizing language suggesting a dislike or prejudice against transgender people. “It’s a boy,” Y wrote in response to a message from his female accomplice, X, in which she referred to Brianna as “she.”

“Really all I want to see is what size dick it had,” wrote Y, revealing a grisly fascination. Britain’s Cheshire police announced that they had “no information or intelligence to suggest it was a hate crime,” though the view was not shared by many, especially not by members of the LGBTQ+ community who have been holding vigils.

In a perverse way, the manner in which the young killers planned the murder betrayed maturity. Their text messages seemed to indicate that there were four other potential victims as subjects in what might have been a macabre experiment. X messaged, “Let’s just stab her. It’s more fun.” The male Y answered, “I want to see if



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it will scream like a man or a girl.” (Note the persistent use of “it”.)

The two killers went to the trouble of befriending Brianna, feigning a sort of state of mutual trust. They plotted to meet her in a lonely country park in Culcheth. Then they stabbed her 28 times in the head, neck and body. They put a certain level of thought into their method before doing the deed. But the question remains: Why did they do it?

### **The Bell and Bulger cases**

At a certain age, children are intrigued by things beyond their comprehension. It sickens us, but there are children who want to experience the sensation of killing. Most dismember daddy longlegs or trample on small animals for no better reason than that they can. But others have more exacting curiosities.

The UK’s paradigm case was in 1968 when the 11-year-old Mary Bell strangled two boys, aged three and four, “solely for the pleasure and excitement of killing,” according to the judge. Like X, she had an accomplice. Mary’s accomplice was eventually acquitted, leaving her as the only culprit. (She was named, as will be X and Y in due course.) Mary was sent to a special security unit and released on license in 1980, when she was given a new identity. It is believed she now has a daughter. There is no way of knowing how accurate the judge’s assessment was, but maybe she really was seeking a depraved thrill.

The case was echoed in 1993 when two 11-year-old boys killed James Bulger, aged two — read that again: two. The killers dropped the child on his head and repeatedly punched and kicked him, at one point forcing batteries into his mouth, before hitting him on the head with a 22-pound iron bar. There were so many injuries that the coroner could not determine the precise cause of

death. The killers were named as Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, and they were sentenced to a juvenile offenders’ facility. They were released in 2001, given new identities and granted legal anonymity for life.

### **Violence and the mentality of children**

Morality is not innate: We learn to distinguish between right and wrong, probably from the age of four or, possibly, even earlier when we begin to internalize values and accept them as part of a natural order. From about six, children develop a more nuanced sense of morality and, later, learn to apply moral reasoning — that is, to discern rightness or wrongness in specific social settings. Empathy arrives any time after about eight. In all three cases discussed here, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another appears to be lacking. Or is it? It is difficult to believe any of the killers were not aware that they would be causing physical distress and, in the Bulger case, acute pain, to their victims.

We shouldn’t be surprised to learn how easily they subordinated this awareness to their own specific, excessively selfish interests. Adults do it all the time. Otherwise, there would be no crime. I am not arguing that child murder mirrors what goes on in society generally. But crimes of violence or crimes that involve violence concomitantly probably require subjectively depriving a person or group of people of some human qualities.

We are taken aback by the ferocity of children who kill, but adults do similarly. Children, like adults, victimize their peers. Fully half of child sex abuse incidents in England and Wales, for another example, are perpetrated by children. This is the recurringly reborn “monster” I mentioned earlier: it’s a cruel and daunting creature and we don’t know where it comes from or how it can be defeated.

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Young killers pick on children as victims, not because they hate other children, but because they are convenient victims. Jon Venables and Robert Thompson were 11; they would hardly be in a position to kill an adult or anyone else who could fight back. Children can, however, and sometimes do kill adults too. In 2000, three teenage girls stabbed Sister Maria Laura Mainetti to death in Chiavenna, Italy. Like other victimizers, they attack whom they can.

Brianna Ghey was killed because her killers believed she would not provide resistance. Dehumanizing her was part of the method, not the motive. So, what is the motive? The same as it was for Bell and the others, perhaps.

Children live in a world in which arguments are settled usually by some form of violence either in or outside the school playground. Some even witness arguments settled at home by the same means. They also learn that larger arguments are also settled or not settled by violence.

This is not the place to go into the socio-psychological dynamics of violence or how global conflict affects the mentality of children. But we should at least recognize that the violence that horrifies us so much when perpetrated by children and adolescents is not so different from the behavior to which we are habituated. After all, no state can exist with a police force or its equivalent in armed might. Ultimate violence may not be used frequently, and official violence is deliberately under-emphasized, but it is the ultimate foundation of any social order.

Mercifully, child-on-child killings are rare. So rare that they appear extraordinary. Children are inspired to use violence by all manner of inescapable influences. They, like adults (and I mean all of us) experience the temptation to hurt others and maybe even kill them. But they and we exercise effective control over these impulses. Our

sense of morality usually kicks in and, when it doesn't, the threat of long-term imprisonment is always lurking.

But it is not so for some children. Their sense of right and wrong is either underdeveloped, buried beneath other sensibilities or possibly distorted by what they've witnessed at home or in their social environments. They do not have inhibitions that stop others. Or they have curiosity sufficient to overpower them.

[Ellis Cashmore's most recent book is [The Destruction and Creation of Michael Jackson](#)]



**Ellis Cashmore** is the author of *The Destruction and Creation of Michael Jackson, Elizabeth Taylor, Celebrity Culture* and other books. He is a

professor of sociology who has held academic positions at the University of Hong Kong, the University of Tampa and Aston University. His [first article](#) for *Fair Observer* was an obituary for Muhammad Ali in 2016.

