

Fair Observer

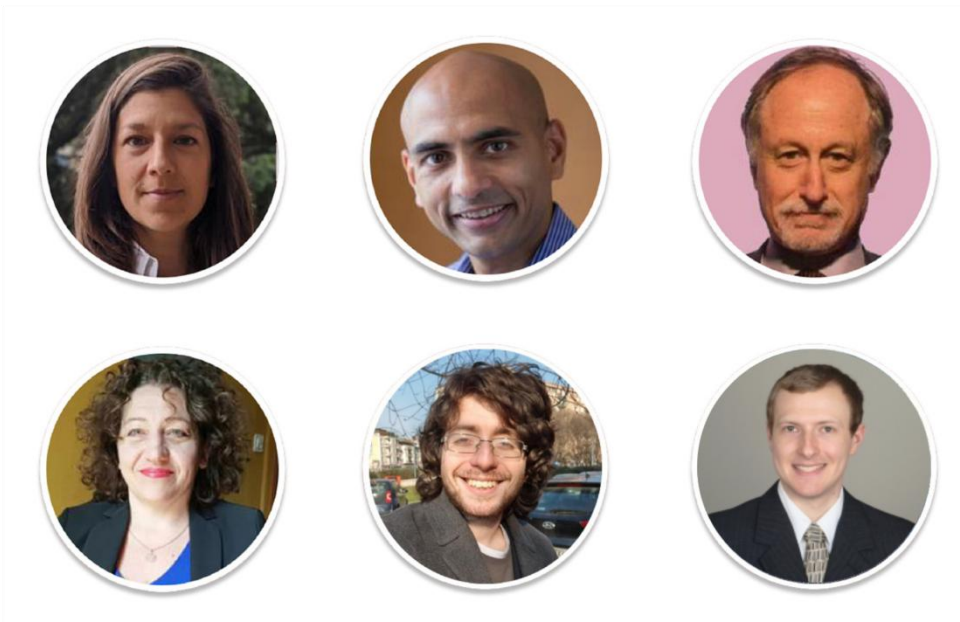
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Independence, Diversity, Debate

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Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia Need New Alliances

Mikołaj Tomasz Słowański
December 01, 2024

The European Union, especially the Eastern European nations, may wish to bolster its cooperation with Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, this mutually-beneficial arrangement is challenged by NATO and a reliance on China, respectively. For now, cooperating in non-contentious fields like trade and technology could strengthen their voices on the global stage.

In today's rapidly changing global landscape, the European Union, particularly Eastern European nations, has a strategic opportunity to enhance cooperation with Southeast Asia. As global powers like the United States, Russia and China dominate the balance of power, smaller nations must seek greater autonomy by forming new alliances. Such partnerships could allow both Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia to amplify their influence, navigating the complexities of a shifting international order.

Both Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia often find themselves at the periphery of global decision-making, despite playing key roles in global events. For instance, while fighting fiercely for sovereignty, Ukraine has faced challenges in influencing broader political dynamics. Limited resources, military constraints and insufficient global representation contribute to this difficulty, a struggle also familiar to many Southeast Asian countries.

Strengthening ties between Eastern European countries such as Poland, the Baltics and Slovakia, and Southeast Asian nations like Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, could provide an avenue for mutual self-determination. This partnership would help smaller states align their interests in ways that larger powers often overlook. Global events like US presidential elections, the war in Ukraine and China's aggressive economic policies have far-reaching effects on these regions, introducing risks that may not be the primary concern of dominant powers.

Pursuit of partnerships

While existing initiatives within NATO and the EU have laid the groundwork for some cooperation, they still operate under the influence of a few powerful states. To maximize their potential on the global stage, Eastern European and Southeast Asian nations must explore partnerships that emphasize greater independence and equal decision-making.

The EU has already fostered economic cooperation with Southeast Asia through agreements like the European Union–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and the European Union–Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA). These agreements open up new markets and strengthen trade ties, providing a platform for Eastern European countries, such as Poland, to expand exports, especially in sectors like renewable energy technologies, machinery and chemicals.

In terms of security, NATO's operations in the Asia-Pacific — primarily focused on counter-piracy and anti-terrorism have indirectly benefited Eastern European nations like Estonia and Latvia, which rely on secure international trade routes. Although NATO's formal role does not extend deeply into Southeast Asia, there is growing

collaboration in counter-terrorism and cybersecurity, which further strengthens the security frameworks of Eastern Europe.

Benefits of Eastern European–Southeast Asian cooperation

The economic benefits of cooperation between these regions are undeniable. Southeast Asia's rapidly-expanding markets present a prime opportunity for Eastern European nations like Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic States to diversify their economies beyond their traditional reliance on Western Europe. Eastern European countries have strong industrial sectors, especially in manufacturing and energy, which align with Southeast Asia's need for infrastructure, energy solutions and high-tech products. In turn, Southeast Asia offers an expanding consumer base and growing sectors in biotechnology, Information and Communication Technology and manufacturing — areas in which Eastern Europe can make inroads.

Both regions also share common security concerns. Eastern Europe faces direct threats from Russia while Southeast Asia grapples with challenges posed by China's regional ambitions. Despite these differences, lessons learned from Ukraine's resilience in the face of Russian aggression could offer valuable insights for Southeast Asian nations aiming to safeguard their sovereignty. Joint defense exercises, intelligence sharing and enhanced military cooperation could further improve security for both regions.

As Eastern Europe's digital sector continues to grow, particularly in countries like Estonia, Southeast Asia stands to benefit from expertise in areas like e-government, cybersecurity and smart cities. Conversely, Eastern Europe can learn from Southeast Asia's rapid advancements in mobile technology and e-commerce platforms, where Southeast Asia has outpaced many other regions.

Challenges and solutions

Despite these opportunities, several challenges remain. Eastern European countries often find themselves constrained within broader EU or NATO frameworks, with their foreign policy decisions heavily influenced by larger EU members like Germany or France. Similarly, NATO's priorities are often shaped by the US, limiting the ability of Eastern European nations to fully engage in independent partnerships with Southeast Asia.

Moreover, Southeast Asia's dependence on China complicates the situation. Many Southeast Asian nations are cautious about antagonizing China, which could limit their willingness to deepen ties with Eastern Europe, particularly given Russia's ongoing role as an ally to several Southeast Asian countries.

To navigate these challenges, both regions should take gradual, incremental steps. They can begin by focusing on non-contentious areas like trade, technology and cultural exchange. Multilateral organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) and the EU–ASEAN dialogue provide platforms for both regions to build consensus on broader security concerns without escalating geopolitical tensions.

While the road to deeper cooperation between Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia is not without its obstacles, the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships remains strong. By focusing on economic, technological and security cooperation, Eastern European countries like Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic States can reduce their dependence on traditional allies and assert greater autonomy on the global stage. Leveraging existing frameworks like the EU and NATO while navigating the complex geopolitical landscape will be crucial in

fostering ties that give both regions a stronger voice in global affairs.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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Anti-Haitianism: A Hemispheric Rejection of Revolutionary Blackness

Bertin M. Louis, Jr.
December 05, 2024

In September, US Congressman Glen Clay Higgins promoted false claims that Haitian immigrants in Ohio were eating pets. This is another chapter in the story of Haitian scapegoating for political gain. Anti-Haitianism reflects a deep racial hierarchy and anti-blackness attitude abroad, especially in the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas.

This piece is part of a series analyzing anti-Haitianism with a hemispheric approach. Read the first piece in the series.

On September 25, 2024, Democratic representative Steven Horsford introduced House Resolution 1500 on the floor of Congress. The resolution was intended to censure Republican Congressman Glen Clay Higgins of Louisiana over a social media post. The post in question amplified false claims made by President-elect Donald Trump and his running mate, JD Vance, that Haitian immigrants were eating pets in Springfield, Ohio. In a post on X responding to an Associated Press article about Haitians in Springfield filing charges against Trump and Vance, Higgins wrote: "Lol. These Haitians are wild. Eating pets, vudu, nastiest country in the western hemisphere, cults, slapstick gangsters... but damned if they don't feel all sophisticated now, filing charges against our President and VP."

He continued: "All these thugs better get their mind right and their ass out of our country before January 20th." Higgins later deleted the post, but the damage was done. Condemnations flooded in, followed by the resolution to censure the congressman.

Such comments and lies reflect the worst white supremacist stereotypes about Haiti and Haitians. Broadly, anti-Haitianism consists of actions, beliefs, outcomes, policies, political strategies and practices that reify the negative connotations associated with blackness and Haitian identity. Trump and Vance both used the admittedly false anti-Haitian rumor as a form of anti-black, anti-immigrant fear mongering to garner political support.

Examples of such strategies abound. In September 2021, for instance, United States Border Patrol agents appeared to whip Haitians in Del Rio, Texas amid a crackdown at the border.

This resulted in the largest mass expulsion of asylum seekers in recent US history. Between January 2021 and February 2022, the US expelled or deported over 20,000 Haitians. During the same period, more than 5,000 Haitians were deported from other countries, about half of them from the Bahamas.

Anti-Haitianism, of course, is not limited to the US. It is a regional and hemispheric phenomenon. Within scholarly and informed circles, the best known example of this form of political domination, marginalization, racism and anti-blackness is in the Dominican Republic. In his study of race and politics, Professor Ernesto Sagás analyzes how Dominican political elites use race and antihaitianismo to “construct national myths and then use these myths to stymie challenges to their hegemony.”

As Sagás explores, the national myth underlying Dominican statehood was that the Dominican Republic was the most Spanish colony in the so-called New World. After Haiti’s occupation of Santo Domingo from 1822 to 1844 — which liberated enslaved people, guaranteed Haitian freedom and independence and culminated in Dominican independence — the Dominican Republic solidified its distance from blackness and Haitian identity. Antihaitianismo then developed as an ideology based on anti-black prejudices, stereotypes and myths about Haitians and people of Haitian descent. Antihaitianismo, Sagás writes, scapegoats Haitians for problems within Dominican society and considers Haitians to be culturally and racially inferior black sub-humans.

Dominican society violently displayed antihaitianismo in the 1937 genocidal massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians at the orders of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. In 2013, the country’s highest court issued a ruling, locally known simply as *la sentencia*, that not only upheld a constitutional amendment that abolished

birthright citizenship but retroactively stripped the citizenship of more than 200,000 black Dominicans of Haitian descent, rendering them stateless. Beginning in 2015, tens of thousands were forced out of the country. Now, Dominican President Luis Abinader has announced plans for a new round of mass deportations.

“A certain kind of Black”

In my book project, *Anti-Haitianism in Paradise: Marginalization, Stigma, and Anti-Blackness in the Bahamas*, part of the *Black Lives and Liberation* series from Vanderbilt University Press, I build on Sagás’s work and use anti-Haitianism to articulate the unique form of oppression Haiti and people of Haitian descent experience. In other words, I am wresting the idea and reality of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic, applying it to varying social contexts and broadening the theory to explain what anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse — in reference to the racist treatment and degradation of Haitians in other parts of the world — refers to as “the rejection of a certain kind of Black.”

The Bahamas, a small, predominantly black Caribbean archipelago nation, has a history of anti-Haitian actions. Haitians have migrated to the Bahamas since the era of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1803). Yet on November 9, 2019, members of a Bahamian nationalist group called Operation Sovereign Bahamas protested outside a gymnasium housing hundreds of victims of Hurricane Dorian. Starting on September 1, 2019, the devastating Category 5 hurricane hovered over Grand Bahama for 24 hours, flooded much of the island and mostly submerged the Abaco Islands, rendering these areas uninhabitable. Haitians who had been living in informal settlements in Abaco faced displacement.

Two months later, the Operation Sovereign Bahamas demonstrators called on the Bahamian

government to evict the displaced people taking shelter at the gymnasium. “The Bahamas is for Bahamians,” the group’s founder, Adrian Francis, said, according to Bahamian news service Eyewitness News. Other members of the group held Bahamian flags and shouted at evacuees, presumably of Haitian descent, “Go home!” “Repatriation!” and “We want you out of our country!” This scene came after the same civic group had held a well-attended town hall meeting on October 4, 2019 in New Providence, Bahamas titled, “Eradicating Illegal Immigrants in the Bahamas, Shanty Towns Down.”

Cyclical white supremacy

Anti-Haitianism operates as an ideology rooted in anti-blackness, nationalism, political domination and marginalization. We can also see anti-Haitianism expressed as a set of practices. But what is the relationship between antihaitianismo in the Dominican Republic and anti-Haitianism in the Bahamas? As in the US, political elites in both nations use anti-Haitianism as a strategy, suggesting that both African-descended nations are structurally anti-Haitian. When black Dominicans of Haitian descent were forced to leave the Dominican Republic in 2015 due to la sentencia, it was partly done by the party in power to garner political capital.

Another dimension of anti-Haitianism is that these nations express and exert their sovereignty through anti-blackness. In the wake of Hurricane Dorian, the Bahamas repatriated 228 Haitian migrants, 153 of whom had lived in hurricane-ravaged Abaco. Many Haitian residents there lived in informal settlements, locally called shanty towns, and had work permits that granted them legal status in the country.

When majority black nations assert their sovereignty through anti-Haitianism, they extend the spirit of white supremacy and anti-blackness,

traditions previously exerted on the ancestors of Bahamians and Dominicans through slavery. These cycles also expose the cyclical nature of white supremacy and the durability of anti-blackness.

Anti-Haitianism in hemispheric perspective

Reflecting its hemispheric dimensions, anti-Haitianism has also developed into an important type of anti-blackness informing other types of blackness within nations in North America, the Caribbean and South America. Regine O. Jackson’s 2011 book, *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*, discusses how Haitian migrants and their progeny have served in the past and present as repugnant cultural “others” in relation to the citizens of Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Cuba.

In the wake of the 2010 earthquake, a United Nations-introduced cholera outbreak in Haiti claimed nearly 10,000 lives and adversely affected more than 820,000 people. The UN remains unaccountable and unpunished for this human rights catastrophe. In addition, much earthquake aid did not go to Haitians but to donors’ own civilian and military entities, UN agencies, international non-governmental organizations and private contractors. This suggests that humanitarian aid can be wielded as an anti-Haitian weapon.

And in Brazil, scholars Denise Cogo and Terezinha Silva have observed the racist treatment of Haitians who were encouraged to migrate the country in the post-earthquake period to work as laborers ahead of the 2016 Olympics. The adverse experiences of Haitians in Brazil — home to the largest black population in the Americas — expose the linkages between labor extraction, anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism.

Anti-Haitianism also serves other purposes within these examples, such as identity

construction. The peoples of the Bahamas, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and other countries construct their identities as superior in relation to Haitian identities, producing anti-Haitian outcomes. The fact that Haitians have still not been compensated by the UN for cholera-related illness and death, and that the people who caused the epidemic have not been punished through Haitian or international law, reflects how Haitian lives are considered expendable and unworthy of justice.

While we must consider differences in the local histories, socioeconomic conditions and political situations of the Bahamas, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere, a clear anti-Haitian pattern emerges in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. This pattern, which displays in the news and scholarly publications, involves alienation, death, expulsion, elimination, humiliation, marginalization and stigmatization.

While these majority black nations are subject to anti-blackness, all these countries promote a unique form of anti-blackness that specifically adversely affects Haitians. This should remind us that all that is black is not the same type of black, reflecting hierarchical and differentiated blackness.

Anti-Haitianism is, in other words, an expression of a rejection of the blackest of the black — a revolutionary blackness that demands freedom, equality and dignity, but remains collectively punished and stigmatized.

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[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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Emmanuel Macron’s Embarrassing Hour of Reckoning

Peter Isackson, Atul Singh
December 05, 2024

French Prime Minister Michel Barnier’s minority government collapsed yesterday. President Emmanuel Macron’s maneuvering has brought General Charles de Gaulle’s 1958-vintage Fifth Republic to the edge of collapse. The traditional left and the right have imploded and new actors have taken their place. The constitution itself is under threat and the future seems bleak.

The political temperature in France has been rising for more than a decade. It has now reached boiling point. President Emmanuel Macron’s latest attempt to form a government compatible with his self-assured “jupitérien” vision has produced, as many expected, a resounding failure.

Macron's many failures have been a recurring pattern since les gilets jaunes ("yellow vests") movement erupted in France starting the winter of 2018. Only the pandemic stopped the movement from weakening the president further. Now, all presidential authority has evaporated thanks to a full-blown constitutional crisis.

What is going on?

Many of our readers have been following the US elections and have not paid France as much attention. So, let us lay out the bare bones of France's crisis.

In June, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement national (RN) emerged as the largest party in the French elections for the European Parliament. In response, Macron called a snap parliamentary election to break the far-right fever gripping the country. In the first round of parliamentary elections, RN got 33.21% of the votes, beating Nouveau Front populaire (NFP) and Ensemble, which got 28.21% and 21.28%, respectively. In the second round, the left coalition NFP and Macron's centrist grouping Ensemble combined to push the far-right RN into third place. NFP unexpectedly ended up with 180 out of 577 seats in the National Assembly. Ensemble managed to come in second and retain 159 seats. RN increased its numbers to 142 seats but was no longer the leading party in parliament. In this hung parliament, no one party could form a government and the French hosted the Paris Olympics whilst in political limbo.