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## Cultural Genocide? The Reality on the Ground in Xinjiang

Patrik Meyer  
January 23, 2024

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**A week-long visit to China's Xinjiang region is not enough to make an assessment of Western claims of Uyghur cultural genocide. But it is long enough to see that Xinjiang is not the heavily policed state Western media habitually**

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**claim it is. And the Uyghur language, far from being suppressed, appears to be thriving.**

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**A**fter a seven-year break, I joined a small group of Chinese researchers last fall in their visit of four cities in Xinjiang: Kashgar, Aksu, Kuche, Bayi and Urumqi. The far-western region of Xinjiang is home to China's mostly Muslim Uyghur minority. The main purpose of the visit was to get a glimpse into the Uyghurs' daily lives and, in particular, assess whether their lives were adversely affected by what the West claims to be excessive security measures and a de facto ban of the Uyghur language. While most of our 7-day trip and meetings were supervised, there were numerous opportunities to observe Uyghurs going about their lives and improvise a number of conversations with them.

Given the time and access restrictions, this article does not intend to enter the discussion of whether Chinese policies in Xinjiang can be considered "cultural genocide" or if there is forced labor in the region. Neither does this article intend to explain why no women were seen to wearing the hijab, or the fact that only very few older men were seen to attend prayers. These radical changes can hardly be explained by natural and voluntary internal changes in the Uyghur community, but an objective assessment of these issues is not feasible with the available information. However, the information collected during the 7-day visit is sufficient to assess the validity of claims made by Western scholars and media regarding strict restrictions imposed on the use Uyghur language and the ubiquitous presence of security checkpoints in the region.

## **Where are all the checkpoints?**

The Council on Foreign Relations, a reputed American think tank, states that, "In some cities, such as western Xinjiang's Kashgar, police checkpoints are found every one hundred yards or so." Under the headline, "The Police Region of Xinjiang: Checkpoints, Camps, and Fear," the author declares that "an Uyghur I know was stopped 34 times one day." In a similar vein, the Uyghur Academy states that "Each square has a police station that closely monitors inhabitants by regularly scanning their identification cards, taking their photographs and fingerprints, and searching their cell phones." The New York Times' piece "How China Uses High-Tech Surveillance to Subdue Minorities" affirms that "the online records indicate that a network of about 10,000 checkpoints in Urumqi made more than six million identifications in 24 hours."

These statements about security checks in Xinjiang are either outdated or grossly inflated.

Indeed, what struck me the most on our first day in Kashgar was the total absence of checkpoints and paramilitary patrols on the roads and streets, which had been common during my last visit to the region in 2016. After landing in Kashgar, we drove to our hotel downtown and went to one of Kashgar's night markets. To my surprise, there were no checkpoints at all, neither for traffic nor for pedestrians. In the following two days, we crisscrossed the city and went to the countryside several times. Not a single time had we to go through a checkpoint or saw anyone having to do so, no checkpoints or police patrols were visible and police presence on the streets was minimal. We only spotted one police van in a park where there was a large congregation of people dancing and a few traffic police cars on the roads. Moreover, this absence checkpoints continued for the whole 7-day trip to Kashgar, Aksu, Kuche and

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Urumqi, during which did not encounter or see a single checkpoint.

So, at least in these four cities, there were no visible checkpoints and the police presence was minimal. The general atmosphere in the streets was relaxed, which was in itself a positive change from the situation we saw seven years ago, when interethnic tensions were obvious and extensive security measures were visible. Over the entire period of our visit, we didn't see any security checkpoints at all and didn't witness anyone having his ID checked in the streets, strongly undermining the Western media's claim that checkpoints are omnipresent in Xinjiang.

### **Language issues**

Another controversial issue discussed extensively in the Western media is that the use of the Uyghur is extremely restricted in Xinjiang. The United Nations Human Rights assessment from August 2022 found that some Uyghurs and Kazakhs “were not allowed to speak their own language.” The Uyghur Human Rights Project's brief January 2019 piece “Assault on the Uyghur Language in East Turkestan” stated that “official policies discourage speaking and writing in Uyghur in public” and that “shops must clear the shelves of anything written in Uyghur script and Uyghur scrubbed from street signs and signboards.”

The first hint that made me question the validity of these statements was the fact that the announcements on the plane from Urumqi to Kashgar were made in three languages: Mandarin, Uyghur and English. After landing in Kashgar, most signs in the airport were in Uyghur too. And most Uyghurs spoke to each other in Uyghur. While driving from the airport to the city, we tuned into different programs on the radio and we found that approximately half of them were in Mandarin and half in Uyghur. In the following days, we

stayed in several hotels and the local TV programs were also half in Mandarin and half in Uyghur.

Street and store signs were always written in Chinese characters and most of them had Uyghur, too. The font of the Chinese characters was larger, and sometimes the Uyghur script was not shown or not illuminated at night. From the observations I made over the 7-day trip, I gathered that signs are required to be written in Chinese characters and that people have the choice to add the Uyghur version. In predominantly Uyghur areas, the Uyghur script was practically always added.

Most Uyghurs talked to each other in the Uyghur language on the streets, in restaurants, aboard planes and in the countryside. School-aged children talked to each other in both Uyghur and Mandarin. It is relevant to mention that two of the Uyghurs we talked to (aged 30–40 years old) were unable to maintain a conversation in Mandarin, indicating that they had not spent time in the “vocational schools” or “camps.” Numerous Uyghurs we talked to had still very limited command of the Mandarin language.

Uyghur might not be taught in schools, but it seems to be the dominant language used among Uyghurs, both young and old, and the large majority of the signs seen were both in Uyghur and Chinese. Hence, the restrictions on the use of the Uyghur language are also grossly overstated in the West. Also, we didn't see any indications that the use of the Uyghur language was restricted.

It is important that Western media and scholars adjust their claims to the current realities in Xinjiang, otherwise, they will strongly undermine their efforts to provide a credible perspective of the living conditions of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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**Patrik Meyer** has eclectic personal, academic and professional backgrounds. He earned his PhD in Politics and International Studies from the University of Cambridge working with Chinese scholars to provide better understanding of the conflicts in Xinjiang that fuel tensions between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government.

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## **Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico Is the EU's Latest Headache**

Daniel Martinek  
January 26, 2024

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**On January 17, a plenary session of the European Parliament criticized the newly returned Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's proposed reforms, which it said would fundamentally erode the rule of law in Slovakia. Only a day earlier, Fico had met his Hungarian counterpart, Viktor Orbán, in Budapest. Following Orbán's example, the Fico government is set to become yet another troublemaker within the EU.**

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**I**n December 2023, protests erupted across Slovakia against the first actions of the new government led by Fico and his party, Direction — Slovak Social Democracy (Smer – Slovenská sociálna demokracia, usually called Smer). Only three months into its mandate, the Fico government is already making crucial changes in the institutional structure of the state. It has approved an amendment to the criminal code that is set to abolish the office of the special

prosecutor (Úrad špeciálnej prokuratúry, or ÚŠP). The ÚŠP handles serious crimes like corruption or financial fraud. It oversaw, among other things, the investigation into the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in 2018. Under the new proposal, regional prosecutors would argue cases before specialized criminal courts.

The rapid purge of the prosecutor's office and changes to the criminal law quickly drew criticism from Slovak partners and allies, including the European Commission and the US Embassy in Slovakia. The European Parliament recently passed a resolution expressing concerns about Slovakia's capacity to combat corruption and safeguard the EU budget in the event that the proposed reform of the criminal code is approved.

Domestically, the protesters and opposition leaders consider the government's actions to be part of a gradual dismantling of the rule of law in the country. Robert Fico, they argue, views the ÚŠP as existential threat to be removed. A petition organized by three opposition parties — Progressive Slovakia, the Christian Democratic Movement and the Freedom and Solidarity party — reads:

We, the citizens of the Slovak Republic, reject attacks on the rule of law, which must be inviolable in a democratic country. Therefore, we ask the Government of the Slovak Republic to withdraw the draft law by which it wants to abolish the Special Prosecutor's Office, reduce the penalty rates for corrupt criminal activity and remove the status of protected whistleblowers from members of the Police Force.

The petition has gained 81,000 signatures so far.

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## **Fico eliminates a threat to his power**

Fico justifies the government's proposal by claiming that the ÚŠP jeopardizes human rights. According to legal experts, that allegation is just an artificial cover-up for the fact that prosecutors were pursuing organized crime involving people in Fico's immediate circle, including his party members.

Along with the abolition of the ÚŠP, other “reforms,” such as the reduction of punishments for corruption and economic crime, are also set to be implemented. President Zuzana Čaputová has warned that the proposed changes will take place through an expedited legislative process without expert discussion. Čaputová considers the abolition of the ÚŠP a significant alteration to the existing framework of law enforcement agencies in Slovakia, contradicting the principle of the rule of law.

Following Fico’s proposal, prosecutors involved in ongoing investigations would be transferred to regional offices of the general prosecutor. However, experts point out that the general prosecutor's office has shown in the past a tendency to use a notorious legal provision (Paragraph 363) to halt entire processes without the possibility of resuming.

Additionally, regional offices lack the resources of the ÚŠP, which had 30 specialized prosecutors dedicated to combating organized crime, with impactful results.

As I wrote in Fair Observer the day before the new government was appointed on October 25, the erosion of democratic institutions, oppression of minorities and the shrinking of the civil society environment is slowly (or, indeed, rapidly) becoming the new political reality in Slovakia.

Proposed personnel changes in key state institutions go beyond the usual post-election transfer of power. They represent systemic changes transforming the entire institutional state. The affected departments are mainly those that Smer wants to get back under its control, those where there is an ideological-cultural struggle or those which present an opportunity for political revanchism.

For example, Fico has changed police leadership, including internal affairs. He has subsequently purged more personnel, laying off investigators who dealt with cases of political corruption. He has also replaced three members of the Judicial Council, a constitutional body that oversees judicial independence.

The new government has carried out many other measures in line with its nationalist ideological agenda. It has reorganized the strategic communication departments and departments for the fight against hybrid threats by firing experts dealing with pro-Russian disinformation narratives. It has also taken control of funds meant for the culture ministry, along with marginalizing artists whose messages the government deems unacceptable.

Finally, the government has announced that it will no longer be officially communicating with four leading media outlets that are critical of Fico. State-owned enterprises will no longer advertise with these outlets. The government is also withholding grants from non-governmental organizations whose ideological orientation it opposes.

## **Joining the troublemaker club**

Fico's government has already earned comparisons from Slovak observers to the former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, under whose government in the 1990s Slovakia faced criticism

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from the West due to the deficit of democracy. According to former Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, Fico resembles his Hungarian counterpart, Viktor Orbán.

At the EU level, the situation in Slovakia has already become the subject of discussion. Just after the September 30, 2023, Slovak legislative elections, the European Socialist Party suspended the membership of Smer and its coalition partner, Voice — Social Democracy. It did so due to their positions on the Russian war against Ukraine, the rule of law and the LGBTIQ community.

Now, the proposed criminal reforms have raised alarm. The EU public prosecutor's office sent a letter to the European Commission condemning the proposed changes as a serious threat to the rule of law. The letter also noted that the measures would impact the financial interests of the EU.

The EU faces a new test. How far will it prevent Fico from going with his illiberal plans? It remains to be seen how tough a position the EU will take and what consequences the international community, particularly the EU, will draw from the new domestic situation in Slovakia. At the moment, Fico's motivation to undermine the rule of law and democratic principles is still high. This might change if the domestic protests and international pressure continue.

On March 23, 2024, with a second round on April 6, Slovaks will vote for their next president. Whether the president comes from the opposition or from the government camp will play a significant role in the further domestic development in Slovakia. President Čaputová currently represents, in the eyes of the opposition parties, the last of the institutional barriers against the implementation of Fico's nationalist agenda.

“At this pace, no one can stop us.” Robert Fico said in December last year. But Slovakia is still a

functioning democracy based on an active civil society and citizen engagement. Not all Slovaks voted for Smer, after all. Indeed, Slovak citizens are the ones who can stop him. Given that they forced Fico out in 2018, it would not even be the first time.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]



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## India's South Has Wealth, but the North Has the Numbers

Subhashish Bhadra  
January 26, 2024

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**The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) political success in the Hindi heartland of North India and its stagnation in the southern state of Telangana deepen the crisis of representation for southern states. Poorer but more populous North India has more (and growing) electoral representation than richer and less populous South India in India's parliamentary democracy. Will India be able to resolve its conflicting regional aspirations?**

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**I**n the recently concluded state-level elections in three northern “Hindi heartland” states, the Indian National Congress (INC), the primary national opposition party, fared poorly. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the national ruling party headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, won a resounding victory. However, the INC beat the BJP in the only southern state that went to polls, Telangana. This has rekindled the longstanding North versus South debate. Many commentators ascribe the INC victory to South India’s higher literacy, better social infrastructure and lower communal tensions. A member of parliament (MP) from South India has referred to North Indian provinces as gau mutra (cow urine) states, adding fuel to the fire of this regional divide.