After the Olympic summer, Macron appointed Michel Barnier prime minister on September 5. This was a rather surprising choice. Les Républicains (The Republicans), the traditional center-right party, got 5.41% of the votes and won 39 seats. Barnier was not among those elected to the National Assembly. In fact, in the lead-up to the 2022 presidential election, Barnier ran as a

primary candidate for his party but was eliminated in the first round, getting only 23.9% of the vote.

Like almost all French politicians, Barnier graduated from one of France's elitist grandes écoles, the highly selective institutions that train the crème de la crème of France. Though not a household name, he is a highly competent public servant who held many important positions in Paris and Brussels. Like Macron, he is very much part of the French elite that governs the country and plays a big role in the EU. It is also now a highly discredited and increasingly despised elite.

Barnier tried to pass a long overdue budget but met strong opposition in parliament. Eventually, he used an executive order, Article 49.3, to pass the budget on December 2. Two days later, France's far-right and left-wing lawmakers joined together to vote a no-confidence motion through. RN required a permanent consultative role in budget planning, increased spending in areas benefiting French citizens directly and opposed Barnier's tax increases. Both RN and NFP opposed austerity measures, while NFP supported higher taxes on the wealthy. Their contrasting but complementary populist themes made inevitable their convergent choice to vote out Barnier. Now, France is about to enter 2025 with no government and no budget.

Three points are of note after the no-confidence vote:

As per the constitution, Barnier now has to resign. Macron cannot call yet another election until June because the constitution sets out a 12-month waiting period after a snap election. Macron is unlikely to find anyone acceptable to a majority of legislators in the National Assembly to succeed Barnier as prime minister.

Barnier was trying to improve France's fiscal position by cutting the deficit from 6.1% to 5.0%

of the GDP. France is growing by barely 1.0% a year and its debt-to-GDP ratio now stands at 110%. Therefore, Barnier proposed €40 billion (\$42 billion) in spending cuts and €20 billion (\$21 billion) in tax rises. Neither the NFP nor the RN found Barnier's proposals acceptable. His effort to push through this budget through an executive order, overriding democratic process, led to his fall.

These are interesting times for France. Yesterday, the country experienced its first successful no-confidence vote since Georges Pompidou's government fell in 1962. At that time, none other than Charles de Gaulle was president. He had inaugurated the Fifth Republic in 1958 and had immense political authority. Macron is literally and metaphorically a midget by comparison and his Sancho Panza Barnier has achieved the dubious distinction of becoming the shortest-serving prime minister in the Fifth Republic.

In the past, French political parties went through protracted bouts of arm-wrestling to agree upon a budget. With the implosion of the traditional center-right and center-left parties and the drift to populist anti-establishment positions, France's legislators are now unable to arrive at a compromise. Instead, they are engaging in a bruising brawl. Fists are flying and not only has Barnier been knocked down but the French political system is on the floor.

On Sunday, *Le Monde* published a long, detailed article full of fascinating quotes from diverse members of the political class, both friendly and unfriendly to Macron. It bore the title: "Since the dissolution, the slow twilight of Emmanuel Macron." Many are wondering whether he intends, in the words of Dylan Thomas, to "go gentle into that good night" or "rage, rage against the dying light."

This is not the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic that a president has felt endangered. Far more spectacular were the events in 1968 — celebrated in France as *mai soixante-huit* — when the world and the French population wondered whether they weren't witnessing a second revolution à la 1789. Students armed with anti-authoritarian slogans such as "It's forbidden to forbid" or, more poetically, "Sous les pavés, la plage" ("under the paving-stones the beach") dug up these very paving-stones and threw them at the riot police. An estimated 500,000 people took to the streets and de Gaulle fled the Élysée Palace. A year later, the grand old general resigned but the Fifth Republic survived.

History is rhyming but not repeating itself

The difference between then and now is twofold. First, de Gaulle had immense stature as the leader of the French Resistance during World War II. Even though the war hero secretly fled to West Germany during the most fraught days of the unrest, he still commanded authority in much of the country. Upon his return to France, de Gaulle gave a resounding speech and called for a snap election. About 800,000 supporters of various ages marched through Paris and Gaullists won 353 of 486 seats while the Socialists and Communists managed only 57 and 34, respectively.

Second, France has now entered the brave new world where traditional politics of the left and right is dead and buried six feet under. In 1968, the Gaullists and the left offered two clear visions for France. Both had seasoned professionals and well-structured political parties. At the same time, there was a solid centrist bloc that could work with both sides of the political divide. Voters had a clear choice between the left and the right and, thanks to de Gaulle's actions, the disorder of May became the new order of June.

The crusty old general succeeded in saving the constitution because he literally embodied it. In 1958, he had created the Fifth Republic after the collapse of the postwar Fourth Republic. Yet when he called for a constitutional referendum a year later, de Gaulle lost and duly resigned. Pompidou, his Gaullist prime minister, took over and the Fifth Republic endured.

Macron has consistently taken inspiration from de Gaulle. But to paraphrase Lloyd Bentsen in his 1988 vice-presidential debate with Dan Quayle, the appropriate response to the current president's hubris would be: "Manu, you are not le Grand Charles." The essayist Alain Minc, quoted in the *Le Monde* article, offered the most credible explanation of Macron's personality in a discussion he claims to have had with Nicolas Sarkozy. Apparently, Minc told Sarkozy, "You're egocentric. He [Macron] is a narcissist. Egocentrics need others. Narcissus is alone." Note that a friend of the two authors who was a classmate of Macron at Sciences Po called Macron a pervers narcissique (pervert narcissist).

Even though Macron managed to cobble together a disparate group of followers and call them a party — initially, *La République en Marche* and later *Renaissance* — he has never succeeded. Monsieur Jupiter fails to understand that, by their very nature, political parties include a number of disparate interests who somehow combine to work together on multiple levels of policy and organization. All successful parties have some mechanism to make collective decisions.

In 2018, Fox News reporter Chris Wallace asked Macron what he liked most about being president, Macron replied that he likes making decisions. Note not solving problems, not negotiating complex issues, not even governing. Making decisions. Macron then defended himself against the accusation of being authoritarian, arguing that being "aware of all the consequences

of your decisions and thinking that you have to stick to your decisions to deliver when it's for the good of your country is not the same as being authoritarian or arrogant."

Some credit Macron for being a political genius but forget that he benefited from spectacular good fortune in 2017. The blocs on the left and the right had lost their sense of direction. They had failed to produce political personalities whom the French saw leaders. Then, Macron was a young unknown. He was a recent addition to then-President François Hollande's administration. Mostly as a result of Hollande's political amateurism, he rose from the technocratic ranks to become finance minister. In the past, this important post was usually reserved for political personalities. That honor ennobled Macron in the eyes of the public and at the same time inebriated him. Hollande's performance as president weakened the Socialist Party and Macron cannily played the card of continuity while betraying the party of his benefactor.

Elected in 2012, Hollande was the first president in the history of the Fifth Republic to visibly lack the force of personality and political muscle the French associate with the office of president. De Gaulle, François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac — each with his contrasting style — successfully embodied the image of Fifth Republic president. Sarkozy, despite his two discrediting epithets "bling-bling" and "Sarko l'Américain" (Sarko the American), thrived, at least for a while. He lived on his previously constructed image as a "tough guy" when he was Chirac's minister of the interior.

Note that Sarkozy's American reputation helped him initially. Even though the French constantly criticize Americans, they secretly admire everything American. This includes bling-bling and celebrity culture. Yet this appeal has its limits. Sarkozy ended up as a one-term wonder

because they do not appreciate bling-bling in their leaders. Hence, the tough guy lost the 2012 election to Hollande, who had promised to be “normal.” In 2017, Macron promised a chimeric return to a Gaullist past but the callow president lacked judgment, experience and substance.

Macron survived a flurry of punches in the first seven years of his reign as jupitérien president for a very simple reason: His opponent in the final round of the 2017 and 2022 elections was the “unrepublican” Marine Le Pen. The notion of “republican” for the traditional political class has long been applied to anyone who fits into the traditional mold of a politician belonging to a party not too extreme to deserve banishment from polite company. Marine’s father, Jean-Marie, was the portrait of someone who was existentially unacceptable.

It has long been noted that the unifier of the left, François Mitterand, was the first to exploit the idea of using Jean-Marie as the ideal foil to create havoc on the right. It was a successful strategy but it proved risky in the long run. When Jean-Marie became a spent force, his daughter Marine took center stage as a softer and subtler version of her father. It wasn’t exactly King Lear and Cordelia, and there was far less drama to it. But a dose of cultural conflict between the two gave Marine the credibility Jean-Marie never had.

All this drama, from de Gaulle to Macron and Le Pen, has ended up producing the constitutional crisis playing out today. The founders of the Fifth Republic — de Gaulle and his cronies — crafted a document designed to avoid what is now unfolding before our eyes. They created a parliamentary system dominated by the spectre of presidential authority. The French presidency has a monarchic tinge to it because it was designed to prevent the instability that often afflicts parliamentary regimes of which we have seen two examples recently in Europe. Post-Brexit United Kingdom proved so

unstable that Conservatives devoured their own prime ministers. In Germany, the traffic light coalition of Socialists, Liberals and Greens has just collapsed. Ironically, the Fifth Republic that set out to avoid parliamentary instability might itself be able to collapse.

In some ways, the current situation is very French and a product of a political culture that developed as a result of the French Revolution in 1789. France has been politically unstable since that fateful day when a group of rebellious citizens stormed the Bastille. Unlike the United States with its quasi-religious faith in its 1787 constitution that many still see as sacred writ, France has been through several successive constitutions. Each time, the French rewrote the basic rules of the state. France has experienced the First Republic, the First Empire, the Restoration, the liberal monarchy, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, the Third Republic, the Vichy regime, the Fourth Republic and then the Fifth Republic. Hence, the French do not see the Fifth Republic as magical, mystical, spiritual or even literary. To their eyes, it does not deserve immortality. The traditional political establishment, and Macron above all, disagree.

The rise and fall of Macron and the Fifth Republic

As noted above, the Fifth Republic was a stable two-bloc system for decades. However, the last 16 years destabilized the reigning equilibrium. Like many other first world countries, France was unable to deal with the 2007–2008 global financial crisis. Sarkozy, “l’Américain,” elected in 2007, as the global crisis was developing, took the right in an Atlanticist direction, alienating the proud nationalists who had inherited de Gaulle’s stubborn embrace of national autonomy and resistance to the US. Hollande, inspired by the examples of US President Bill Clinton and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, succeeded Sarkozy and

dreamt — in the age of high tech and Silicon Valley prestige — of running a rational, technocratic regime. He failed to serve the middle or working classes and his party came to be perceived as champagne or caviar socialists.

Clinton and Blair's Third Way tried to reconcile center-right and center-left politics by synthesizing economically liberal and socially democratic policies but ended up leaving the working class behind. The British Labour Party has only returned to power this year after 14 years of political wilderness. In the US, Democrats under Kamala Harris have just been defeated roundly by Donald Trump. Her defeat is much worse than Hillary Clinton's who had the consolation of winning the popular vote.

By 2016, Hollande's champagne socialism had made him unpopular with voters. Unlike Sarkozy, he did not stand for re-election. In the ensuing primary, Benoît Hamon triumphed. He was the most traditionally working class but, by now, Hollande's Socialist Party was dominated by centrists. They rallied behind Macron who emerged as a third party candidate.

At that time, most people did not give Macron much of a chance. François Fillon, a former prime minister, was the frontrunner who was expected to waltz to victory. He possessed all the traits of a traditional leader. He was the establishment figure of the center-right but an embezzlement scandal involving his wife torpedoed his prospects.

This miraculous break in the clouds allowed Macron to emerge as a fresh young face promising a break from the past. Hamon and Fillon fell by the wayside and Macron and Le Pen squared off for the second round of the 2017 presidential election. Her party's sulfurous, unrepublican reputation paved the way for Macron's victory. In 2022, he again won because his opponent was Le Pen and because the Covid-19 pandemic gave him a break

from les gilets jaunes. In the snap elections this year, his party only came third. The voters have sent him a clear message: "You may be president for another three years, but we no longer trust you to govern."

As stated earlier, Macron managed to win two elections but he has failed to create a real political party. It has no truly political or even ideological identity. Ensemble is little more than a coterie of lukewarm loyalists bound for the advancement of their political careers to a talented but narcissistic leader. This leader has chosen technocrats with no political stature as his prime ministers. Édouard Philippe, Jean Castex, Élisabeth Borne, Gabriel Attal and now Barnier are not exactly household names in France. Macron clings to the fantasy that the weaker his prime ministers are, the stronger he will be. This has clearly backfired and led to an eminently avoidable crisis.

The constitution obliges Macron to find a new prime minister. The next elections cannot be held until July. Yet there is no personality on the left or in the center with enough authority to who can win the confidence even of a ragtag majority in a fragmented parliament.

The urgent issue today, a day after the vote of no confidence, is to confirm a budget for 2025. But with no government to push a budget through, uncertainty reigns. With Trump waiting in the wings to take charge of the West Wing, uncertainty will only amplify. He is threatening 10–20% tariffs on European imports. So, France faces a risk of lower export earnings from the US market. It along with other European countries also faces the added risk of Chinese dumping because the Trump administration is planning to hit China with massive tariffs.

The war in Ukraine and the Middle East also cast a dark shadow on France. With no budget yet in either France or Germany, Europe can no longer

back Ukraine. In any case, Trump has clearly signaled that he will be following a very different policy to US President Joe Biden in Ukraine. After tying himself closely to Biden, Macron will have to sing a different tune. Lebanon and Syria are former French colonies. They are in trouble and could end up in bigger trouble soon. This will cause Macron headaches.

In a nutshell though, the lack of a government and a budget poses grave risks for the economy. Fair Observer's Editor-at-Large Alex Gloy points out that yields on French ten-year bonds have surpassed those on their Greek counterparts and the country's credit rating could be downgraded soon. Bankruptcies have been soaring and the French stock market performance has severely lagged those of other countries. Since the peak in 2007, the French stock market index CAC-40 is up a mere 18% while the German Dax has increased by 148% and the US S&P 500 by 286%.

Furthermore, like Germany, France has been hit hard by soaring energy prices, high inflation and rising interest rates after the war in Ukraine started in February 2022. There is no political consensus as to how to pay for current and future spending. Like many times in the past, France is now in a full-blown political and economic crisis. Macron's jupitérien reign is ending in an unmitigated disaster and the Fifth Republic might not survive for too long.



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For the US in Syria, Is It About Principle or Interest?

Peter Isackson
December 11, 2024

The situation in Syria has been dramatic, but can anyone make sense of it? Luckily, we have politicians who provide the simplest and presumably most rational of explanations. United States President Joe Biden assures us that it is all about clarity and sticking to principles.

In an era marked by authorities waging battle against the windmills of disinformation (conveniently defined as somebody else's speech), the average citizen is clamoring for access to facts. But where do facts come from, or rather, how do we citizens receive and consume them?

The obvious answer is the media. But few people in the United States trust the media these days. Surely, in a democracy "of the people, by the people and for the people," there will be a few scoundrels who make their way into government, but we can assume that the majority merits our confidence. Well, according to a Pew survey titled, "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2024," the current level of trust has fallen to 22%.

December 2024 offers us a vision of exacerbated tensions in various parts of the globe. At such moments, we expect our leaders to speak with some degree of honesty. Especially when the stakes are high and decisions become a matter of life or death. We accept that some things must remain secret. But the democratic principle implies an effort on the part of our governments to offer a minimum of clarity concerning the facts and their intentions.

Alas, the duty of obscurity seems to have replaced the ideal of clarity as the norm. Clever government officials have good reasons to justify their brazen stonewalling. First, national security requires concealing one's true intentions. After all, if revealed, the enemy will profit. Then there is the fact that in any situation of conflict, we should accept the reality of the "fog of war," a concept erroneously but persistently attributed to Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz by commentators, some of whose brains may be subjected to a permanent fog.

What are US presidents for if not guiding the nation towards an understanding of the truth? In August 2023, US President Joe Biden informed us that "Putin has already lost the war" in Ukraine. An obvious fact. The truth teller now describes the recent history of US policy towards Syria. "Over the past four years, my administration pursued a clear and principled policy toward Syria. First, we made clear from the start sanctions on Assad would remain in place unless he engaged seriously in a political process to end the civil war."

Today's **Fair Observer Devil's Dictionary** definition:

Principled policy:

A course of action relentlessly pursued thanks to the capacity of some people in a position of authority to persistently ignore surrounding reality.

Contextual note

Biden uses two epithets, "clear" and "principled," to describe his policy. The word "clear" is certainly the most overused word by any spokesperson for the White House or State Department. At briefing sessions with personalities such as the White House's Karine Jean-Pierre and the State Department's Matthew Miller, whenever a journalist poses embarrassing questions that highlight potential ambiguity or equivocation with regard to the "noble" principles that guide US actions, they respond with the formula, "We have been very clear about..." In one random example, the press briefing session of March 27, 2024, Max Miller crafted this litany of explanations:

So we have been very **clear** about this matter. So we have made that quite **clear** to them. So I will say that we have a fundamental disagreement with the Israeli Government over this issue, and we have made that quite **clear**.... we

will continue to be **clear** about what we think about these actions....we have made **clear** that we believe that allegations of genocide are unfounded....we have made **clear** that the United States is not going to send any troops to Ukraine.And I think it's **clear** that these claims are categorically false. (this was a response to the claim that the US created ISIS.)...and we'll make the same thing **clear** privately....we have made **clear** since the outset of this administration that the promotion of democracy is one of the top priorities for the President.So we continue to make **clear** in our conversations with the Government of Bangladesh... that we wanted to see free and fair elections and we will continue to support free, full, open democracy in Bangladesh.So we have been very **clear** about this matter. We've been unequivocal. (This concerned the fact that "Ben-Gvir's coalition would be annexing additional land in the Jordan Valley.")So we have made that quite **clear** to them. We've been very direct and candid about it in our conversations with them. (On the same topic of land seizures.)