Other commentators reject the terms of this debate. They argue that it oversimplifies a complex issue and stokes imaginary regional differences. The issue at hand is the delicate balance between states. India’s significant diversity traces its roots to prehistoric times. Genetic research shows that modern Indians came from at least four waves of migration into the subcontinent. This has resulted in persisting genetic differences between people from different parts or communities of the country. For example, some researchers have found that people from lower castes have lower Central Asian and European genetic ancestry than those from higher castes. Similarly, the Dravidian-speaking populations of South India show noticeable genetic differences from the Indo-European-speaking populations of North India. Only in recent times has there been some exchange of vocabulary and grammar.

As deep-rooted as they may be, these differences are only ancillary to the project of the modern Indian republic. Forged in the collective resistance to British colonialism and the millennia of deep cultural exchange that preceded it, the

country's unity is enshrined in its constitution's first words, “We, the people of India.”

Today, any recent Hindi-language superhit movie has drawn inspiration from the South’s regional cinema, and vice-versa. Athletes from various parts of the country powered India’s history-making medal tally in the recent Asian games. The national government seeks to further solidify this convergence through policy initiatives like a unified tax system and large, centralized welfare schemes.

### **Regional differences are growing**

These successes of national integration should not lull even the staunchest “unionists” into a false sense of complacency. Underlying the modern Indian republic is a fundamental and growing chasm between its different regions. The differences between Indian states on many socio-economic parameters are more significant than between countries in other parts of the world. The South Indian state Kerala’s infant mortality rate is within striking distance of that of the US. In contrast, the North Indian state of Madhya Pradesh’s rate is closer to the rates of war-torn and violence-ridden Afghanistan and Niger.

Economic disparities between regions are not unique to India. In the UK, if one excludes London, the country has a lower per-capita income than Mississippi, the poorest state in the US. However, India is unique in one aspect. In other countries like the UK and the US, the economically more robust regions are also more populous. These regions subsidize the poorer, less populous parts of the country. In India, the poorer North is far more populous than the richer South, and this asymmetry is growing. In a democratic system based on the “one person, one vote” principle, the richer southern states are thus losing political power.

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South Indian state Karnataka contributes 2.12 rupees to central taxes for each rupee it receives from New Delhi. In contrast, the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh — India’s most populous province — contributes only 0.56 rupees to the national treasury for each rupee it receives. Clearly, South Indian states subsidize their North Indian counterparts.

In 2026, the long-pending delimitation of parliamentary constituencies is due. When that happens, the South Indian state Karnataka will likely lose 7% of its seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India’s parliament, whereas Uttar Pradesh will gain 14%. Other South Indian states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh will lose out in the 2026 delimitation as well. Even as South India subsidizes North India, this more prosperous part of the country is losing political power.

### **Political preferences are exacerbating regional differences**

The growing dichotomy between economic and political power poses a significant threat to the stability of the Indian Union. After all, citizens from South India have already begun asking whether their diminishing clout at the national level is fair. The reason South India’s population growth has slowed down is that southern states have implemented better female literacy and family-planning initiatives since independence in 1947. These states feel they are being penalized instead of rewarded for succeeding in their developmental goals.

Despite its recent growth in Karnataka, only 9% of members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) in South Indian states belong to the BJP. In contrast, the figure for the INC is 27% while 64% of the MLAs belong to regional parties.

Not only South India, but also some eastern states, like Odisha and West Bengal, and even northern states like Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttarakhand will lose national political power in the 2026 delimitation. The BJP represents only 15% of MLAs in the “losing” states. This new delimitation will benefit the BJP while hurting the INC and India’s regional parties.

The BJP dominates the “gaining” states, which include Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Haryana, Gujarat, Delhi and Chhattisgarh. In these states, 56% of the MLAs belong to the BJP. Except for Delhi, India’s saffron party rules all of these states.

This growing crisis of Southern representation is already clear in Parliament. Fewer than 10% of BJP’s MPs in the Lok Sabha are from the five southern states. Note that South Indian MPs comprise nearly 25% of the Lok Sabha. This number tells us that South India is suffering a double whammy. Not only are southern states losing their parliamentary clout in the coming delimitation, but they are also not adequately represented in the BJP government. The BJP’s support comes mainly from North India. Therefore, its incentive is to bestow financial largesse to the Hindi heartland states, which have fueled the party’s rise to power and will become even more important after the 2026 delimitation.

### **Some solutions to the North-South problem**

It is entirely plausible that this looming North–South crisis may not come to pass. States in North India and South India might converge faster economically and demographically than expected. This would reduce the divergence between their political preferences. Or the national government of today and tomorrow might not covertly or overtly favor the states from which it draws power. Yet India can ill afford to leave the future stability of its political structure to these uncertain factors.

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Instead, structural solutions that prevent the build-up of political friction within the country are the need of the hour.

One solution is diminishing the overwhelming dominance of the national government by changing its country's fiscal structure. Today, about two-thirds of the tax revenue goes to the national government in New Delhi even though it accounts for approximately one-third of the national expense. Instead, states must retain more of the tax revenue they generate. Then, they will feel less of a sense of injustice from the central government allocating tax revenues to different states

These reforms will bring financial decision-making to a lower level of government, where each voter has a more significant say than when voting for a national government far away in the national capital. Such financial devolution is likely to improve social outcomes because state governments are structurally more responsive to voter preferences.