This obsessively repeated verbal tic brings home the point that "being clear" means quite simply: "Whatever we say must be accepted as truth." As for the "principled policy" Biden cited, his logic consists of announcing a simple principle — that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must be removed from office — and never deviating from it. Even if circumstances change, and even if hundreds of thousands of people may die or be displaced as a result of clinging to that principle.

Biden has already vowed to support the new Syrian government. Some may find this a bit strange. At this point, nobody has even a vague idea about what the new government will look like. On principle, can the US support it? What if it turns out to be a Wahhabi terrorist government,

fulfilling its leader's initial allegiance? Moreover, Syrian Head of State Abu Mohammed al-Joulani still has a \$10 million bounty on his head because the US branded him a terrorist. Does Joulani's success in overthrowing a dictator, Assad, automatically mean that democracy is on its way? Biden might profitably consult the poem, "The Great Day" by the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats::

"Hurrah for revolution and more cannon-shot!A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again!The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on."

Substitute "regime change" for "revolution" and Yeats has defined the principle that defines at least 50% of US foreign policy. In the meantime, Biden and his good friend, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are providing "more cannon-shot." Within a day of the announced liberation of Syria, the US and Israel conducted multiple bombing raids on the military infrastructure and other threatening elements within a country that is rife with threatening elements. Can anyone seriously doubt that the lash will go on?

Anyone struggling with the question of which "clear principles" to apply to a dramatic situation in which multiple interests both converge and diverge would do well to follow Caitlin Johnstone's advice. "I personally don't blame people for misunderstanding what's been happening in Syria all these years. Some of my favorite analysts got Syria wrong in the early years of the war. It's a complicated issue. It's hard to sort out the true from the false, and it's hard to sort through the moral complexities and contradictions of it all as a human being. What matters is that you stay curious and open and sincerely dedicated to learning what's true instead of bedding down and making an identity out of your current understanding."

Johnstone's wisdom tallies with the advice our fictional journalist and his AI assistant are intent on following in the video above.

Historical note

As US President Barack Obama's vice president and then as president, Joe Biden has been associated with the framing and enforcing of the principles he claims to be at the core of US policy with regard to Syria.

But what are those principles? In 2015, The Guardian revealed that the most obvious one has been to ignore any initiative aiming at peace and mutual security, especially if the initiative comes from Russia.

The Guardian was clear. "Russia proposed more than three years ago that Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, could step down as part of a peace deal, according to a senior negotiator involved in back-channel discussions at the time. Former Finnish president and Nobel peace prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari said western powers failed to seize on the proposal. Since it was made, in 2012, tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions uprooted, causing the world's gravest refugee crisis since the second world war."

Biden's principles are clear. He once again demonstrated that clarity in December 2021 when he refused to consider security arrangements Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed that could have avoided an invasion and a prolonged war in Ukraine, in which an estimated one million people have died. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson applied the same principle when he instructed the Ukrainians not to sign a peace treaty in April 2022.

During a 2015 television interview, Former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas recounted how his British friends told him they were

planning to overthrow Assad because the "Syrian regime said things that were anti-Israeli." Another case of applying a principle, this time by British allies of the US.

These cases illustrate what has become clear as far as principles are concerned. Negotiation and diplomacy can never replace kinetic action, whatever the eventual cost. The principle of regime change for Syria has already been in place for 12 years. It has finally succeeded. Just as it had in Iraq and Libya and even in Afghanistan in 2001.

One may legitimately ask, is it more about principle or about interest?

[In the age of Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain, another American wit, the journalist Ambrose Bierce produced a series of satirical definitions of commonly used terms, throwing light on their hidden meanings in real discourse. Bierce eventually collected and published them as a book, *The Devil's Dictionary*, in 1911. We have shamelessly appropriated his title in the interest of continuing his wholesome pedagogical effort to enlighten generations of readers of the news. Read more of Fair Observer Devil's Dictionary.]

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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products and partnered with major organizations such as the BBC, Heinemann and Macmillan. Peter has published books and articles in English and on intercultural management, language learning, technology and politics.

Elon Musk Chooses Life (and Science) Over Tech

William Softky
December 13, 2024

This week, the world’s most powerful technologist cast an unambiguous vote for children’s safety and mental health, against most of Big Tech, as supported by science. Elon Musk supports revolutionary legislation, the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), which the United States Congress will vote about on December 17.

Most humans who voted for President-elect Donald Trump want a world where people celebrate special occasions together, contribute to the community, show respect for one’s elders, take care of their bodies and are careful about indulging one’s appetites. Most humans who voted for opposing candidate Kamala Harris also want a world where people do these things. This common ground exists because these practices allow humans to meet our basic informational needs, sensory information in particular.

Recently, my partner, Criscillia, and I demonstrated that truth mathematically, by understanding that the information brains need for trust is not the kind of information you find in

newspapers or books. It is the kind of information we receive through our senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and interoception, all at once. Real people know nervous systems need real life.

That same math shows that digital inputs are bad for us. The more “personalized” they are, the worse. Because personalized digital technology makes so much money, that basic tension pits private profit against public health. I have never heard any scientific disagreements with this contention, even after trying for a decade to provoke them. The math of information flow and all unbiased evidence agree: Digital media damage learning and sociability. So any country hoping to protect its youth must severely limit childrens’ digital exposure.

The United States, which pioneered this awful tech and makes the most money from it, must now officially face this choice just as Trump takes office. The Senate side of Congress already passed the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) — a proposed legislation meant to protect children on the Internet — by the lopsided odds of 91–3, showing wide bipartisan support. But the House of Representatives has stalled and tried to weaken it to make it easier on industry.

The House will vote on KOSA on Tuesday, December 17. Will the congressmen protect kids from known digital toxins? Or will they protect their contributors’ profit margins? It seems too close to call.

KOSA vs free speech

The big news came this week when Trump’s tech vizier, Elon Musk, the world’s most influential technologist, announced his support of KOSA. Even more crucially, he and X CEO Linda Yaccarino helped the House restore the teeth of the Senate version. He and his tech company voted for life over tech.

Unlike earlier bills, KOSA was designed to identify and neutralize the toxin, not just give it a name and a punishment. The toxin in this case is described in the key term, “design feature.” Design features are software elements (such as “infinite scroll,” for example) which entrain the human nervous system unconsciously; individuals can’t defend themselves. Their basic structures have been mathematically understood since the old days when “persuasive technology” was considered good, not evil. KOSA’s genius approach embeds that established industry knowledge into the very legislation regulating industry and protecting kids and teens.

The major objection to KOSA is based on a weird US myth, going by the name “free speech.” Free speech in the US means people get to speak their minds without government interference, which is good for democracy. Furthermore, according to our scientific understanding of trust, speaking out loud in public is very good for the nervous system. So what our Founding Fathers imagined is still alive and well.

Unfortunately, the US also has a sub-population of people who think that typing posts is equal to using the voice. Some of those people further claim that free speech ought to apply in ways having nothing to do with voices or even people, so any regulation at all constitutes “censorship.”

The people who say such things call themselves intelligent. But does a foreign server hosting porn deserve free speech? How about social media platforms urging kids to kill themselves?

Musk was right: Choose life. Science says so.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



William Softky is a biophysicist who was among the first neuroscientists to understand microtiming, and among the first technologists to build that understanding into algorithms. Thousands have cited his scientific work, his PhD in Theoretical Physics is from Caltech, his name is on 10 patents and two of the companies he inspired were acquired for \$160 million total.

The “Greater Israel” Plan Has a Colossal Reach

Alan Waring
December 19, 2024

Israel’s unquestionable assertions about its “right to self-defense” mask an apparent long-term plan to annex into Eretz Yisrael vast areas of neighboring and regional sovereign states. Already seemingly underway, is this plan solely for self-defense, is it viable, and is it legally justifiable or morally acceptable? What would happen to the conquered peoples?

As a sovereign nation, the State of Israel has existed since 1948, following the end of the 30-year mandate for British administration of Palestine, when the Jewish Agency declared the territory as the independent state of Israel under Jewish control. Prior to independence, according to census data, the Jewish population of Palestine was some 32%, with Muslims comprising 60%. Civil war ensued, with neighboring Arab states helping the Palestinians.

Israel won that war and at least 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from the new Israel and became refugees in surrounding and other countries. That enforced diaspora, including their descendants, now numbers approximately 6 million registered refugees plus a further 2.5 million unregistered.

Of the Palestinians who remained in Israel, and their descendants, approximately 2 million live in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, with a further 2.3 million in Gaza. Some Palestinians in the West Bank have Israeli citizenship while the majority have residency papers. Although many areas are officially designated as under administration by the independent Palestinian Authority, in reality, the entire West Bank is under Israeli military law.

Israel also won subsequent wars declared by a variety of Arab neighbors, in 1956, 1967 and 1973. Territorial gains for Israel included: part of Golan Heights (from Syria), part of Sinai (from Egypt, returned in a peace accord), Gaza (from Egypt, relinquished to autonomous Palestinian administration in another peace accord), and the West Bank and East Jerusalem (from Jordan).

In September 2024, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Israel's continued occupation of Palestine and demanding it cease and desist. However, given Israel's notorious decades-old contempt for the United Nations, and its ultimate rejection of all previous resolutions and internationally brokered attempts to secure Palestinian rights and nationhood (examples include the 1947 UN Resolution 181 (II), the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords, and the two-state solution), it is highly unlikely that Israel will comply.

Over two decades, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has never been more than equivocal about a two-state solution. Since 2015,

he has rejected the idea and since 2023 has outright rejected any possibility of Palestinian statehood at all. By June 2024, despite Israel's best efforts to deny Palestinians any claim to statehood, 146 out of the 193 nations of the UN had recognized Palestine as an independent state.

Intermittent Israeli military attacks and temporary occupation of large parts of Lebanon have also occurred on numerous occasions over decades. Many feared that the latest, from October 1 to November 26, 2024, ostensibly to eradicate Hezbollah rocket attacks on Israel, was also a "dry run" for an indefinite annexation of the southern half, if not the whole, of Lebanon.

Israel's response to Hamas terror attack of October 7, 2023

Hamas's savage cross-border terror attack from inside Gaza on Israeli settlements on October 7, 2023 inevitably provoked a justifiable Israeli military response. Israel sought to capture or kill the perpetrators, and then to eliminate the terrorist organization. Varying official estimates from different sources agree that at least 1,139 were killed by the October 7 attack, plus some 3,400 wounded and 251 (75% Israelis) captured and taken into Gaza. Of those captured and held as hostages, many have been confirmed dead, 105 were released by negotiation, and 2 were released by Israeli special forces, leaving 97 plus 4 others from earlier Hamas abductions currently still in captivity.

Israel's steadfast rejection over decades of a two-state solution, coupled with its demonstrable disregard for mass civilian casualties in its war on Gaza since October 7, 2023, has perplexed and infuriated long-standing allies of Israel. The gross disproportionality of the Gazan casualty numbers and the fanatical destruction of almost all infrastructure belie Israel's stated objectives and strongly suggest a deliberate mass punishment of

the population, contrary to the laws of war. Israel rejects this evaluation.

However, the initial “search and destroy” Israeli mission to eradicate an estimated 30,000 armed Hamas operatives quickly turned into what looked like an indiscriminate assault against the entire population, using sophisticated weaponry and brutal tactics to destroy entire neighborhoods and life sustainability. That relentless daily assault has gone on for over a year, with no sign that the Israelis intend to stop. By mid-November 2024, over 43,000 Gazans (including some 11,500 women and 16,800 children) had been killed, according to their identity and death certificates held by the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry, plus at least 10,000 missing, presumed dead under rubble, and over 103,000 wounded. The UN Human Rights report of November 2024 confirms that 70% of deaths have been women and children.

Over the past 12 months, the Israelis have been accused of systematically blocking food, medical and other humanitarian supplies, carrying out targeted daily bombardment of hospitals, schools, residential areas, food depots and refugee camps (including so-called “safe places” designated by the Israelis themselves), and conducting repetitive enforced mass displacements of the population throughout Gaza. By the end of May 2024, the UN officially estimated that 1.7 million (or 75%) of the Gazan population had been internally displaced. That estimate had increased to 1.9 million (or 90% of the population) by early September 2024.

In late October 2024, UN and WHO chiefs declared that “the entire population of north Gaza” was now at serious risk of death from starvation, privation and lack of health care, and castigated Israel’s “blatant disregard for basic humanity and the laws of war.” In May 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel’s recent conduct in Gaza was not genocidal (proto rather than actually achieved so far), but did state,

quoting the Genocide Convention, that Israel “must immediately halt its military offensive” and warned against harming civilians. The International Criminal Court (ICC) followed this by seeking arrest warrants for Netanyahu and then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for crimes against humanity. These cast Israel’s political leaders and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as culpable villains. The arrest warrants were issued on November 21, 2024.

The Nation-State Law and land grabs

There are multiple well-documented reports of violent attacks and land grabs against Palestinians and other minorities (for example, Armenians) in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem by so-called “Israeli settlers.” These reflect the apparent determination of Netanyahu’s government and the judiciary to sanctify de facto ethnic cleansing and accelerate the practical implications of Israel’s 2018 Nation-State Law. The latter stipulates that Israel is a Jewish state in which only Jews have full rights. Article 7 specifically prioritizes Jewish settlements as “a national value” and for which the state will “act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation,” i.e. ethno-religious segregation and usurpation of non-Jewish land as the desirable norm.

By mid-2024, some 380,000 Israeli settlers had already occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with a further 500,000 planned for the short term by Israel’s Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who denies that Palestinians are a nation or have ever had land rights. Former Israeli generals are advancing a similar plan for a settler takeover of Gaza after the Palestinian population has finally been removed.

More recently, Article 7 intent has been pursued through a new Israeli law banning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) from operating inside Israel, including

Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel accused UNRWA of being infested with Hamas agents. Apart from removing the majority of international aid that would normally barely keep the Palestinian population fed, medicated and educated, the new law also has the effect of falsely declassifying Palestinians as UN refugees and removing any Israeli judicial recognition of their prior title rights to land the Israelis confiscated.

Self-defense or neo-imperialism?

There is no question that Israel is surrounded by states that, to varying degrees, are hostile. Some of them also harbor anti-Israeli extremists who have engaged in terrorist attacks, both cross-border and inside Israel. The Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, and the ongoing rocket barrages from Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon into Israel are high-profile examples. Some of these extremists call for the total annihilation of Israel and all Jews. The majority of neighboring Arab and Muslim states have, however, opted for a more “tolerated difference” approach whereby a modus vivendi has emerged, such as Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, UAE, Dubai, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and even Lebanon. Others, such as Syria, Iraq, Iran and Yemen, have not.

In such a historically hostile and turbulent context, Israel has created an extensive, sophisticated and multi-faceted defense “fortress” to prevent, deter or neutralize any kind or scale of attack from any source, external or internal. Israel’s population is minuscule compared to hostile states in total and, even if including its full citizen reservist capacity, its numbers of military personnel are dwarfed by theirs. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that Israel’s weapon systems, firepower, electronic warfare capacity, sophisticated electronic surveillance and intelligence systems, espionage agencies, motivation and training are vastly superior.

With Israel’s small population and modest GDP, all this has only been possible as a result of decades of financial, political and defense systems support from the United States. According to Reuters (September 26, 2024), scheduled US military aid over the next 10 years to Israel comprises \$35 billion for essential wartime defense plus a further \$52 billion for air defense systems. At an annual average of \$8.7 billion, the US aid to Palestinians pales in comparison, at a mere \$300 million.

Many independent observers have become increasingly reluctant to accept Israel’s stated justifications for its relentless response to the October 7 massacre. Their Gaza campaign, Lebanon campaign and violent land grabs from non-Jews in the West Bank no longer appear to be just about Israel’s “right to exist,” “right to self-defense,” and “right to pursue implacable and murderous enemies.” The daily video footage of mass civilian carnage in the immediate aftermath of Israeli bombardments of all kinds in Gaza contradicts Israeli official denials.

Beyond Israel’s stated military objectives, the elephant in the room now exposed is that the Gaza campaign also appears to be part of an aggressive nationalist territorial expansion project (or land grab), involving cleansing the ground of all opposition (actual and potential), as well as Palestinian population masses and infrastructure. Israel’s apparent ulterior motives in Gaza surface in the following examples:

Extra land and commercial development

Groups of settlers have been setting up temporary camps along the Israeli side of the Gaza border, waiting for the IDF to confirm that it is safe for them to cross over and mark out their desired settlements. These settlers firmly believe that God, through a proclamation of Abraham, granted all Jews the unchallengeable jus divinum right to

exclusively occupy the “whole land” of Israel. They assert that it stretches from the west bank of the River Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates in Iraq, as implied in the Bible (as in Genesis 15:18-21) and other ancient tracts.

A separate style of land grab in Gaza involves Israeli property developers, some of whom appear to have already moved in. Such developers are offering Israelis beachfront, new-build properties on Palestinian land, which employees wearing IDF military reservist apparel are now clearing of war-damaged, abandoned homes. According to one developer’s own promotional video, its employees are already erecting these new buildings.

Lawyers point out that all such land grabs are in breach of international law and may also constitute a war crime. In all such citizen actions, the Israeli perpetrators believe that, in addition to the claim of *jus divinum*, they can also now rely on Article 7 of the Nation-State Law 2018 to legitimize their conduct.

The Ben Gurion Canal Project

Originating in the 1960s, the Ben Gurion Canal Project centered on a plan to cut a deep-water canal from the Mediterranean, from Ashkelon near Gaza, into and across Israel and down to the port of Eilat and access to the Red Sea. This canal would thus bypass the Suez Canal and greatly reduce international shipping’s reliance on it. The plan’s bold vision might well have transformed Israel’s economy, but for some 50 years, it remained dormant, primarily because its unilateral implementation and annexation of Palestinian land would doubtless have inflamed the Arab world, rendered the canal vulnerable to Hamas attacks and sabotage, and probably provoked war again.

Over the past 20 years however, with the inexorable rise of militant ultra-Zionist groups in Israel and their increasing influence on

government, serious discussion of the Canal Project has restarted. Some right-wing interests in Israel are now advocating that the route of the canal should go directly through central Gaza. The suspicion is that under the current wartime regime of Netanyahu, with several aggressive ultra-Zionists in his Cabinet, the Gaza campaign provides an ideal opportunity to clear central Gaza of all Palestinians under the guise of military necessity. This may partly explain the IDF’s extensive scorched earth actions in Gaza.

The “whole land” justification and its scope

Both the Ben Gurion Canal project and the annexation of Gaza for Israel’s economic growth are consistent with the Greater Israel concept and its operationalization as it has evolved over a century or more. Numerous papers and articles on the subject of annexation of Palestinian land, Greater Israel and “the whole land” have appeared over the past twenty years, for example: The Guardian (2009), the Rossing Center, Migration Policy (2023), The Week (2024).

Recent independent research (MEPEI 2024) notes that the acknowledged founder of Zionism in the 19th century, Theodor Herzl, recorded in his own diaries that Eretz Yisrael included not only the traditional Jewish areas within Palestine but also the Sinai, Egyptian Palestine, and Cyprus, with the totality stretching from “the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates”.

This view is rooted in a dogmatic belief that around 2000 BC, Abraham declared that God had revealed to him that he had granted him and all his descendants the exclusive right to the “whole land” of Israel, as later loosely defined in various verses of the Book of Genesis in the Bible, the Judaic Torah and other related ancient tracts. Maps of the claimed Greater Israel show it encompassing not only the territories cited above, but also approximately 30% of Egypt, most of Iraq, a large

area of Saudi Arabia, the whole of Kuwait (1,300 kilometers from Tel Aviv), Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, and parts of southern Turkey.

As noted above, Herzl clearly favored an extended geographical scope for the “whole land,” once a national Jewish homeland had been secured in Palestine. However, in his overtures to and negotiations with European leaders to seek support, such a subsequent “ultimate phase” appears to have gone unmentioned. The proposed homeland was presented as a benign, multi-ethnic, multi-religious polity with equal rights for all and in which none of the rights of the pre-existing Palestinians would be jeopardized.

Herzl’s colleague Chaim Weizmann very effectively championed the Zionist movement, before and after Herzl’s death in 1904. 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. The short Balfour Declaration crucially 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.” Clearly, a coach-and-horses have been driven through that “understanding” long ago.

The erudite paper by Professor Chaim Gans in 2007 on historical rights to the “Land of Israel” distinguishes between historical rights and sovereignty, rights and “taking account of,” and between the concept and geography of the “whole land.” Others have argued that the “whole land” was always a spiritual concept that was never meant to be interpreted literally in objective, geographical terms.

Gans further notes the self-defining and self-serving nature of ultra-Zionists’ arguments, which are “valid only for those who believe them” and

observes that “...they do not make the slightest attempt to provide moral or universally valid arguments, only reinforcing the prejudices of the already persuaded.” He continues that one nation’s extreme quest for self-determination may expunge another’s legitimate quest and may involve a criminal land grab. The jus divinum justification for wholesale repression, land grabs, massacres and expulsions presents as being holy, righteous and praiseworthy. However, many regard it as a primitive expression of assumed a priori ethno-religious superiority and selfish entitlement at the expense of “the others.”

Neo-imperialist motives?

Why is Israel’s Gaza campaign against an enemy that is vastly inferior in all respects (now extended to its Lebanon campaign) so relentless and ruthless over such a long period and over so much foreign territory? Why is their firepower targeted so heavily on the civilian population and civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, food supplies and utilities?

The official Israeli justification is military necessity in the face of terror attacks. Yet, far-right Israeli cabinet ministers, such as Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben-Gvir, Avigdor Lieberman and Amihai Eliyahu, have been pushing extreme nationalist Zionist justifications and policies way beyond national defense. On January 3, 2023, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich publicly expressed their desire to expel Palestinians from Gaza. The Times of Israel described the policies and stance of the ultra-Zionist Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party, to which Ben-Gvir and Eliyahu belong, as “neo-fascist.”

Cabinet Minister Ben-Gvir, leader of the Otzma Yehudit Party, joined other senior far-right politicians from the Religious Zionism Party and the Likud Party at a Preparing to Settle Gaza Conference on October 21, 2024. While there, he

restated that the Palestinian population of Gaza should be “encouraged” to leave Gaza forever. Likud MP May Golan opined that “taking territory” and re-establishing Jewish settlements in Gaza would be a lesson that “the Arabs” would never forget. The conference organizer Daniella Weiss advocated an ethnic cleansing of Gaza since the Palestinians had “lost their right to live” there. Weiss’s Nachala organization claimed so far to have already marshaled 700 settler families prepared to move into Gaza once the Palestinians had been removed.

Eliyahu said in an interview on November 5, 2023, that Israel should take back control of Gaza and move in Israeli settlers, a position he has since repeated, and said that the Palestinian population “can go to Ireland or deserts...the monsters in Gaza should find a solution themselves.” 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.” He further stated in January 2024 that the entire Palestinian population of Gaza (not just the Hamas militants) should be subject to painful retribution as a means to break their morale and destroy any thoughts of independence.

Nations threatened by the Greater Israel plan

Few citizens of the nine sovereign nations (excluding Palestine) are aware of the predatory threat of Israeli annexation. These nations include:

Syria

Although a frontline Arab state that fought Israel in the 1948, 1967 and 1973 wars, Syria has tried to avoid any major confrontation with Israel for some years. Since 2011, the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad had been largely preoccupied with a bloody civil war against pro-democracy groups, as well as an Islamic State (ISIS) insurgency from 2013 to 2017. Israel captured two-thirds of the

Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 war and it remains an occupied territory that is a de facto annexation by Israel. Since October 2024, Israel has launched a series of air strikes on Syria and reports surfaced of the IDF creating a fortified buffer zone within the separation corridor between the Israeli and Syrian-held areas of the Golan Heights.

The sudden overthrow of the Assad regime in early December 2024 by a variety of Syrian opposition forces, led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, introduces great uncertainty over Syria's future governance and national security. The interim government has made clear that foreign military forces and their proxies in Syria must leave.

Russia, Iran and Hezbollah appear to be complying, but the US and Israeli compliance intentions are unclear. Israel has, however, taken the opportunity to pre-emptively destroy much of Syria's naval fleet and air force assets, and bomb military targets in and around the capital Damascus. IDF forces have also crossed the Golan Heights buffer zone and reached some 25 kilometers from Damascus to create a “sterile defense zone.” How temporary or limited this incursion will be remains to be seen.

The whole of Syria is marked on the Greater Israel map as being part of Eretz Yisrael.

Lebanon

In addition to its ongoing Gaza campaign, Israel opened up a new war front in Lebanon in October 2024 against Hezbollah. The military tactics employed by Israel during this invasion of Lebanon, including seemingly indiscriminate bombardment of Beirut and other population centers and short notice mass evacuation orders to hundreds of thousands of civilians, had all the hallmarks of their Gaza campaign. Despite a

ceasefire agreed on November 26, 2024, is the Israeli seek-and-destroy self-defense operation against terror groups masking a much bigger long-term objective of depopulating much, if not all, of Lebanon so as to facilitate its annexation into Greater Israel? The whole of Lebanon is also marked on the Greater Israel map as being part of Eretz Yisrael.

Cyprus

Since the Republic of Cyprus was formed in 1960, it has had a cordial relationship with Israel. The two countries share common interests in many matters. Israeli tourists and wedding parties are common sights in the southern Greek Cypriot-controlled area where I lived for many years. Greek Cypriot police officers often receive training in Israel. Israeli gamblers frequent the numerous casinos in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

In the past few years, both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot areas have also enjoyed an influx of investment by mainland Turks, Russians, Lebanese, Iranians, Gulf Arabs and Israelis. In the Turkish Cypriot northern third of the island, Israeli investors have become predominant, especially large property developers and entrepreneurs attracted by the real estate boom. The TRNC has welcomed foreign direct investment with few restrictions and relaxed anti-money laundering controls. However, such investment has caused property price inflation to such an extent that ordinary Turkish Cypriots can no longer afford to buy even a modest home. Such economic distortion has resulted in the TRNC administration effecting legislation in September 2024 to restrict residential property purchases to TRNC and Turkish citizens only and to one per person.

Turkish Cypriots are also concerned that Israeli investors and landowners are becoming so embedded in the TRNC economy that there is a

risk that some of them are, or could become, fifth-columnist agents for the Israeli government against Turkish Cypriot interests. Such concern received added piquancy when, in October 2024, President Erdogan of Turkey (TRNC's political and financial guarantor) issued a stark warning about Israel's alleged Greater Israel territorial ambitions against Turkey.

Israeli investment in the Greek Cypriot controlled southern Cyprus has seen involvement of fewer large Israeli property developers and entrepreneurs than in the TRNC area. This may reflect the much tighter EU regulation and anti-money laundering controls in the south. Smaller Israeli operators are in evidence in the south, plus a large number of individuals buying a property for their own use (such as a holiday home). Since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack in Israel, the number of individual Israelis and families buying or long-term renting properties in the south has rocketed, presumably as an "insurance" bolt-hole in case things go badly in Israel. Affluent Lebanese have also flooded the Greek Cypriot property market to escape the Israeli military onslaught.

As in the TRNC area, the rapid influx of large numbers of Israelis in 2024 has distorted the property market in the Greek Cypriot south to the extent that ordinary citizens can no longer afford to buy and traditional tourists from northern Europe can no longer easily find holiday properties to rent. However, unlike the TRNC administration, the Republic government in the south has yet to take any action on this.

Although Herzl included Cyprus as a potential Jewish homeland in his original scope of Greater Israel, he later dropped it in favor of Palestine. However, some ultra-Zionists today still regard Cyprus as being part of Eretz Yisrael.

Turkey

Turkey has had good relations with Israel since 1948. However, in recent years, Turkey's President Erdogan has been increasingly critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and his anti-Israel rhetoric has become increasingly harsh. In early October 2024, Erdogan bluntly warned of Israel's alleged long-term plan to annex parts of Anatolia into Eretz Yisrael. He also threatened to defend Lebanon militarily should Israel try to annex it. Certainly, any move by Israel to annex or even temporarily occupy north Lebanon or Syria would threaten Turkey's national security.

It should be noted that Turkey has large and well-equipped armed forces, ranking 8th out of 145 countries in the Global Firepower review, and is the second largest military force in NATO after the US. Erdogan's anti-Israel rhetoric and accusations have caused much discussion and debate.

Parts of Anatolia in south-eastern Turkey are marked on the Greater Israel map as being part of Eretz Yisrael.

Likely success of Israel's expansionist plan

In a limited sense, some of the Greater Israel Plan's objectives have already been achieved. Some territorial gains were made in previous wars, and subsequent imposition of Israeli laws, decrees and policies in the occupied Palestinian territories have dispossessed large numbers of remaining Palestinians. Israel's military, administrative and armed settler actions against the Palestinian populations of Gaza and the occupied West Bank before and since October 7, 2023, and repeated statements by its government ministers about permanently removing all Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, are consistent with the Plan and Article 7 of the Nation State Law.

There is, however, a need to consider:

The apparent existence of a Greater Israel Plan, which in its various elements is being openly promoted by ultra-Zionist Israeli government ministers and extremists. The practical viability of executing the Plan beyond annexation of currently occupied territories, given Israel's very small population and therefore inability to field long-term occupation personnel in other territories. The current high level of support (risen from 39% in May 2024 to an estimated 45-60%) among the Israeli population for Netanyahu's ruthless Gaza and Lebanon campaigns and his hard-line rejection of any ceasefire, two-state solution or other peace deal brokered by the international community, but which may collapse if the government fails to produce its promised concrete, permanent safety results for citizens. Netanyahu's steadfast and dismissive refusal to listen to US and other allies' entreaties to agree to a two-state solution for Palestine. Israel's growing international isolation resulting from its intolerable treatment of the Palestinians and a determination even by friendly nations to make Israel accountable to international laws and standards. Uncertainty over whether the US will continue its unswerving and undiluted financial and military support for Israel. The Netanyahu regime increasingly imposing sanctions against "ordinary" Israeli Jews and news media who dare to challenge its apparent proto-genocide campaign in Gaza, or who call for a two-state solution and peace accord with the Palestinians, such as the attacks on Haaretz.

It is clear that the current Israeli regime ideologically supports the Greater Israel Plan, and several Cabinet Ministers are actively promoting its execution as far as the occupied Palestinian territories are concerned. Less clear is how Israel views Lebanon and whether its recent

bombardment and invasion was limited to a short-term “search and destroy” mission against Hezbollah, or whether it will be later resurrected by more gung-ho IDF and ultra-Zionist leaders as an opportunity for a partial or total permanent annexation of Lebanon into Eretz Yisrael. Hopefully, cooler heads will prevail.

Israel may be assumed to conduct desktop “war gaming” exercises covering all its known and likely enemies and even others within the 1,300-kilometer reach from Tel Aviv on the Greater Israel map and beyond, but actual military invasion of the vast majority is highly unlikely. Vast numbers of trained military personnel are required for “boots on the ground” invasions and then occupation, often against much resistance, and Israel’s tiny forces make most invasions not viable. Then there is the problem of supply lines, communications and control over great distances, the environment, and the weather. Napoleon learned the hard way, as did Hitler, in their respective invasions of Russia and retreats from Moscow.

Given Donald Trump’s unconditional support for Israel and his rhetoric encouraging their uninhibited military aggression against all enemies, his second US presidency heralds an even less restrained Israel. Territorial expansion à la Greater Israel is now more likely. Even the threat of a regime-change war with Iran (beyond the Greater Israel map), led by Israel as Washington’s “local Rottweilers,” may convert to action.

However, it is not feasible for Israel (or any country with only 3 million combatants) to subdue — much less conquer, annex and control — surrounding territories whose antagonistic populations far exceed 150 million (and that’s excluding Iran’s 90 million). Nor can they rely on superior technology and weaponry to close the “strategic gap.” The US has still failed to grasp the latter weakness despite effectively losing in

Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan to low-tech peasantry. Even if achieved, subjugation of the region, including regime change in Iran, would not and could not impose a Pax Americana/Pax Judaica on the region. It would simply alter the systemic topography of endless power struggles and conflict.

Finally, beware hubris. Most “grand plan” empires emanating from megalomaniacs and extremist zealots fail because these involve narcissistic delusions of grandeur, supreme power, invincibility, glory, and of righteousness, which do not recognize their own limitations and feet of clay.

[Will Sherriff edited this piece.]



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Ten Reasons Saudi Arabia Should Host the 2034 FIFA World Cup Finals

Ellis Cashmore
December 20, 2024

Although the idea has scandalized many Western observers, Saudi Arabia should host

the 2034 FIFA World Cup. FIFA could promote positive change in labor practices, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ inclusivity. At the same time, Saudi Arabia's financial capacity and growing influence in global sports make it a strong candidate for hosting such a prestigious event.

FIFA, the world governing organization of association football (soccer), recently announced that its quadrennial tournament, the World Cup, will be staged in Saudi Arabia in 2034.

The birthplace of Islam in the 7th century, Saudi Arabia, which occupies most of the Arabian peninsula, became an independent kingdom in 1932 and, after the end of World War II, grew to become a major economy, revolutionized by the exploitation of the area's oil resources. It is the world's second top oil producer after the USA, accounting for 13.2% of the world's oil. Saudi Arabia (population 31,500,000) is ranked 18th richest country in the world.: wi

But there are strong objections, which seem to crystallize around four main concerns. The kingdom's human rights record, which includes issues such as the suppression of dissent, lack of freedom of expression and use of capital punishment, is often raised.

Like other Gulf states, Saudi Arabia has faced allegations of exploitative labor practices, particularly involving migrant workers and, despite promises of reform, questions about workers' conditions during the preparation for such events persist.

Homosexuality is illegal in Saudi Arabia, and same-sex relationships are punishable by imprisonment, flogging, or even the death penalty

under Sharia law. This contrasts sharply with FIFA's promotion of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusivity.

Arguably, the most powerful objection is Saudi Arabia's subjugation of women. The kingdom now allows women to participate in the workforce and drive cars unaccompanied, but guardianship laws that require women to obtain permission from male relatives for many activities and limited representation of women in leadership positions reflect deep-seated social inequality. Despite this, I believe Saudi Arabia is an appropriate host and offer ten reasons why.