Our founders were not complacent about national integration at independence. Partition accompanied independence in 1947. India's diversity raised fears of disintegration and the founders opted for a strong national government. Initially, this government chose socialism, slowing down the economy because of the license-permit-quota raj. Liberalization in 1991 unleashed economic growth, and now India needs a competitive federalism that can unleash the next wave of growth. Greater fiscal power for state governments will defuse the tensions between the North and South over the 2026 delimitation, boost growth, and increase national integration.

[[Liam Roman](#) edited this piece.]

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## Republican Governors' Revolt Tests Biden's Willpower Over Illegal Immigration

Andrew Morrow  
January 27, 2024

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**Texas Governor Greg Abbott has ordered state militia to bar United States Border Patrol from Shelby Park, which sits on the US–Mexico border. Abbott argues that the federal government has failed to stem illegal immigration, and therefore Texas must do so itself. No less than 25 other Republican state governors signed a statement in support of Abbott's defiance.**

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**R**ight now, the governor of Texas and up to 25 other states are in open defiance of the US federal government. Unless you are terminally online, though, you might have missed it. Establishment media outlets like The New York Times have so far refused to cover this governors' revolt, although the newspaper of record did

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amplify the complaints of nine Democratic governors.

Let's back up. In 2012, the state of Arizona, which shares a border with Mexico, lost a case at the Supreme Court (*Arizona v. United States*). The Court ruled that federal immigration law is supreme over state laws; the states, therefore, cannot enforce immigration law or prevent people from crossing the southern border. Federal supremacy is an established principle of American constitutional law, but the negation of state authority to hinder and deal with illegal immigration was unprecedented. The Supreme Court decided that this was the federal government's exclusive responsibility. To borrow Douglas Adams's phrase, this has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move by those on the right. Either way, it is now the law of the land.

Since then, the federal government has largely abdicated its responsibility to enforce the southern border or immigration law. More illegal immigrants than the total population of 33 states have been allowed into the country within the last four years alone.

Conservatives are outraged. One of the oldest responsibilities of any state is to make sure that that state's borders are secure. If a state's borders are not protected, its distinctiveness from other states is non-existent. Quite simply, a country without borders is not a country. For the last 14 years, elements of state governments have tried, and largely failed, to claw back any scrap of authority they can from the federal government in the area of immigration. At times, state law enforcement has interdicted illegal immigration on human trafficking grounds, other times on drug smuggling grounds and still other times on grounds as simple as trespassing. But no matter what, the federal leviathan has asserted itself in the arena, and the states have quailed — until now.

## **Texas has taken matters into its own hands**

The state government of Texas has decided to stop playing around. On September 23, 2023, Governor Greg Abbott called up elements of the Texas State Guard and evicted units of the United States Border Patrol (USBP) from Shelby Park, a vital sector of the southern border abutting the Rio Grande River, where the tide of illegal immigration is often highest. Abbot has also had barriers of concrete, shipping containers and razor wire constructed. The federal government lodged a lawsuit against Texas. The case has made its way to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit with a speed that only such a critical case could have. The circuit court issued an injunction against the federal government, forestalling the federal authorities from removing Texas's fortifications.

The government appealed that injunction straight to the Supreme Court. The Court vacated the injunction without issuing an opinion. The vacating of the injunction gives the federal authorities the right to remove Texas's fortifications while the case proceeds. Generally, the Court's ruling on an injunction serves as a bellwether for its decision on the case itself. Therefore, this ruling would typically indicate that Texas's efforts will fail on the merits. In simpler, less contentious, times, that is where the drama would have ended. Texas would have decried the decision, vowed to fight the case on its merits and allowed the USBP to remove the fortifications. The conclusion of the case would have been the end of the debate.

Not this time. Abbott has defied the Court's order vacating the injunction. The Texas Guard has actively denied the USBP access to the park to remove the fortifications. Moreover, they have added more fortifications to the border after the injunction was vacated, further obstructing the

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removal process. The Texas Guard and the USBP are still currently in a standoff.

### **Abbott invokes the compact theory of federalism**

On January 24, Abbott issued a statement accusing the federal government of breaking the “compact” between the states. This language borrows directly from the Confederate state of Virginia’s 1861 secession ordinance. Abbott has thus invoked the “compact theory” of American federalism. According to this theory, the US constitution is a treaty between the states. If the states or the federal government violate this treaty, every party is free from its obligations. This theory was the rationale for the Confederate states’ secession from the Union. As early as 1793 (*Chisholm v. Georgia*), and again after the Civil War in 1869 (*Texas v. White*), the Supreme Court rejected this theory, insisting that the United States was not a treaty organization but a sovereign republic. By invoking the compact theory, then, Abbott is calling into question the federal government’s claims to sovereignty.

Abbott is not calling for secession yet. Instead, he says that, since the federal government has failed to fulfill the compact, it falls on the states to uphold it. If America is a marriage, this is an accusation of adultery. It does not say “divorce” yet, but it could lay the groundwork for it.

Abbott’s statement lays out the derelictions of duty of which he accuses the Biden administration. President Joe Biden has failed to enforce federal immigration law by refusing to prosecute immigrants for illegal entry. He argues that the federal government has breached Article IV, Section 4 of the constitution: “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion.”

Texas must thus invoke its right to self-defense laid out in Article 1, Section 10, Clause 3: “No State shall, without the Consent of Congress ... engage in War, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent Danger as will not admit of delay.” Abbott invokes Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia’s dissenting opinion in *Arizona v. United States*. In that opinion, Scalia wrote, “The State has the sovereign power to protect its borders more rigorously if it wishes, absent any valid federal prohibition.”

Texas has said it is ready to rumble — whether in defense of the whole or in defense from the whole remains to be seen.

In happier, less contentious times, Abbott’s would have been little more than a fever-dream manifesto. The statement reads like something out of an alternate history novel. But, at the time of writing, up to 25 state governors, all Republicans, have vowed to support Texas in a looming, real showdown with the federal government. Will the federal authorities blink? I don’t know. No one knows. This is a dispute with little precedent. Cooler heads probably will prevail and reach a compromise deal.