1. Promoting ethical labor practices

Saudi Arabia's World Cup preparations will involve many large infrastructural projects, and FIFA's oversight should ensure these adhere to global standards. Over the next decade, FIFA's inspection teams will monitor construction sites to safeguard workers' rights, promote ethical labor practices and insist on compliance to its own standards. This decade-long timeline gives Saudi Arabia an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to improving working conditions, addressing past concerns, and setting new benchmarks for fairness and safety. By making transparency and compliance a condition, FIFA can leverage its influence to leave a lasting legacy of ethical labor reform in the region.

2. A wider conception of inclusivity

FIFA's stated mission is to celebrate cultural diversity. This presumably means the organization is prepared to embrace different cultures, regardless of whether their values and norms differ from Western equivalents. But FIFA's adoption of inclusivity as an animating principle is, at present, limiting: It effectively excludes nearly a quarter of the world's population, who subscribe to Islam. For this group (numbering about 1.9 billion),

same-sex relationships are a sin and women are not equal to men. As such Muslims' fundamental beliefs contrast with FIFA's commitment to LGBTQ+ rights and women's status in terms of rights and opportunities. FIFA has approved of players wearing rainbow colors and promoted women's football to signify its resolve. By selecting Saudi Arabia, FIFA may broaden its conception of inclusivity by welcoming nations with different and possibly conflicting religious beliefs.

3. Productive dialogue on LGBTQ+ rights

Hosting the World Cup in Saudi Arabia will surely promote dialogue about differences in approaches to LGBTQ+ rights. No one is naïve enough to believe Islam will change dramatically, if at all. But there is at least the possibility that religious and cultural differences can be addressed in a respectful and constructive manner. While significant cultural gaps exist, the visibility of LGBTQ+ issues during the event could encourage awareness and sensitivity, promoting incremental progress. The World Cup's traditional role as a unifying force could highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion.

4. Advancing women's rights

Saudi Arabia has made some strides in improving women's rights, and hosting the World Cup could accelerate this progress. The event's global spotlight will encourage the kingdom to further expand opportunities for women in sports and beyond. Recent developments, such as the introduction of women's sports leagues, indicate a willingness to evolve. A World Cup's emphasis on equality and inclusion would act as a stimulus, pushing for greater gender parity in sports while inspiring young Saudi women to break barriers and participate fully in social change.

5. Women's rights in other Islamic territories

While it's a lofty ambition, the World Cup in Saudi Arabia could also catalyze deeper global dialogue on women's status in Islamic societies. While the kingdom has made progress, significant cultural and religious restrictions remain. By hosting the tournament, Saudi Arabia would face international expectations to showcase advancements in women's rights. This external pressure, combined with internal aspirations for modernization, could foster more material changes, providing a platform for discussions about balancing tradition with contemporary gender equality. This sounds quixotic but the World Cup could help redefine how women participate not only in sports but in wider society.

6. Only Gulf States can afford global sports tournaments

World Cups and Olympic Games are increasingly expensive to stage, and by 2034, only a handful of nations may possess the resources or the political will to host such massively costly events (Qatar is estimated to have spent \$220 billion on the 2022 World Cup). Saudi Arabia's substantial financial capacity makes it an ideal candidate to sustain these costs and one of only a handful of countries prepared to. This pragmatic adaptation reflects the new reality of global sports, where Gulf States are becoming central hubs for high-profile events (see 10, below). FIFA's decision acknowledges this reality, ensuring that the World Cup remains a sustainable and spectacular global celebration despite mounting financial challenges. After 2034, countries outside the Gulf may not be able to afford the World Cup or, for that matter, the Olympic Games. Saudi Arabia, together with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates may become permanent homes.

7. "Sportswashing" is a misnomer

Critics often accuse Gulf States of using sports to improve their international image, a practice

known as “sportswashing.” Yet, hosting high-profile events inevitably has exactly the opposite effect, drawing global media attention to a country’s human rights record. By selecting Saudi Arabia, FIFA will guarantee that critical issues — such as labor rights, freedom of expression, and gender equality — remain in the media. This scrutiny will put pressure on the host nation to address their limitations, leveraging global attention to drive meaningful change or face the consequences of bad publicity. The World Cup’s visibility thus becomes a tool for accountability and meaningful change rather than mere optics, or image management.

8. Saudi Arabia will build state-of-the-art stadiums

The stadiums built for the Qatar World Cup in 2022 received widespread acclaim for their innovative design and advanced technology. Saudi Arabia is likely to follow the pattern, constructing state-of-the-art venues that will no doubt set new standards for sports infrastructure. These facilities would serve not only the World Cup but also future sporting and cultural events, providing lasting value for the kingdom and the broader region. By investing in cutting-edge infrastructure, Saudi Arabia would ensure a world-class experience for players, fans, and broadcasters alike, leaving a legacy of excellence in global sports.

9. Growth of the Saudi Pro League

The Saudi Pro League has not yet emerged as a significant player in global soccer, even though it now boasts several world-class players like Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar. But, by 2034, this competition could rival the English Premier League, Serie A and La Liga, showcasing top-tier talent and competitive matches. Hosting the World Cup could solidify Saudi Arabia’s position as a global soccer hub, drawing attention to its

domestic league and boosting its credibility. Increased investment in local clubs and player development would further elevate the Pro League, creating a sustainable ecosystem for soccer within the region.

10. The tectonic plates of sports are shifting

The Gulf States have made their intention signally clear: They want to be sports’ center of gravity. They have monopolized world heavyweight boxing title fights, created a LIV golf tour to rival the PGA, staged F1 Grands Prix and hosted an ATP Tennis Open. It’s possible that Qatar will petition for a tennis Grand Slam that will rival Wimbledon. Fans may balk at the idea, grumbling that there is no natural tradition of sports in these areas. But the clink of coin can be heard everywhere. No one knows for sure why the Gulf states want to “own” professional sports. They lose prodigious amounts of money on it. There is a certain cachet in staging prestigious sports events, for sure; but do the wealthy territories need status, distinction and acclamation? The nearest we can get to an answer is another question: Why does the billionaire art collector David Nahmad want the largest collection of Picasso paintings in the world? He currently has about 300 works and explains, somewhat inscrutably, his artworks are “as dear to him as children.”

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The (Re)Writing of Ukrainian History: Narratives and Legacies

Jack Gill
December 21, 2024

Since Russia's invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, the nation has undergone a significant process of national reinvention, with a focus on redefining its history and identity. Central to this reinvention are debates over which historical narratives can best represent a distinct Ukrainian identity, as alternatives to those of Russian–Ukrainian unity. By emphasizing its European heritage and democratic values, Ukraine aims to align itself more closely with Europe while distancing itself from Russia’s sphere of influence.

Ukraine has been experiencing a national rebirth since the Russian invasions in 2014 and 2022. Nationalist discourses centered on questions such as “What is Ukraine?” and “Who are Ukrainians?” permeate discussions with the goal of creating a new national historical narrative.

Every nation-state in Europe has such a national historical narrative. Everyone has been taught about the people and events that built their nation.

Perhaps most importantly, these narratives determine what lands and people belong within the state. For younger nations, this process resonates strongly in people's minds. Most other European nations, however, established their own narratives long ago.

A frenzy is taking place among students, academics and intellectuals looking to rewrite the course of Ukrainian history in a way that empowers an independent, European Ukraine and, above all, denies Russia’s claims over its territory. This situation is highly understandable. After all, to justify his invasion Vladimir Putin concocted his own historical narrative about Ukraine. His long-winded article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” written in mid-2021, depicted Ukraine (and Belarus) as culturally inseparable from Russia. For Putin, his piece serves to delegitimize Ukrainian nationhood and justifies Russia’s right to intervene. For Ukraine, refuting Putin’s narrative is paramount. However, the history of Ukrainian territory as a junction for cultural and political exchanges makes this an intricate task.

Caught between empires

As the American historian Timothy Snyder impressively illustrated over a 23-part lecture series in 2022 (all available on Youtube), throughout the last 2000 years up until the mid-20th century, different parts of Ukraine came under the control of different countries at different times. Despite this, three important periods stand out in Ukrainian history, which the country could draw upon to be cornerstones of its national story. Chronologically, these periods are Kievan Rus’ (c. 880–1240), the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795) and Austrian Galicia (1772–1918). This complexity means that drawing one narrative from one part of Ukraine may negate another narrative from another part. For example, stating that Crimea and Donbas belong to the modern

Ukrainian nation, while also claiming a common history with Poland leads to difficulty. Identifying one single narrative of Ukrainian nationhood that encompasses all of contemporary Ukraine's recognized borders is impossible.

Starting in the Middle Ages, the story of Kievan Rus' marks the first major European state ruled from Kyiv. It was huge, stretching from the Black Sea to Finland, and was founded by Norsemen. This period saw the East Slavic peoples adopt Orthodox Christianity. However, as a pan-East Slavic state, its legacy is too closely shared with modern Russia to function as Ukraine's main national origin story. At that time, the East Slavic peoples were much closer than they are today; they all spoke similar dialects and had similar customs. Crucially, Putin himself is currently using this story to justify his own narrative on Russian and Ukrainian unity.

Another period in question is Austrian Galicia, where a part of western Ukraine came under Habsburg control as part of the Austrian and later Austro-Hungarian empire. For the time, the region had considerable autonomy, and much Ukrainian nation-building, such as newly distinct Ukrainian literature, took place during this time and space. However, since most of modern-day Ukraine lay in the Russian empire during that time, Austrian Galicia was too small to be used as the main historical cornerstone for the whole Ukrainian nation.

This leaves the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Another vast state stretching from the Baltic Sea almost to the Black Sea, the Commonwealth encompassed much of modern-day western and central Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Poland. Nominally a union between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, towards the end of the period the state was also an early example of a constitutional, elected monarchy, characterized by great internal

diversity. Indeed, most may not know that the state adopted Europe's first written constitution — the May 3, 1791 Constitution — soon after the American and French Revolutions. Equally important is how the state met its end; between 1772 and 1795 the Commonwealth was carved up and partitioned by the absolutist monarchs of Prussia, Austria and Russia. Ukrainian lands were divided between the latter two. Poland and Lithuania would not exist as independent states again for another 124 years.

Lessons from the Commonwealth period

But where does Ukraine lie in all this? As an integral part of the Commonwealth, Ukrainians, referred to as "Ruthenians," enjoyed certain religious freedoms, and Ruthenian lands and nobility were recognized as distinct and equal in rights to their Polish and Lithuanian counterparts. They were incorporated into a (proto) democratic European state, enabling them to draw on a legacy of Europeanness and democracy, but also victimhood at the hands of imperial Russia, by whom they were annexed. Whereas until 2014 Ukraine had been firmly tethered to Russia from a historical perspective, from this view Ukrainian history can be anchored externally in another neighboring country— Poland. As a modern, prosperous democracy in the EU, Poland's success is what Ukraine also aspires for.

By granting Ukraine a degree of ownership of the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Poland will also benefit. Instead of another pro-Russian autocracy, like Belarus, Poland will have a friendly, democratic neighbor between it and Russia. Poland's own history of Ukrainian oppression during the interwar period, perhaps its most painful source of historical guilt, will be overlooked in favor of common history and values. An example of this that comes to mind is when Poland and Ukraine co-hosted the UEFA Euro 2012 football championship, whose literal

motto was “Creating History Together.” More recently, Poland’s overwhelming support for Ukraine has seen it take in millions of Ukrainian refugees and supply Ukraine with significant military and financial resources.

Shifting narratives westward

What does this rethought historical narrative mean for Ukraine’s future? First and foremost, by cutting threads with Russia, Soviet and imperial Russian history will be viewed through the lens of occupation and oppression, but also Ukraine’s overall triumph. Meanwhile, the linkage with Poland (and Lithuania) has worked to convince Ukrainians and other Europeans of Ukraine’s rightful place in European institutions (mainly the EU), bestow it with some valuable democratic credentials, and hopefully secure it from future Russian aggression by building solidarity with the rest of Europe. Outside of this Commonwealth legacy, importantly, are Crimea and southeastern Ukraine — areas currently under Russian occupation — as these lands never came under Polish rule.

Historical narratives are used in every country in the world to achieve societal harmony as well as political goals. Ukraine is no different. To pursue a European path it is necessary to convince people of Ukraine’s “Europeanness.” By emphasizing cultural and historical ties to Poland and EU values of democracy and tolerance, Ukraine is succeeding in pegging its tent in the European camp.

[Stephen Chilimidos edited this piece.]



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Judicial Fiat and the 14th Amendment

Andrew Morrow
December 22, 2024

Judicial progressivism can be undone easily because it’s always founded on the shakiest ground. Two jurisprudentially progressive castles seem ripe for being upturned in the next few years: The national right to gay marriage established by the case of Obergefell v. Hodges, and a 14th Amendment misinterpretation that grants birthright citizenship to anyone born on our soil. You will live in interesting times.

That which may be done with the stroke of a pen may be undone with the stroke of a pen.

This simple maxim is, in its two separate clauses, the nursery and the gallows of every piece of progressive judicial activism that has ever been forced upon an unwitting populace. Social change that is founded solely upon the whims of judges may be undone by the whims of contrary judges and there is no legitimate reason to gainsay the reaction.

The left loves judicial progressivism because it is a method tailor-made to enforce social

engineering from the top down. This is always the primary means of social engineering, but when social engineering is done by things like a monarch's religious conversion, as was the reason for the adoption of Christianity by tribes wholesale, or legislation, as was the case with things like the Civil Rights Act, there is a sense of legitimacy. There's a feeling that the wheels of state are turning how they are supposed to. The sovereign is acting in its sovereign capacity and making decisions.

But with judicial activism, you don't have this veneer of legitimacy because courts are not and never have been sovereign in any society. Power is sovereign. Whether power resides in the popular will or the divine mandate of kings, it doesn't reside on the bench. United States President Andrew Jackson noted quite correctly when he stated, "[The chief justice] has his decision, now let him enforce it," that rulings issued must be carried out, and judges don't take their robes off to see their orders executed. And when one court issues an order, a new court can simply undo it using the exact same powers as the first did to enact it.

With President-Elect Donald Trump's second victory, he will almost certainly have the opportunity to appoint at least one, but likely more, Supreme Court justices during this next term. Some of the elderly conservative judges will likely retire to make sure there's no chance of a Democrat appointing their successor, as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg so critically erred in not doing so before her death. There may be some opportune vacancies among the liberal judges, who are no spring chickens, either.

What will be done with these spoils of victory? I think two things that are likely to be dispensed with are Obergefell v. Hodges, the case that enacted nationwide gay marriage, and the assumption that the 14th Amendment provides for

birthright citizenship to all persons born upon the US's magic dirt.

Obliterating Obergefell v. Hodges

Obergefell v. Hodges is an easy one to dismantle. The decision is ludicrous in its reasoning and was meant to be a progressive high-watermark of the Barack Obama administration's attempts to remake the country. Finding a fundamental right to homosexual marriage in the US constitution is simple wishing. It was not based on the much more procedurally solid grounds of building out full faith and credit requirements to all other states based upon the states that had already enacted homosexual marriage in 2015; it was based on a desire to find a "fundamental right" no one ever knew of before 2015.

That is, there is a requirement already in the constitution that each state give "full faith and credit" to the rulings, licenses, orders etc, of every other state. By 2015, 37 states had already legalized homosexual marriage through their regular lawmaking process. Instead of determining that because of this, all states must give full faith and credit to homosexual marriages enacted in the states that allowed them, and recognize the marriages, the Court got hasty. In its scramble to signal its progressive bonafides, it determined that there was a fundamental right hidden in the constitution that no one had ever noticed before.

How will this be undone? Simple: The second Trump court will get a case challenging Obergefell v. Hodges and the justices now will say, "No, there clearly isn't a hidden right." Wash hands, go home, have dinner, done.

Setting the record straight on the 14th Amendment

The presumption that the 14th Amendment provides for birthright citizenship will be tougher

because it has more than a decade of inertia behind it. But where there's the will — and there appears to be — there's a way. But what is that way? The amendment says, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." Seems clear, doesn't it? If you're born under the jurisdiction of the US, you're a citizen, end of story.

Except no, of course it isn't. It wasn't that way for three-quarters of a century in practice. That pesky subordinate clause, "and subject to the jurisdiction thereof," may seem like it just means that if the US can impose its law upon you, you're qualified.

It didn't mean that way at the time, however. It didn't mean that until the executive agencies, that pesky administrative state I've opined on at length numerous times, began actually issuing citizenship papers to anchor babies in 1929. What the hell was going on before then? Well, the US was doing exactly what every state had been doing since time immemorial and gatekeeping citizenship to its own people, that's what.

Senator Lyman Trumbull, one of the key framers of the 14th Amendment, was exceptionally clear that its intention was to give the assurance of citizenship to freed black slaves in the South, and not just anyone who happened by, because "subject to the jurisdiction of" meant owing allegiance to. A freed black slave whose ancestors had been in the US for 300 years owed allegiance in a way that a Mexican illegal immigrant today simply does not.

United States v. Wong Kim Ark, often cited as the case that defined birthright citizenship, was not decided for another 30 years. When it was, its result was decided because Wong, the son of Chinese legal residents, did not owe allegiance to the Empire of China any longer.

Even this decision did not grant citizenship to the children of Native American tribes, which happened by special legislation in 1924. Why? Because tribes are sovereigns; their members do not first owe loyalty to the US, but to their tribe. This is why the major Native American tribes have also seen fit to issue their own declarations of war when the US has gone to war against, say, Germany in 1918.

So even today, a Native American is not a citizen of the US as well as a citizen of their tribe because of the 14th Amendment or because of United States v. Wong Kim Ark. Rather, they are because of special legislation that allows the children of a subsidiary sovereign, a vassal, to also be a citizen of the country. The 14th Amendment's supposed provision of birthright citizenship to illegal aliens and foreigners is not nearly as ironclad as popular leftist publications and commenters would have you think.

And why should it be? Even today, it does not apply to the children of foreign ambassadors who happen to be born in the US during their parents' tenure. Why? Because their parents do not owe this country loyalty and thus are not subject to its jurisdiction. But based on the popular maximalist take on the 14th Amendment, it should.

Birthright citizenship must end

Consider the absurdity that is nested in such a maximalist position. Let's suppose that an actual invading army lands on US shores and sets up a beachhead base. Within that army's camp followers, they have intentionally brought 10,000 heavily pregnant women. Once established, they induce labor, causing each woman to give birth. Under the current liberal understanding of the 14th Amendment, that enemy camp now has at least 10,000 US citizens in it. They were born here illegally, yes, but they were still born here

regardless. They're on our soil, and thus are subject to our laws. They're citizens.

Can we attack that armed camp? Remember, a US citizen cannot be deprived of life, liberty or property by the government without due process of law. Will we refuse to attack the army occupying our soil because it has within it US citizens? Or will we understand that they're not US citizens, and infants or not, they're manipulation tactics meant to facilitate the extraction and expropriation of resources from the native populace? Let the reader understand here.

Birthright citizenship will end because it is not the intention of the text. It will end because it must end. In the opposite direction of repealing birthright citizenship is, ultimately, the necessary conclusion: Every person on the planet is a US citizen that simply doesn't know it yet or simply hasn't had the correct paperwork done yet. It's not even that wild of an argument to make.

For the better part of the last century and all of the current one, we've been enforcing US laws and interests around the globe. So in a very real way, based on the current liberal understanding, all of the planet is subject to US jurisdiction and thus every person is a US citizen-in-waiting.

Is the US a nation that, like every other nation that has ever existed, is made up of a particular people with a particular culture occupying a particular place? Or is it an economic zone that you just need the right papers and stamps to be legal in, thus giving you the same right to the bounty as those whose ancestors tamed the land and built it? This is a critical question that Trump must answer decisively by heavily curtailing the ability for just anyone to be grafted into this vine.

I hope he has the constitution for it.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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From Subordination to Supremacy: The Indian Supreme Court's Rise in Governance

Allen David Simon
December 23, 2024

The rise of the Indian Supreme Court as the most powerful constitutional court in the contemporary world is a result of the growing judicialization of governance. However, its institutional insecurities have hindered its policy activism, leading to inefficiencies within the Court.

Since its inception in 1950, the Indian Supreme Court (SC) has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from a subordinate body into a central figure in Indian governance. This shift is the result of seven decades of struggle in which the SC navigated political and structural constraints to expand its jurisdiction and assert its authority. Over time, the

Court has increasingly taken on roles traditionally reserved for the executive and legislature, especially in areas of policymaking. This significant expansion of power has led Manoj Mate, a scholar of judicial politics, to argue in his work *Public Interest Litigation and the Transformation of the Supreme Court of India* that "the Indian Supreme Court is the most powerful constitutional court in the contemporary world."

The Indian Constituent Assembly, a body of elected representatives tasked with drafting the Indian Constitution after India gained independence from British rule in 1947, modeled the Indian Union legislature after the British "sovereign" Parliament, making Parliament the supreme legislative body in India. This decision prevented the Supreme Court, the highest judicial authority in India, from having equal status with Parliament. The Assembly designed the SC to be a weak, subordinate institution. The Indian Constitution, under Article 368, allowed Parliament to override SC judgments by making constitutional amendments. This arrangement ensured that the SC could not challenge Parliament's decisions effectively.

Indian legal tradition inherited the British approach of Austinian Positivism, a legal theory associated with the British philosopher John Austin, which focused strictly on formal legal rules and interpretations. This approach placed too much emphasis on adhering to strict legal formalism, rather than considering broader moral or social concerns, further limiting the flexibility of Indian jurisprudence and weakening the role of the SC.

When the SC began its work in 1950, it did not receive strong support from the public. Many viewed it as an elitist institution with no clear mandate from the people. This perception worsened after the SC's early clashes with the government in the 1960s and 1970s. In response, the Indian Parliament used its power to amend the

Constitution to limit the SC's influence. Parliament introduced several changes, including the Ninth Schedule and Articles 31B and 31C, along with the 24th, 25th and 29th Amendments. These amendments allowed Parliament to bypass minor delays caused by the SC's judicial reviews, encouraging the SC to avoid directly challenging the central government.

The SC's landmark *Kesavananda Bharti* case (1973), which established the Basic Structure Doctrine, limited Parliament's ability to amend the Constitution. However, this ruling led to hostility from the executive branch. The government responded by superseding senior judges when appointing the Chief Justice of India and strategically filling the Court with judges who were more sympathetic to the government's views.

The Emergency

The Emergency period (1975-77) saw a further increase in the government's power. This was a turbulent and controversial time when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency across the country, citing internal disturbances. The government used this period to consolidate power and curtail political opposition. During the Emergency, civil liberties were suspended, and a number of democratic practices were suppressed, including censorship of the press and the imprisonment of political leaders. The executive branch, led by the Prime Minister, was able to operate with increased authority, while the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, faced pressures that limited its independence.

The 40th, 41st and 42nd Constitutional Amendment Acts played a pivotal role in altering the balance of power between the branches of government. These amendments were designed to limit the scope of judicial review, reducing the Court's ability to challenge government actions and decisions. One of the most controversial

measures during the Emergency was the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), which allowed the government to detain individuals without trial. MISA was often used to suppress political dissent by imprisoning opposition leaders, activists, and anyone deemed a threat to the government's authority.

The Supreme Court's failure to intervene against the government's use of preventive detention and other authoritarian measures during this time significantly damaged its credibility. Its reluctance to challenge abuses under MISA, notably in cases like that of Shiv Kant Shukla, who was detained under the Act, led to widespread criticism. In these cases, the Court largely upheld the actions of the government, failing to protect the civil liberties of citizens. This contributed to a perception of the judiciary as a "regime court"—an institution that not only failed to defend fundamental rights but also seemed complicit in supporting the government's authoritarian agenda. The Emergency period, thus, marked a period of heightened executive power, limited judicial independence and widespread repression of political freedoms.

After the Emergency

The post-Emergency era ushered in a new age of judicial activism in India. During this time, the Supreme Court played an active role in shaping public policy and ensuring government accountability. A key development in this period was the rise of Public Interest Litigations (PILs), which allowed citizens and organizations to file cases on behalf of public causes. This expanded the reach of the judiciary and increased public access to the courts, making it easier for individuals to seek judicial intervention in matters of public concern.

In an attempt to restore public trust and confidence in the judiciary, the SC broadened the

interpretation of Article 32 of the Indian Constitution. Article 32 guarantees the right to constitutional remedies, allowing individuals to approach the SC if they believe their fundamental rights have been violated. By expanding this article's interpretation, the SC widened the scope of locus standi, which refers to the legal standing or right to bring a case to court. Traditionally, only those directly affected by an issue had the standing to file a case, but the SC's interpretation allowed both private and public interests to seek judicial relief. This meant that citizens, social organizations or even associations could now bring cases to the court on behalf of the general public.

In what can be described as a "classic Marbury move" (referring to the landmark *Marbury v. Madison* case in the United States, which established the principle of judicial review), the SC's *S.P. Gupta v. Union of India* verdict in 1981 endorsed the standing for PILs. This case marked a shift in the Court's approach, as it allowed public interest cases to be brought before the judiciary even if the petitioner was not directly affected. Following this, in *Fertilizer Corporation Kamgar Union v. Union of India* (1981), the SC assumed new roles of oversight and accountability, holding national and state entities to higher standards. The judgment established that citizens could challenge government actions and policies that were in violation of the public good.

By putting the PIL system into operation, the SC allowed all cases filed by citizens or organizations to be heard, even if they were not directly impacted by the issue at hand. This significantly broadened the scope of the judiciary's involvement in public welfare and reinforced the judiciary's role in ensuring government accountability.

Expansion of PILs

Throughout the 1980s, the Supreme Court of India significantly expanded its powers in Public Interest Litigation, which allowed the Court to take proactive actions in cases that concerned the public welfare. The SC introduced a concept in the *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Gujarat* case, which became known as "remedies without rights." This innovative approach allowed the SC to issue mandamus (orders requiring the government to act) in PIL cases without providing a conclusive verdict, allowing the Court to maintain continuous oversight in these cases. This flexibility made it possible for the SC to address social issues more effectively, even without the usual formalities of concluding a case.

In another landmark case, *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*, the SC further expanded access to justice by relaxing the standing requirements for filing PILs. The SC began accepting letters from individuals, social groups or any third-party litigant as legal petitions, thus allowing broader participation in the judicial process. This helped increase the Court's role in addressing social justice issues, especially those affecting marginalized groups.

The SC also asserted its authority over the judicial appointment process. In the *First Judges Case* the SC had ruled that the executive had the final say in judicial appointments. However, in the *Third Judges Case*, the SC reversed this decision and established that the judiciary itself would have control over appointing judges. This decision greatly strengthened the independence of the judiciary in India.

During this period, the SC became more assertive in addressing corruption and maladministration. In the *Jain Hawala Bribery Case*, the SC took a strong stance in tackling corruption, even as it faced political pressure. The SC also played a critical role in protecting the right to information in cases such as *Association of*

Democratic Reforms v. Union of India. In this case, the SC upheld the right of voters to access information about the criminal and financial records of candidates running for Parliament or state legislatures, ensuring transparency in the electoral process.

The SC further defended the right to information in the case of *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India*, a case which also led the Court to declare the right to food as an integral part of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, and the SC's decision broadened its scope to include the right to adequate food, emphasizing the state's responsibility to ensure citizens' basic needs are met.

In cases related to environmental protection, such as the *Godavarman Case*, the SC took on a quasi-administrative role. The Court set up a high-powered committee to act as its fact-finding arm in overseeing forest conservation efforts. This led some scholars to refer to the SC as a virtual Ministry of Forests, highlighting its increasingly active role in policy matters beyond traditional judicial functions.

Additionally, the SC took a leading role in human rights protection and played an essential part in police reforms. In the *Prakash Singh* verdict (2006), the Court issued directives for reforming police institutions to ensure accountability, transparency and the protection of citizens' rights.

In *RK Garg v. Union of India*, the SC upheld the *Special Bearer Bond (Immunities and Exceptions) Ordinance Act of 1981*, which allowed the government to combat black money in the economy. The SC ruled that the Act did not violate Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law. This decision supported the

government's efforts to curb illegal wealth and improve financial transparency.

Despite the Supreme Court's growing activism, it did not undermine parliamentary supremacy, even as it carved out a more active role in governance. While the SC became a key player in shaping public policy, it still avoided directly challenging the central government. The SC adopted a selective approach to assertiveness, supporting key government policies when needed. During the 1980s, the SC upheld the socialist-statist policies of the Congress Party, which was in power at the time. These policies emphasized state control over the economy and social welfare programs. Later, in 1991, when the P.V. Narasimha Rao government introduced liberalization, privatization, and globalization (often referred to as the LPG reforms), the SC did not challenge these pro-market reforms but instead supported their implementation. This marked a shift from state control to a more market-driven economy, with the SC playing a supportive, rather than confrontational, role in the changes.

The decline of Parliament

In the 1990s, the Indian Parliament became increasingly incapacitated due to the decline of one-party dominance, the rise of regional parties, the birth of coalition politics and a series of weak coalition governments. This shift in the political landscape allowed the Supreme Court to shed its previous criticisms as a regime court. With Parliament's diminished power and authority, the SC took a more active role in governance.

The SC used Public Interest Litigations as a tool to assume new oversight and accountability functions, intervening whenever governmental institutions, including Parliament, violated or failed to uphold the Constitution and laws of India. The SC began to act as a central, prominent and

active player in decision-making for both state and national entities.

As the apex court of India, the Supreme Court played a pivotal role in policymaking, defending civil and human rights and protecting vulnerable groups in society. It expanded educational rights, recognizing access to education as a fundamental right, and provided interim relief to poor prisoners while initiating reforms to improve prison conditions. The Court asserted the rights of prisoners and marginalized populations, ensuring their rights were respected. It introduced development and affirmative action policies to uplift disadvantaged communities and worked to curb state repression of human rights, holding the government accountable for violations. In the landmark Maneka Gandhi case, the Court expanded the interpretation of fundamental rights, broadening the protection of personal freedoms. Additionally, the Court addressed the issue of bonded labor, aiming to eliminate forced labor in India, and played a significant role in enforcing environmental policies, handling key cases like the Delhi Pollution Case, the Taj Mahal Pollution Case, and the Shriram Fertilizer Case, which tackled industrial pollution and its harmful environmental effects.

In these ways, the SC recognized its growing influence and power, becoming a crucial institution in protecting rights, holding the government accountable and shaping public policy.

SLPs and the judicialization of governance

The judicialization of governance in India reflects the journey of the Supreme Court, which evolved from a court struggling to assert its relevance to one that plays a central role in political and policy discussions in India. This transformation has made the SC a key player in shaping the country's laws and governance. However, this evolution is not

without its complications. One of the key challenges faced by the assertive SC is its failure at self-restraint—the difficulty in balancing its expansive jurisdiction with the need for institutional efficiency.

Raeesa Vakil, a lawyer and legal commentator, discusses this issue in her contribution titled “Jurisdiction” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution*. Vakil expresses concern over the SC’s broadening role, pointing out the blatant imbalance in its jurisdiction. This refers to the SC’s increasing involvement in both policymaking and governance, sometimes stepping into areas traditionally handled by the executive and legislature. Vakil questions whether the Court’s expanding power is in line with its constitutional mandate or whether it undermines the principle of separation of powers among the branches of government.

The Supreme Court, as the apex court of India’s unified and integrated judiciary, holds a central position in the country’s legal system. It exercises appellate jurisdiction over a range of cases, including constitutional cases, civil cases and criminal cases. These cases typically involve appeals from lower courts, where individuals or organizations seek to challenge or review lower court rulings.

When the Constituent Assembly established the Supreme Court, it imposed strict restrictions on the types of cases the Court could hear. The primary concern was that if the Court had too broad a jurisdiction, it could become overwhelmed by appeals and ultimately collapse under the weight of the caseload. These restrictions were designed to act as filters, ensuring that the Supreme Court would only hear certain cases, including civil cases involving significant financial stakes, criminal cases involving a death sentence due to the severity and finality of such judgments, constitutional cases that raised important legal

questions or impacted the public interest and cases certified by the High Courts for their importance.

In general, not all appeals have the automatic right to a hearing in the SC. The Court has discretion to choose which cases to entertain based on the above criteria.

Curiously, despite the SC’s original jurisdiction, appeals have come to form the core of its jurisprudence. A disproportionate amount of the SC’s caseload consists of Special Leave Petitions (SLP), which allow individuals or organizations to appeal a decision made by any lower court or tribunal in India. Shockingly, 88% of the cases heard by the SC are SLPs, highlighting the Court’s heavy reliance on its appellate role, rather than its original jurisdiction.

Over time, the Special Leave Petition has become a way for litigants to bypass the strict restrictions on appeals to the Supreme Court, allowing them to raise their grievances in the highest court in the land. This loophole has allowed more cases to reach the SC, despite the original limitations set by the Constituent Assembly to prevent the Court from becoming overwhelmed. Additionally, Parliament has gradually relaxed the qualifications for filing an SLP. For example, the 30th Amendment Act of 1972 removed the pecuniary threshold for civil cases, making it easier for civil appeals that raise substantial questions of law and public importance to be heard by the SC. Similarly, the Enlargement of Criminal Appellate Jurisdiction Act, 1970 allowed all criminal cases resulting in a life sentence or imprisonment for more than ten years to automatically proceed to the SC.

Inefficiency within the Court

However, the intention to reduce the number of appeals through SLP has largely failed. This is because the SC has been unwilling to impose any

restrictions on the SLP process, despite the burden of managing its vast jurisdiction. The SC has consistently defended the SLP process in an increasingly exaggerated manner, treating it as an "untrammelled" source of power that cannot be confined by clear definitions. The SC has resisted attempts to define the nature and scope of Article 136, which governs the SLP process, or to establish standard guidelines for the exercise of discretion in accepting or rejecting SLPs.

Moreover, Supreme Court jurisprudence has been shaped by the practice of division benches—two or more judges working together on a case. This system has led to a legacy of uncoordinated judgments, marked by inconsistency and discrepancies in the interpretation of law. As a result, the application of legal principles has been erratic, often influenced by emotional subjectivity when deciding whether to admit appeals under Article 136. This has led to arbitrary decision-making, with the criteria for accepting cases constantly evolving in unpredictable ways.