But they might not. The federal government doesn’t like being challenged or having its authority eroded. And make no mistake, no matter what happens, the federal government’s authority will be eroded by this somehow, whether the federal authorities back down, and their authority is eroded, or Texas backs down, and we see the USBP open the border to allow millions more illegal immigrants into the country. That doesn’t even begin to countenance the worst thing that could happen from a major standoff between armed enforcers of state and federal governments.

Will that happen? I do not know. But I know that, on the morning of April 12, 1861, precious

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few people woke up thinking they'd be at war by the time they went to bed.

[[Anton Schauble](#) and [Liam Roman](#) edited this piece.]

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**Andrew Morrow** is a lawyer and a former administrative law judge. Born in Indiana, he later moved to Arizona. Andrew earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy from Arizona State University. He earned his law degree from Arizona Summit Law School, a school that no longer exists, which is fine by him.

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## China Watch: The Chinese Economy Is Now Down, but Not Out

David Mahon  
January 28, 2024

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**The greater the number of laws and enactments, The more thieves and robbers there will be. Therefore, the Sage says: "So long as I do nothing, The people will work out their own reformation." Lao Zi, 5th century BCE**

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**I**n 1992 aged 87, Deng Xiaoping traveled to southern China. His only remaining formal role was chairman of the Chinese Contract Bridge Association, yet he was still the arbiter of China's economic policy. At each stop, he promoted the market reforms he had launched as China's paramount leader over a decade earlier.

Economic historians tend to credit this trip as triggering the formation of China's first private enterprises, but Deng was taking political ownership of what had already occurred in order to challenge the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) growing resistance to free market forces in Beijing. Today the Chinese economy is recovering, and contrary to most predictions (including earlier ones made in this publication) the Government is promulgating some effective new policies.

Six months ago, Beijing appeared flummoxed by the complexity of guiding the economy back to growth and stability. There was no mention of big reforms and only scant references to the private sector, with considerable focus instead on the state. This seems to have changed, and policies announced over the last eight weeks have the potential to facilitate stronger private sector expansion and confer greater autonomy on the provinces.

Beijing cannot lead Chinese entrepreneurs out of their present uncertainty and skepticism by policies alone; they must also relax some of the rules that constrain them.

### Finance to fuel economic recovery

Having partially curtailed loan sharks and shadow banking schemes, Beijing now needs to fill the funding vacuums this has created for the private sector to expand significantly. Over the last two decades, the government has been slow in allowing the development of private retail and investment banks, and now when it needs private sector growth urgently, there are inadequate means to fund that growth. At USD 3 trillion, China's shadow banking sector remains a systemic risk to the economy, but it is also a resource to be converted into a regulated, stable source of private lending and investment, for many of the institutions within it are already adequately managed and hedged. China's lack of financial

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diversity and flexibility has inhibited its recovery from three years of COVID and the collapse of the property bubble, which have inflicted major costs on public confidence and finances.

Despite improved macroeconomic indicators in the industrial and service sectors, consumers are still feeling uncertain and overly cautious in their spending on everyday items, waiting for proof that asset prices are rising again.

We have good salaries and savings and most of us are in steady jobs. But I admit: although unemployment is not widespread, I have friends who have lost their jobs and know that many working for the state have had to accept pay cuts. This is making me feel a bit insecure. Everyone is buying cheaper products, even when it comes to essentials. Frugality seems natural in hard times. The middle class is supposed to be hundreds of millions of people, but many were not born into it, so remember some form of poverty. They are conservative. This is a factor behind China's slow recovery.

— Manager of a private trading company in Shanghai

### **Global economists are hoping for the worst**

Most leading global economists have written off the Chinese economy and forecast a long decline, on the assumption that China rose on the basis of an unsustainable growth model driven by non-market factors over recent decades and is paying for it now. Western commentators tend to view Chinese economic data through distorting political lenses. Chinese economic gains are often reported as ill-gotten and tools of coercion, while economic contraction is presented as evidence of inherent instability and political illegitimacy. Much commentary is more akin to war rhetoric than rational economic analysis. It is true that China's present economic recovery will likely continue to

be uneven and any growth incremental. The risk of setbacks due to administrative blunders and external factors is ever-present, there are deflationary trends in many sectors, but the current recovery has momentum, and the policy direction is encouraging.

In October, Chinese industrial value-added (net manufacturing gains) rose 22% and retail sales were 14% higher than in October 2019. Supply and demand are both expanding, and apart from the residential property sector, prices are stable. New residential property purchases are still down in China's 20 top cities, while existing homes are being purchased at significant discounts. Buyers across China fear they will lose their deposits on new apartments if developers fail. If the government were to establish a real estate deposit insurance scheme, similar to that which exists in banking, buyers would have more confidence in the better, medium-sized developers.

### **The economy's winter awakening**

Beijing appears to be initiating good policies to spur small and medium enterprises (SME) growth in particular, and there are signs that provinces are being given more fiscal autonomy, allowing them to restore their finances beleaguered by the costs of fighting the pandemic and the collapse of property prices. The appearance of monolithic power projected by the CCP means outside observers often miss the fragmented nature of China and the degree to which the government generally rules more by consultation and compromise with local officials — particularly in the wealthier regions — than by fiat. There were more political checks and balances before President Xi Jinping's era, but the scale and diversity of the Chinese economy today create an economic equilibrium of sorts. The messages from the leaders in China's top 20 cities to policymakers appear to constitute a unanimous demand for the central government to pay attention to the private sector and not expect to drive reform



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and repair through state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as much as in the past.

Few governments today seem to be managing their country's markets well — understandable given the world is recovering from one of the greatest shared economic calamities since the Great Depression.

Public confidence after crises tends to return gradually, often imperceptibly, as individuals overcome their fears and make ordinary economic decisions again, each influencing the other, until hope becomes a subtle, steadily rising tide. This shift is now palpable in China, not so much among the wealthy in the major cities where people have more to lose, but among poorer folk in lesser coastal towns and significantly in the interior cities and rural areas.