The absence of clear guidelines for how the SC should exercise its discretion in Special Leave Petitions has caused significant problems. Instead of maintaining its original purpose as a measure of last resort, the SLP process has become a normalized part of SC jurisprudence, with many cases routinely passing through the Court without sufficient restraint or consistent standards. The unequal expansion of the Supreme Court's jurisdiction has significantly contributed to the 300-year backlog of cases in the Court. While there has been much debate over the need for systemic reforms to address the burdens and structural issues of the SC, the judicial backlog is also a result of the jurisdictional imbalance in the Court's role. In retrospect, the SC's unwillingness to place limits on the number of petitions it hears has led to a loss of credibility in the judgments made by both higher courts and subordinate courts.

If parties involved in legal disputes can appeal to the SC for even the most trivial matters, what prevents someone from taking a menial issue all the way to the Court? The wide scope of the SC's appellate jurisdiction—which allows it to have final authority to overturn decisions from lower courts—has left the subordinate courts with little power or control over their rulings.

In hindsight, the SC's reluctance to better regulate its own jurisdiction has allowed it to maintain control over the entire judicial system in India, expanding its influence over national governance. However, this approach has also led to significant inefficiencies within the judiciary, as the SC becomes burdened with a massive number of appeals, leading to delays and a lack of timely justice.

While the Supreme Court's ascendancy in governance has strengthened democracy and the system of checks and balances in India, the Court's institutional insecurities regarding its hard-fought and hard-earned position have made it reluctant to reduce its jurisdiction. The SC's failure to self-restrain is largely a result of the historical struggle it faced to gain a position of influence in the Indian government, especially in the context of the Westminster model of governance. In this environment, the SC had to fight for its independence and its role as a powerful institution. As a result, the SC's growing pro-people activist stance—focusing on public welfare and rights—has come at the cost of its ability to function efficiently and manage its workload without being overwhelmed.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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Elections in Southern Africa: Which (Dis)continuity? South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia

Mario Zamponi
December 26, 2024

In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) lost its majority, signaling a shift to coalition governance. Botswana's elections reflected dissatisfaction with the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), with voters demanding economic reforms. In Mozambique, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) retained power amid allegations of electoral fraud. Across Africa, a younger, urbanized electorate is demanding economic and social change.

The 2024 election results in several Southern African countries highlight the political renewal issue. However, each case has distinctive characteristics that require analyses

diversified from the generic “wind of change.” For some analysts, the birth of South Africa’s new coalition government heralds change for the region and its leaders. They probably indicate that Southern Africa, a region whose governments are dominated mainly by former liberation movements, may be approaching a post-liberation movement era.

Indeed, in May, we witnessed the first significant indication when, in South Africa, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) lost its majority in May, making it necessary to form a coalition government. However, this did not depend only on the crisis of the ANC and the demands by some social and economic groups but also on the presence of other parties, such as the one headed by former President Jacob Zuma, which likely intercepted votes from poor and dissatisfied people, that is, those political and social groups that the ANC is struggling to reach today.

Specifically, some consider the role of Zuma through some themes of debate: The first theme is “Jacob Zuma as Donald Trump,” the second is that uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party’s strong performance can be explained by Zuma’s appeal to Zulu “nationalism,” signaling that they have successfully appealed to aspects of Zulu culture and history to get support. Third, MK’s rise may be the product of a “coalition of the aggrieved”: Those who have felt sidelined by the Ramaphosa government’s policies, as mentioned above.

October: Botswana and Mozambique

The two October elections in Botswana and Mozambique are interesting and, at the same time, have different elements.

Botswana differs from the regional context because, in this case, the nationalist party that led the country to independence in 1966 was not an

armed liberation movement as in most cases in the region (Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa). The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) then remained in government as the dominant party for almost sixty years.

The opposition Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) has won a majority in parliament; its leader, Duma Boko, 54, a Harvard-educated human rights lawyer, praised the peaceful handover. "What has happened today takes our democracy to a higher level," he declared.

The election outcome in Botswana highlights the need for renewal in a stable and democratic political system characterized by high levels of social inequality and forms of marginalization, which have somehow influenced the electoral results.

Indeed, when Botswana gained independence from Britain in 1966, it was one of the world's poorest countries. However, economic planning and the discovery of diamonds allowed the ruling BDP to provide efficient services and maintain political stability. The nation of 2.5 million people held elections every five years. In 2023, Botswana had the highest GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa. For decades, Botswana was considered one of the best-run countries in Africa.

But things are partially different. The people of Botswana voted to replace the party responsible for mounting economic grievances, particularly among young people. Unemployment and mismanagement were the top concerns among most voters: The BDP had not delivered on its promises of social development, and the cost of living was very high.

The election results register the anger of citizens over economic stagnation linked to a decline in the diamond trade, on which the

country's economy depends. Botswana's leaders have maintained inequality instead of spending on health, education and social welfare. A downturn in the global diamond market caused economic growth to plummet this year to a projected 1%, while unemployment rose to 28%. The new government will need to focus on reducing diamond dependency, stabilizing the economy and creating new jobs, especially for young people.

The new president has said he will try to contact De Beers as quickly as possible. He has also campaigned to raise the minimum wage and increase social grants.

Botswana is linked to other countries by elements of social marginalization and forms of crisis for some population groups. According to UNDP estimates, Botswana remains profoundly unequal, with a significant Gini index that places it among the world's top ten most unequal countries, together with South Africa and Namibia.

In Mozambique, there has been a significant demand for change, especially from middle-class and urban groups that do not see the old liberation movement — Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) — as an adequate interlocutor to solve the country's economic problems. Despite accusations of electoral fraud and serious violence by government security apparatuses, the official results have confirmed Frelimo in power and its candidate Chapo, who does not belong to the old guard of liberation fighters, as president. Consequently, a new form of political and social battle has opened, even violent, in the search for renewal and the search for stability in a country where historical inequalities and political and regional diversity are still very strong and where the armed Islamist rebellion in the northern province is causing further forms of destabilization to which the government intends to respond firmly.

As mentioned, turmoil has followed the presidential and parliamentary elections in Mozambique. The current protests have been more sustained and widespread, especially in the capital, Maputo. At the same time, opposition leader Mondlane actively calls for the annulment of the elections.

However, as mentioned by sociologist Ruth Castel-Branco, on the eve of the October general election, Podemos opposition was a party without a candidate, who found in Venâncio Mondlane a candidate without a party. He is a charismatic leader who managed to ride the wave of youthful indignation. A gospel preacher, Mondlane preaches about tyranny and corruption, development and prosperity, peace and unity. But he inclines toward authoritarian populists. It is unclear whether Podemos and Mondlane can deliver a new dispensation through their marriage, as Mondlane intertwines his theological views with a neoliberal economic agenda. Although Podemos has “socialist” roots, it does not have the political and organizational coherence to influence Mondlane’s political base. And it has become increasingly clear that there will be no peace in Mozambique if there is no justice.

Certain requests for change in Southern Africa depend on the historical context. The old liberation movements are in crisis, and today, they no longer seem able to control the social and political transformations in the era of liberalism, even if they try to respond to contemporary challenges.

November, Namibia

In Namibia, these elements have shaped the political debate, but the results of the November elections reaffirm the substantial status quo, solidifying the old party/movement's hold on power. What is certain is that the candidacy of a woman for the presidency by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) —

something far from widespread and obvious in Africa — has probably given the ruling party an extra opportunity, an element of “positive” novelty. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, born in 1952, is a former activist of the SWAPO youth league and belongs to the party's old guard. In a country where the opposition's requests for change are still unmet, she reverses a regional trend in which some social sectors seek political change.

“The Namibian nation has voted for peace and stability,” Nandi-Ndaitwah said. Her victory cements the SWAPO party’s 34-year hold on power since independence from apartheid South Africa in 1990, while opposition parties have rejected the results after technical problems, including shortages of ballot papers and other issues, marred the election.

Many regarded her as a seasoned diplomat untouched by the corruption scandals that engulfed some other members of SWAPO. Her triumph also signifies that Namibia defies a trend where restive younger voters in southern Africa punish incumbent liberation movements.

The Electoral Commission admitted to failures in organizing the vote, but the chairperson rejected all allegations of fraud. “I urge all Namibians to embrace the results with the spirit of unity, diversity, understanding and reconciliation,” she said.

In conclusion, we must recognize the search for change in the Southern African region's political and social history. Many of its voters come from poverty and unemployment.

Former liberation movements have emphasized their past armed struggles to provide historical legitimacy and to build popular support. However, the liberation narrative seems to be vanishing for the populations governed by these movements. They face the challenge represented by a new,

younger, more urbanized electorate, for whom past successes in achieving independence from colonial powers are less relevant than those of their parents and grandparents. The electorate's demand for change to address problems such as unemployment and social injustice is growing, along with a demand for a more significant fight against corruption.

Regardless of the outcome, the election results in the region should warn ruling parties that they must deliver on the economic promises they made to their electorates. Furthermore, they cannot expect to rule in perpetuity.

[Liam Roman edited this piece.]



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The Syrian Revolution Is a Big Opportunity for Turkey

Nathaniel Handy
December 27, 2024

Turkey's strategic influence in Syria has grown after dictator Bashar al-Assad's fall, with cautious gains amid past setbacks. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's goals for a Sunni-led, pro-Turkish government face challenges from Kurdish groups and global actors. Ankara's exclusionary policies risk undermining Syrian democracy and perpetuating regional instability rooted in ethnic nationalism.

For now, the Syrian revolution is certainly Turkey's victory, but there are obvious ways that they could still squander the advantage.

When Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, ominously suggested on December 11 that an unnamed "neighboring state of Syria" had been instrumental in the downfall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, it was obvious to everyone whom he meant.

The biggest winner in the region right now appears to be Turkey. Remember the Arab Spring? It may feel like a distant memory, but in many ways, its effects have recently resurfaced. What happened in Syria is almost exactly what Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hoped would unfold in 2011.

He had to wait and endure a great deal of humiliation in the intervening years. His bet on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt went disastrously wrong. Turkey may have supported the wrong side in Libya, which remains an unstable and messy stalemate. And in the Syrian civil war that followed the early democracy protests, Turkey took on the burden of hosting millions of Syrian refugees — more than any other state.

Turkey has long since had to scale back its ambitions in the region. Not only has it made friendly overtures to the Sisi regime in Egypt and to Saudi Arabia — despite the brazen killing in Istanbul of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi by the regime of Mohammed bin Salman — but also to Syria itself.

In a final humiliation, Ankara had even begun to accept that it must try to be friendly with Assad once more, despite pushing so hard to remove him. The pressure to support Assad again came from the need to send back Syrian refugees, whose presence had caused electoral issues in Turkey.

Turkey's victory

Turkey can, with some vindication, claim a great deal of credit for events in Syria. It was the deal they struck with Russia that allowed Idlib — the last desperate rump of rebel territory in Syria — to remain unconquered. It is clear that without Turkey, whose troops have been stationed in Idlib since 2017 as a “de-escalation” force, Assad and the Russians might well have finished off the rebellion years ago.

It is unclear to what extent the Russian leadership decided to keep Assad slightly off-balance for strategic reasons. This policy made Assad more dependent on Russia by deliberately ceding Syrian territory that remained beyond Assad's control.

If Russia did try to fool Assad, it backfired. However, as with everything in the Syrian conflict, it is not as simple as “Turkey takes all.” In fact, Turkish influence over Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) — the rebel group that led the lightning raid on Aleppo and turned into a stampede toward Damascus — is limited.

Turkish-backed rebels have established a presence in two pockets of territory north of

Aleppo. While these groups have played a significant role in the Syrian conflict, their primary focus has been on combating the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led militia that received US support and helped expel the Salafist self-declared caliphate Islamic State from northern Syria in 2019.

This situation may be a dream come true for President Erdoğan, but it could also fail to go Turkey's way. Turkey is a major obstacle to the ambitions of international actors who want a new Syrian government that is genuinely inclusive of all Syrians.

Turkey's Kurdish problem

A major ethnic group in Syria is the significant Kurdish minority, concentrated along the northern border region next to Turkey and Iraq. Their political leadership is dominated by parties associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been in conflict with the Turkish state since the 1980s.

The People's Protection Units (YPG) is a Kurdish militia that forms the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and controls al-Hasaka, a triangle of land sandwiched between Turkey and Iraq in the far northeast. They also control a strip of the northern border with Turkey, including the border town of Kobani, which was made infamous after the Kurds, backed by the US, led a successful assault to recapture it from the Islamic State.

While not actively supporting the Islamic State, Turkey appeared to favor it over Kurdish militias in the region. Turkey routinely describes these groups as 'terrorists' due to their connection with the PKK, which is designated as a terrorist group by many international organizations.

Many believed that Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), with its roots in political Islam, was more comfortable with Islamist jihadists than with either the Kurdish groups in Syria or the Alawite regime of the Assad family.

This preference is also evident in the aftermath of the war now that HTS — with roots in al-Qaeda — has led the siege of Aleppo. Many suspect HTS received some support from Ankara. Clearly, a successful outcome for Turkey would be a new Syrian government dominated by Sunni Muslims who subscribe to a mild form of Islamism. Ideally, Turkey would maintain good relations with outside actors while appealing to the new Syrian government to impose its rule over the Kurds in northern Syria. It would also be ideal for Turkey if the leaders of Syria suppressed the SDF, which is currently the de facto authority in much of the north.

Trouble ahead for Syria

Turkey's vision for Syria is unrealistic and is likely to result in a future where many parties are excluded from the table. If Ankara promotes and encourages actors in Syria who aim to suppress Kurdish power and representation, it risks undermining the country's quest for democracy. This could lead to a new regime that represses non-Arabs in the same way the Assad regime did. The Syrian Arab Republic held ethnic exclusivity as a fundamental aspect of its society. This type of exclusion is also the root of Turkey's intractable issue with its Kurdish minority.

Until the states of the Middle East can begin to move beyond narrow ethnic nationalism and recognize the multi-ethnic nature of their polities, we are likely to see continued repression and instability. In this grim future, each state will feed off the weaknesses of its neighbors to gain influence and leverage in their affairs.

[Joey T. McFadden edited this piece.]



Nathaniel Handy is another academic and writer with over ten years of experience in international print and broadcast media. He has published many scholarly articles on the evolution of Turkey's political structure.

All the Light We Cannot See: Urgency for Understandable Academic Writing

Ranjani Iyer Mohanty
December 27, 2024

Academic writing should be clear and accessible to both scholars and the general public. To achieve this, academics must simplify their work through clear summaries and public outreach. With the reelection of Donald Trump, who has proposed dismantling the Department of Education and whose movement displays outright hostility toward academia, effective communication is now more crucial than ever to preserve the value and impact of academic research.

I've always thought I had stumbled my way into a lovely niche job: being an academic editor to professors in the field of Information Systems in universities scattered around the world. They send me their fascinating, leading-edge, research papers and I do my best to make them more readable. One woman, happily doing her

little thing, on her own time, on the edge of the map. Only recently did I realize that perhaps I'm not alone, it's not so insignificant a task, time is ticking, and my work may be more central to learning, knowledge, and academia at large than I thought.

While in Cambridge Massachusetts this fall, absorbing the hallowed atmospheres of its various famed academic institutions, I attended an interesting event at the Harvard Book Store, an independent enterprise. In one section, the store staff had rolled aside several packed shelves to create a space — both physical and mental — for Leonard Cassuto to talk.

Cassuto is a professor of English at Fordham University in NYC. He has written several books and articles on how to improve the American higher education system, including his latest, *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter*. He wrote the book for two reasons: “academic writing has a bad public reputation” and indeed, “reading most academic writing is work” — “both in the literal and the figurative sense.”

Cute title, but it raises hard questions

On the one hand, Cassuto's book title is cute. But on the other, it is unsettling and gives rise to several fundamental questions. Why have readers not mattered in academia? Should readers matter? And what's the purpose of academic writing anyways?

But firstly, who are the readers? In general, the readers have consisted of students and other academics.

Why have readers not mattered in academia? The primary reason is that the audience is captive. Undergrads are assigned required readings by their lecturers, are often tested on it afterwards, and so have to read it. Graduate students have to read

many papers in order to build their foundational knowledge and develop their own thesis. Faculty need to continue reading to research and write their own papers. They also read to keep up with advances and evolving concepts in their subject. In summary, in order to participate successfully in the system, students and faculty have to read academic writing.

Should readers matter? Of course. Academic writing is after all meant to be read and understood by as many people as possible: not just students and academics, but by interested members of the general public as well. Increased accessibility to academic writing can serve vital functions: improve learning, prompt more and higher quality research, facilitate engagement, and increase support.

What is the purpose of academic writing? As the old couplet asks, is it to dazzle them with brilliance or baffle them with bullshit? I'd say neither. I'd say “strive for clarity” — and if brilliance is there, it will shine through. The purpose of academic writing should be to share knowledge such that others can easily understand it, learn from it, and use it — either by building on it, or by arguing against it and presenting an alternative. So then, readers must matter.

Cassuto asks us to think of the reading of an academic piece of writing as a carriage journey with a driver (the writer) and a passenger (the reader), where the job of the driver is to make the journey predictable, smooth, interesting but reassuring, and positively memorable — and most importantly to ensure that the passenger stays in the carriage until the end of the journey.

Some of the earliest research papers I edited were written by Izak Benbasat, a renowned scholar in the field of Information Systems and now Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia. He set the context upfront, stated the

research question and explained its significance, defined key terms, described the methodology, discussed the findings and their relevance, and indicated avenues for future related research. He wrote in a way that was clear and easy to understand. He spoiled me. I thought all research papers were written with such clarity; not!

Academic writing in the time of Trump

Now that US President-Elect Donald Trump (a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania) has been given a mandate to implement his proposed plan of “dismantling” the Department of Education, the need to make academic writing more accessible is all the more urgent. There has been talk of reduced funding for certain topics, less support for DEI measures, more book bans, and a prohibition on student protests. There may even be objection to certain courses being taught or intervention in the content of some courses. Vice President-Elect JD Vance (a graduate of Ohio State University and Yale) has said, “If any of us want to do the things that we want to do for our country, we have to honestly and aggressively attack the universities.”

Author Edward St. Aubyn said, “We are entering the Dark Ages, my friend, but this time there will be lots of neon, and screen savers, and street lighting.”

Academics can no longer afford to live in ivory towers. The solution is not to change what and how they think, but to clearly explain their reasoning. It’s not to change their focus, research questions, and hypotheses, but to clearly explain them. And most importantly, to explain how their research matters to the general public. They must be able to communicate understandably and convincingly — firstly with those within their community of academics and students, but secondly and equally importantly, with the general public.

Forging the connection

By communicating in an easily readable and useful manner to others within academia, academics can accomplish several things: facilitate learning in students; spark interest and draw them deeper into an area of study; encourage interaction and collaboration — both intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary — among scholars; and advance the development of ideas as well as practical implications. To do so, one thing academics need to do is write in a clear manner — as per the many tips given by Cassuto.

By communicating in an understandable and interesting way to the general public, academics can generate a broader audience, love of knowledge, value of academia, and support for their institutions. Academic writing — or at least a summary of it — must be accessible to the general public. One way to do is to have a “General Abstract.” Most papers already begin with an abstract which is an academic summary of the paper. But sometimes such abstracts are best understood only by area experts. A general abstract could speak to the layperson, using simpler language and less jargon, but clearly explaining the research, its association to the field at large, and its relevance to society.

There are also several other ways academics can engage the public. Academics can publish their thinking in mainstream newspapers, magazines, and popular online platforms. They can offer public lectures on aspects of their expertise that may be of particular interest to a general audience or related to current affairs. They could discuss their research on weekly podcasts directed at general audiences.

Once the general public understands academia — what it is striving to do, the context, its process of reasoning, its findings and their relevance to our world — several things may happen. They may

become more interested in what it is saying and doing. They may become more engaged with academia, and networks can form between academia and the public. They may develop deeper critical thinking and contextualization. They may better distinguish between fact and fiction. They may come to see the value of academia. But the onus is on academics to help the public understand their work. Cassuto says it well: “A writer who does a good job forges a connection with the reader, and sympathetic understanding flows back and forth.”



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organizations in Canada, England, Holland, India, and Portugal, Ranjani now works as a writer and editor for business, academia, and the nonprofit sector. She divides her time between North America and Asia. Her social commentaries have appeared in several newspapers, magazines, and websites, including International Herald Tribune, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times and The Atlantic.

Diplomacy, Cannon Fire and Türkiye’s Nostalgia for Empire

Jean-Daniel Ruch
December 29, 2024

The capture of Damascus on December 8 by the Hayat Tahrir al-Shams (HTS) rebels suddenly reminded the world that there is another power capable of playing a major role on the world

stage in the second quarter of the twenty-first century. It's not the USA, Russia or China. It's Türkiye. The signing three days later, under the aegis of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, of an agreement between Somalia and Ethiopia illustrates Türkiye's determination to project its power beyond its immediate borders. Even to the borders of the former Ottoman Empire.

Türkiye is trying to play down its role in the spectacular overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. But you'd have to be blind not to see it. In 2016, after the battle of Aleppo won by Assad loyalist forces backed by Russia and the Lebanese Hezbollah, the HTS Islamists took refuge in Syria's northwest corner, in Idlib. The only supply route was through Türkiye.

Anxious to stem the flow of Syrian refugees, Türkiye facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid from its territory. It also deployed a number of military units. Western experts were on hand to transform Mohammed al-Joulani, decreed by Washington to be a dangerous terrorist, into a cigarless Che Guevara-style freedom fighter.

Meanwhile, the Islamist militia, said to number 30,000 soldiers, was trained and equipped. You can guess by whom. On December 12, just four days after the fall of Assad, Ibrahim Kalin, the powerful head of the Turkish secret service, prayed at the Umayyad mosque. Quite a symbol. Built in the early eighth century, this architectural gem houses the relics of St. John the Baptist. Next door is the tomb of Saladin, the man who drove the Crusaders from Jerusalem in 1187.

The capture of Damascus by their HTS allies was a major success for the Turks. The next step in this part of the world will be to oust the Kurdish militias associated with the Turkish PKK from

northeastern Syria, where they benefit from American protection and Syrian oil resources, captured in 2016.

Despite its economic difficulties — chronic inflation of 50-75%, a budget deficit in excess of 5% of GDP, dependence on Russian hydrocarbons — Türkiye does not hesitate to invest in what it considers to be the best interests of the nation. It has massively developed its defense industry over the last ten years. Its arms exports are set to rise by 25% by 2023. But Ankara also invests in its diplomacy.

The combination of pen and cannon in the projection of Turkish influence in the world could not have been better illustrated than at the start of the war in Ukraine. In 2022, while Erdoğan was mediating between Putin and Zelensky, he was delivering drones to Ukraine. And this President of a NATO member country was collecting twenty billion from Moscow for a concession to build and operate a nuclear power plant on the Mediterranean coast. Uncle Sam frowned, of course. But the ally's geostrategic position excuses its talent for turbulence.

While his HTS allies were celebrating their victory in Damascus, the head of Turkish diplomacy, Hakan Fidan, was already in Qatar meeting the two defeated powers, Russia and Iran. In the Turkish mindset, there is no contradiction: There are only interests. Ankara has defeated its two powerful neighbors on Syrian soil, but that doesn't prevent it from seeking to maintain good relations with them. Military and diplomatic power are two vectors of Turkish influence in the world. Where does one begin and the other end? We need to ask the question: What drives Erdoğan and his troops?

In 2021, the Turkish President published a book entitled “The World is Bigger than Five”, a plea for reform of the United Nations Security Council

to reflect the cultural, religious and geographical diversity of a multipolar world. Even if he doesn't make the specific claim, it's clear that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan believes Türkiye should have a privileged place in the new world governance he is calling for. Straddling two continents, heir to a multicultural empire stretching from the heart of Europe to the Indian Ocean, capital of the Muslim world for centuries, Türkiye wants to rid itself of the American tutelage imposed after the 20th century's two world wars. It wants to play its own part and believes it has a vocation to play a global role. Didn't Napoleon say that if the world were a state, Istanbul would be its capital?

If you want to realize your dreams of greatness, you have to start on your own doorstep. Türkiye's top priority is the Kurdish question. Ankara denies the existence of a “Kurdish problem.” The problem is the PKK, a terrorist organization of Bolshevik inspiration, according to Türkiye. It pursues a separatist struggle from Syria, where it calls itself the YPG and enjoys American support.

The offensive launched by HTS on November 27 was accompanied by another offensive, this time directed eastwards along the Turkish Syrian border. It aimed at creating a 30 km buffer zone inside Syria, free of Kurdish forces. The Americans intervened diplomatically to halt the advance of Ankara-affiliated forces, known as the Syrian National Army, even though they had already crossed the Euphrates.

Erdoğan may be expecting to negotiate from a position of strength after his victory in Damascus and in anticipation of Trump's arrival at the White House, who has announced his intention to withdraw the 900 or 1,000 American troops remaining in Syria. But he may be tempted to finish the job before the unpredictable macho man with the blond locks takes office.

Türkiye's foreign policy is not just geographically oriented. It operates in all directions, at 360 degrees. We've talked about Syria. We didn't mention that normalization in this part of the Middle East could lead to the construction of a pipeline from Qatar to Europe. Through Türkiye, of course. And peace in Ukraine, promised by Trump, could also make the west of the country a hub for Russian hydrocarbons. Covering everything from the battleground of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — “Gaza is Adana”, Erdoğan hammered home, recalling the common Ottoman destiny of the two cities — to the borders of China (the Uighurs are considered cousins by the Turks), via the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and even — as we have just seen with the Ethiopia-Somalia agreement signed in Ankara on December 11 — Africa, Turkish diplomacy makes the head spin.

A symbolic example: China. Far from the ineffectual Western incantations lamenting the Uyghur genocide, Hakan Fidan took the trouble to visit the Uyghur autonomous region of Xinjiang in June 2024, a first for a minister from a NATO member country. Beijing wants to cajole Ankara, a choice stopover for the new Silk Road, just as Istanbul was for the old one. The Chinese understand the Turkish influence on these distant cousins occupying what was once called “Chinese Turkestan.”

In its quest for the rebirth of an empire, Erdoğan's Türkiye can rely on a triumvirate of strongmen driven by the same impulses: a deep-rooted spirituality rooted in the Sufi movement and the irrepressible desire to reconnect with the country's Ottoman past.

Who are these three personalities? Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs after ten years as head of the secret service; Ibrahim Kalin, Fidan's successor in the service after advising Erdoğan, and Erdoğan himself. Collectively they

have more experience than any of their Western colleagues. Their religious values are at least as powerful a fuel as the woke values now prevalent among their European counterparts.

Above all, they have a crucial advantage over their European counterparts: They have the luxury of strategic patience.



Jean-Daniel Ruch is a former Swiss diplomat. He served as Switzerland's ambassador to Serbia and Montenegro, then to Israel and finally to Turkey. Jean-Daniel also served as a political advisor to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Born in 1963 in Moutier, Canton Bern, Jean-Daniel studied international relations and international security in Geneva. Éditions Zarka published his book *Crimes, Hate and Tremors* in June 2024.

Is Gambling Addiction Really an Addiction?

Ellis Cashmore
December 31, 2024

It is easy to classify gambling addiction as a medical condition, but problem gambling is better understood as a behavior driven by rational choices and the thrill of excitement. Medicalizing gambling creates the illusion that one's behavior is beyond one's control, undermining personal responsibility and practical solutions.

Last September, La Monde reported a surge in online sports betting in Brazil: In the first seven months of 2024, approximately 25 million Brazilians began participating in online betting, with an average of 3.5 million new bettors each month. Gambling's sudden growth in popularity raised concerns about its impact on consumer spending and financial well-being. A survey by the research organization Instituto Locomotiva revealed 51% of Brazilians used money intended for savings to place bets.

In December 2024, the UK's National Health Service (NHS) announced that referrals for gambling addiction shot up almost 130% between April and September, prompting the NHS national director for mental health to say: "Addiction is a cruel disease that can take over and ruin lives. NHS England has almost doubled the number of specialist clinics available in the space of a year."

By contrast, Brazil has not structured its healthcare system to accommodate any problems arising from the spike in gambling. The country doesn't officially recognize gambling addiction. It is by no means alone: Several other countries, including Kenya, Ukraine and the Philippines, allow legal gambling but don't recognize gambling addiction as a medical condition. The US, Sweden and Australia are among the countries that accept gambling addiction as a treatable condition. But are they right?

The history of gambling and its enemies

Betting money on games of chance is as close to a cultural and historical universal as you can get. The earliest known dice date back to 3000 BCE, discovered in archaeological sites of the Indus Valley Civilization (modern-day Pakistan and northwest India) and ancient Mesopotamia. Gamblers probably bet on games of chance or even board games, such as senet.

Card games became popular in medieval Europe, though the emergence of organized sports from the eighteenth century onward provided a new landscape for gambling. Prizefighting and horseracing prospered because of the fancy, a following of aficionados who gambled enthusiastically (over time, fancy evolved into "fans"). A combination of human curiosity, acquisitive impulses and an ability to think probabilistically maintained our interest in gambling.

People during the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries viewed gambling through a moral prism. The Salvation Army, founded in London in 1865, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, founded in Ohio in 1874, and the Methodist Church were religious organizations that opposed gambling, decrying it as sinful and a product of individuals' moral failings or a more general moral decay.

Moral condemnation softened in the twentieth century as lotteries, casinos and, in Britain, the football pools normalized gambling, making it respectable. Britain's Betting and Gaming Act of 1960 significantly liberalized gambling. At that point, gambling was framed as a pursuit, which, if followed zealously could lead to ruin or, conversely, riches. It lay outside the scope or concerns of medicine.

That changed in 1980 when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) formally classified "Pathological Gambling" as a mental disorder in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). In 2013, this organization reclassified it as "Gambling Disorder" in the DSM-5, and categorized it alongside substance-related and addictive disorders.

Medicalization

The expansion of medical authority and the categorization of what were once non-medical issues as medical problems is called medicalization, a process driven by the power the medical profession has accumulated to define a wide range of experiences and practices as medical issues. In this way, the medical profession has widened its jurisdiction by reconceptualizing conditions that have origins in social and cultural circumstances as medical problems requiring professional intervention and treatment. Conditions like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and alcoholism have been medicalized. The medical profession, through its ability to regulate itself and define what constitutes illness, has shaped modern understandings of health, illness, and normality.

For example, Body Dysmorphic Disorder was first included in the DSM-IV (published in 1994) under the heading of Somatoform Disorders. In the DSM-5 (2013), hoarding disorder was added as a distinct condition. Other conditions were near-misses: Sex addiction was proposed in DSM-5 but not included (2013). And, while oniomania (compulsive shopping) has been recognized as a behavior of concern, it has never formally been classified as a standalone disorder in the DSM, though it is sometimes considered a manifestation of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

These conditions resemble more traditional forms of addictions that are compulsions that instigate biophysical changes in the human body and brain. But they aren't the same: Addictions to, for example, alcohol, nicotine or opioids differ from compulsive behaviors (like shopping or exercise addiction) that don't involve identifiable physiological processes and biochemical markers.

As recently as the 1990s, we weren't sure whether gamblers who lost consistently and occasioned hardship to themselves as well as their families deserved blame or community sympathy.

Now we know: it is the latter. Gambling addicts, sometimes known as problem gamblers and occasionally compulsive gamblers, are afforded patient status and treated accordingly. They are not credited with volition, by which I mean the faculty or power of using one's will, or agency, that is the capacity to act in a way that produces a desired effect. Instead, they are invalidated and confirmed as having an illness. Poor decision-making is rendered a pathology.

Rational gamblers

Gambling is a social activity, drawing people from diverse backgrounds together to pit their wits and sagacity against one another. No one is forced to engage and, despite arguments that there is a compulsive element to gamblers' behavior, there is ultimately a question behind placing a bet: "Will I win?" The answer determines the action. In 2013, my erstwhile colleague Jamie Cleland and I conducted a modest research project with 2,500 self-proclaimed gamblers. The results challenged what we called "the myth of the gambling addict" and supported a model of the typical sports bettor as rational decision-makers who understand the odds and the technicalities of betting, rather than helpless victims unable to control their compulsions.

Gambling is a rewarding activity even if the gambler loses money: The gratification is in the frisson of excitement it confers. Labeling some gamblers "compulsive" is misleading: They're not driven to gamble by overpowering forces but by the prospect of being thrilled. Even when they realize the damaging consequences of losing, they choose to gamble from a range of possibilities. Being encouraged to think of themselves as something other than volitional agents means a kind of surrender is offered.

Sanitization

Addiction has been sanitized to the point where people have assimilated it into their self-conceptions and believe they're helpless to resist. Writer Adele Walton concedes she is, or was, addicted, in her case to social media apps. She recently reflected on "the behavioural conditioning that I'd unconsciously consented to since getting my first smartphone aged 13" and its consequences: "I couldn't go 15 minutes without reaching for my phone, and the disappointment would surge each time I realised I couldn't get that instant dopamine hit." (Dopamine is a neurotransmitter — a chemical messenger in the brain — that's associated with feelings of pleasure and reinforcement of behaviors. While there's direct and persuasive evidence that Class A drugs, like cocaine and methamphetamine stimulate the release of dopamine and consequent habit formation, there's no compelling proof that social activities like gambling or engaging with social media have comparable mechanisms. The fulfillment derived from these activities is unlikely to be biochemical.)

Some might even exploit the sanitization. Like Amit Patel, a former financial manager for the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars who stole \$22 million from the team and then sued FanDuel for \$250 million, saying the betting company preyed on his gambling addiction by extending him more than \$1.1 million gambling credits.

There are undeniably gamblers who have problems, but the sources of those problems probably lie outside the sphere of gambling and are unlikely to be addressed, less still solved, by medical or therapeutic means. Interventions rely heavily on counseling or behavioral therapy. They're probably not addressing an underlying medical cause, if only because there isn't one. Self-restraint, impulse control and improved decision-making are the kinds of objectives achievable without medical diagnoses and the admission of addiction it implies.

Addictions have become so prevalent that practically any behavior with undesirable outcomes that's repeated without modification is likely to be called addictive. About 30% of DUI offenders in the US are estimated to reoffend, continuing to drink and drive even after facing legal consequences. In the UK, a similar pattern of recidivism is emerging. No one suggests drivers can be addicted to driving-under-the-influence. Yet.

Some years ago, the term "dependence" seemed poised to replace "addiction." This described the state of relying on or being controlled by something or someone and had no clinical or pathological implications, focusing instead on how circumstances and cultural contexts shape behavior.

"Addiction" is easier on the intellect: It is a definable condition with clear boundaries, usually rooted in biology or psychology, offering a simple way to understand behavior that might otherwise be complex and opaque.

[Ellis Cashmore's "The Destruction and Creation of Michael Jackson" is published by Bloomsbury.]



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