### **New engines of growth**

Beijing has announced it will increase support for the private technology sector. Although Chinese state bankers will continue to favor lending to SOEs over riskier private enterprises in an effort to avoid making mistakes that might cost them their jobs, the impact of more flexible credit practices is already apparent. In late November, Xi visited the Shanghai Futures Exchange and a number of technology companies in an attempt to demonstrate the government's priorities.

Adequately funded, the technology sector will become a significant driver of the economy, replacing some of the impetus previously supplied by the real estate sector. In the foreseeable future, the Chinese property sector will not return as a prime driver of the economy, and it must not become the forum for the reckless speculation of previous decades. In 2022, the tech sector grew 10% year-on-year, contributing 41% to China's GDP. Year-on-year credit growth to SMEs could increase by as much as 20% by the spring of 2024.

Despite Washington's embargoes on technology exports to China, Huawei developed a cutting-edge smartphone with chips supplied by a relatively obscure Shanghai company, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp — ironically blacklisted by the US in 2020. Huawei and other tech companies have demonstrated that trade restrictions designed to cripple have instead spurred a greater impetus to innovate and become more independent of global supply chains, faster than they would have aspired otherwise. From space stations to trans-oceanic fiber optic cables and fourth-generation fighter aircraft, China is matching and often exceeding its Western peers.

US tech companies are losing billions of dollars each year due to lost sales to China. US President Joe Biden's conciliatory tone when meeting his counterpart Xi in San Francisco in November could well have been due in part to US tech companies lobbying Washington to ease sanctions.

### **Crisis is the mother of reform**

The World Bank and the IMF are forecasting that China will achieve GDP growth in excess of 5% this year, recording the second-highest GDP in the world in 2023. Even with 4.5% GDP growth in 2024, it would be second only to India. China's accumulated GDP growth over the last three years is approximately 20%, while US GDP grew by 7.7% and Europe by 3%. The fact that Chinese GDP growth will reach or exceed 5% this year without significant government stimulus should encourage foreign investors. They should, however, assess each sector carefully, as recovery will be patchy and there is little evidence that nationwide public trust in government will be restored soon. Confidence is especially low in cities like Shanghai which suffered stringent, extended lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this in turn depresses household consumption. Consumption of nutritional supplements and quality food products in coastal

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cities is still strong, especially of imported premium-quality fruit, as the upper middle class remains willing to pay for established brands of reliable provenance.

Although some in the local government have speculated that Beijing will resort to subsidizing households if consumption does not recover by the spring, it is more likely to pay subsidies to companies expanding in key sectors enabling them to employ more people. Despite China's communist past and the current administration's commitment to poverty alleviation, there are no traditions of welfare as there are in the West. The government will invest less in poverty alleviation programs and infrastructure projects in the poorer central provinces over the next 12 to 24 months as it concentrates on the areas of the economy that can offer better short-term yields. Critical poverty alleviation programs will nevertheless continue, particularly where they support the improvement of agriculture.

I know this may sound selfish, but the government spent too much on developing western China in recent years. If they had focused more on the middle class in the coastal cities they would have achieved greater economic and social returns, and the economy would be stronger.

Hangzhou-based fund manager

There is some truth in critics' assessments of China's social investments, but over the past 50 years, most trickle-down economic strategies have failed. Beijing will focus its future fiscal reforms on coastal cities to restore middle-class citizens' confidence in the system, but unless these are complemented by relaxing hukou (residency) reforms to allow greater internal migration — so rural workers can enjoy some of the benefits of urban life — they will only bring temporary prosperity and ultimately exacerbate the already large gap between rich and poor.



**David Mahon** is the executive chairman of Mahon China Investment Management Ltd. Born in New Zealand, David speaks Mandarin and has lived in Beijing since 1984. He has managed five private equity portfolios in China and held direct responsibility for the management of over 20 Chinese companies. David has also served on the boards of international and Chinese financial and industrial firms. He has four decades of experience advising multinationals entering and expanding in the Chinese market.

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## **My Experience Working Alongside a Former Member of Hamis**

Naley By Nature  
January 30, 2024

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**In the spring of 2022, I traveled to the West Bank and met Basel, a hostel-keeper who had been a member of Hamas. I learned that Palestinians join and support Hamas not because they are filled with hate, but because the organization provides them with the means to create and defend community. After the Israel–Gaza war began in October 2023, the world has seen why Palestinians under attack feel the need to defend themselves.**

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**I** remember the first time I met a former member of Hamas. It was the spring of 2022. I had just arrived in Nablus, West Bank, and was

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invited to iftar (the evening meal during Ramadan) with several Palestinians, international students and visitors. It was the middle of Ramadan, and the city was so festive. My cousin and I had landed in Tel Aviv, Israel, the day before and traveled through checkpoints to reach Nablus. We had an idea for a documentary and decided to start in Palestine first. We didn't know anyone here; we simply signed up for a work exchange program and booked our ticket. We needed to try to assimilate into the daily lives of Palestinians to understand what it was like to live under occupation.

During iftar that first night in Nablus, an international visitor asked our host, Basel, about the Israeli occupation. Suddenly, while discussing the state of affairs, Basel mentioned his time with Hamas during the second intifada. I immediately looked at my cousin. We exchanged uncomfortable glances. Growing up in America, any time we heard about Hamas, it was in the context of an extremist terrorist group. Did he hate America? Did he feel contempt for all people that didn't follow Islam? Certainly, that couldn't be true; several guests from different nations and backgrounds were at this dinner table. So many questions came to my mind, all fueled by fear and curiosity. I was uncertain about the source of my anxiety or the reason behind my feelings.

After we finished our meals, my cousin and I immediately excused ourselves. As soon as we were far enough from our hostel, we both looked at each other and burst into laughter. We were confused, scared, concerned and ultimately interested. We thought pressing questions out loud. Should we stay? Should we leave? The host seemed so kind and friendly. The image we had in our mind did not match up to the impression Basel had made in front of us. So we decided to stay. We came to Palestine to understand and live the Palestinian experience. Confronting our belief systems was just part of the process.

## **Hamas helps Palestinians create a community**

Basel was the owner of Turquoise, a beautifully renovated hostel and cafe that he created with the help of his brother and sister-in-law in collaboration with their non-profit organization, The Yalla Project. The non-profit's mission was to help rebuild the old city of Nablus and support local businesses. I spent a little over a month in Nablus, volunteering at Turquoise. We worked closely with Basel and soon learned that to Palestinians, Hamas wasn't a terrorist organization. To people here, it was a resistance organization and a political group.

During the Second Intifada, the 2000–2005 Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, Basel's role was to help people get in and get out of Nablus while it was under siege. He was arrested and imprisoned for 15 years. Basel spent so much of his life in prison, yet he gave me the impression of someone who lived each moment as if he never wanted to squander a single minute of life. During our volunteer stint, we watched Basel as he dedicated himself to nurturing Turquoise and aiding his community. He enthusiastically engaged us in various tasks. I sensed it was driven by Basel's, and many other Palestinian men's, experience of reentering a world that moved forward without them after imprisonment under occupation. They strive to compensate for lost time, aiming for greater strides and cherishing every moment.

It is important to note that Basel is no longer a member of Hamas. The organization also underwent significant change in those 15 years Basel was in prison. I learned about Hamas from Palestinians, understanding that it wasn't just a part of the resistance movement, but a community service and a political party that organized social programs like education, healthcare and free meal programs. Perhaps many Palestinians do not agree with all of Hamas's actions and core principles,

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but they still see Hamas's function as a resistance to the illegal occupation. Palestinians do not have an army. They feel abandoned by their own government officials, who do not act on their behalf, especially when dealing with Israel's government. I witnessed on multiple occasions how the Palestinian Authority would permit the Israeli occupation forces to raid the city and conduct special operations.

During my time in Palestine, my views on Hamas significantly changed. I became angered with the Israeli occupation forces and with the lack of support Palestinians had on the global stage. Why did Israel have the right to defend itself but not the Palestinians? Why were Palestinians subjugated to checkpoints and mass surveillance? Every aspect of Palestinians' lives is monitored. Many of my Palestinian friends explained what Hamas meant to them, educating me on the organization's core beliefs. Later, I learned that more than half of the members who joined Hamas were orphans, losing both parents due to the Israeli occupation that wiped out their entire families. I can understand how traumatic experiences can radicalize a person. Hell, just witnessing what Palestinians have to go through radicalized me.

### **The aftermath of October 7**

A year later, on October 7, 2023, the world wakes up to Hamas's uprising against Israel. No one in Palestine has ever seen anything like this. No one ever expected anything like this. No Palestinian I know is celebrating; they all know what this means. I know what this means. The media quickly spreads falsehoods, fabricating narratives of infants being beheaded without any evidence or verification. The world rushes to the aid of Israel. Calls from politicians, businessmen and celebrities to flatten Gaza and turn Gaza into a parking lot are swiftly put out. Headlines read "Hamas attacks Israel unprovoked."

That day, I was at home in New York, reading and watching the media spiral. I was completely overwhelmed with fear and gripped with panic. Americans had no clue what was happening. They just read that Hamas attacked Israel. Hamas was the bad guy — the end. There was only one narrative saturating the media, the Israeli one. To speak up for Palestine was a death sentence to your reputation. To speak up for Palestine meant you supported Hamas in the eyes of the Western world, which meant you were a terrorist sympathizer.

Immediately after the Hamas attack, Israel began carpet bombing Gaza in an effort to pressure Hamas to release the hostages. We watched in horror as men, women and children were blown to pieces. We watched these videos from our phones. I remember curling up into a fetal position and weeping in bed. I wanted to speak up for Palestinians, but I was afraid. The Zionist regime is powerful — but did I go all the way to Palestine to be silent? I tearfully forced myself to record a video in defense of Palestinians.

I had prepared myself for the flood of hateful messages in response. Yet something interesting happened after I put out that video: thousands and thousands of people expressed their solidarity with Palestinians. The people mourned with me. People all over shared that they were utterly heartbroken. I realized that people do want to learn about the Palestinian struggle. As people slowly learned about this almost decades-long occupation, a distinct shift in mindset took hold. I began making daily videos on TikTok and Instagram hoping to educate people and share my knowledge and experiences with Palestinians. Soon, TikTok became saturated with pro-Palestinian content. Every day, we can sense an even greater awareness as the truth emerges. Israel was losing the narrative because the truth finally emerged, and it radically shifted our consciousness.

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The word “radical” carries a negative connotation here in the West. It's often used to describe belief systems that are too fervent, that would produce terroristic violence. Yet the word simply derives from the Latin radix, which translates to “root.” Figuratively, it evokes the ground, a foundation or a source. The more radical we become, we simply return to our roots as we tap into a source.

The injustice we are all witnessing in Palestine should cause outrage. It is a crime against humanity. There is evil deeply embedded in these sweeping acts of brutality, and at this moment, we must take a stand. Watching videos of children being slaughtered feels like an extreme provocation of our humanity, reaching the height of insanity. We are fighting a spiritual war. We are fighting an information war. The world is acknowledging that Palestinians deserve the right to self-determination just as much as we do.

That is why a group like Hamas exists. We see them for what they are: a resistance movement. I can empathize with the forces that compel Palestinians to fight for their right to exist, just as much as the Jewish people who led the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Hamas wasn't created in a vacuum. The world has come to see how the United States has been funding the Israeli apartheid regime for decades while it ethnically cleanses Palestinians using our tax dollars. The world has come to see the terrible lies Israel senselessly spreads. The world has come to see Palestinians for the beautiful people they are. And this time, the bloodshed won't be for nothing.

[Madelyn Lambert edited this piece.]

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**Naley** is the founder of NaleybyNature, an independent project to document stories from different corners of the world. She is a filmmaker, producer and writer, and she is currently working on bringing greater awareness of the Palestinian genocide to Western audiences. Born and raised in New York, Naley studied media and journalism at Iona College. With the rise in social media, Naley was drawn to all the perspectives traditional media fails to report on. During the pandemic, Naley and her co-founder, Sadia, quit their jobs and started traveling the world to create their documentary. Since then, they have captured compelling stories of Palestinians, Israelis, Tibetans, Kashmiris and Indians.

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