

CIRCULUM MUNDUM

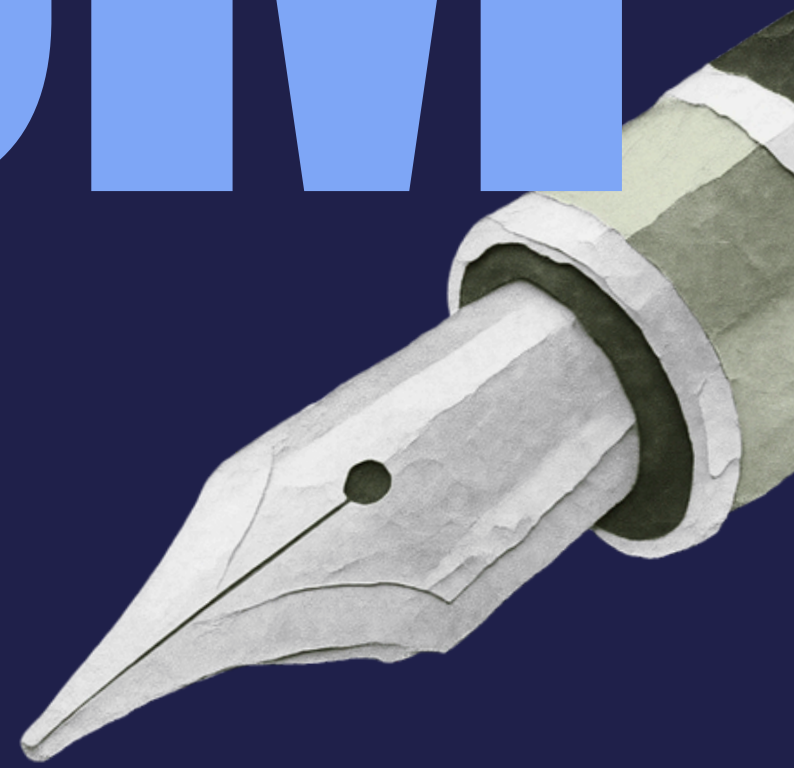
2025/26

WELCOME TO

UCL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SOCIETY'S

JOURNAL AND PODCAST

SINGLE-ISSUE
PUBLICATION



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WELCOME

Circum Mundum, Latin for “around the world”, is the official journal and podcast of the UCL International Relations Society.

First established in 2021, Circum Mundum has now been running for 5 years. It is a space for students to write, discuss and share ideas about international politics and the world around us.

Everything we publish is made possible by our society members, from articles and interviews to podcast episodes and opinion pieces. Our aim is to make current international affairs more accessible, while also giving students the chance to gain experience in writing, editing and publishing their work.

This single-issue publication brings together the work we have produced over the 2025/26 academic year. It reflects the interests and perspectives of our contributors, and celebrates the effort that has gone into Circum Mundum this year.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

This year has been a very busy and exciting one for Circum Mundum, both as a journal and as a podcast.

After a competitive application process of over 50 applicants, we began the year with 25 permanent contributors, the biggest team Circum Mundum has ever had. As Editor-in-Chief, I had a clear vision for the journal: to create an accessible student publication where people could learn about international affairs through the knowledge and perspectives of our contributors.

One of my main aims this year was to move Circum Mundum away from a Eurocentric approach to international politics and towards a more representative journal. With dedicated writers for different regions, we have been able to publish work that reflects a wider range of global issues.

We also launched our social media presence, sharing snippets of our articles and making our work easier to engage with beyond the journal itself. With the help of our amazing Vice-President, Aleyna, we also reignited the Circum Mundum podcast, creating another space for students to discuss the international issues that matter to them.

I also wanted contributing to the journal to feel as accessible as possible. This year, I created resource packs for our contributors, including picture-sourcing guides, editing and writing guides and topic banks. I hope these resources made the process of writing, editing and publishing feel less intimidating and more supportive.

I want to say a massive thank you and congratulations to our wonderful team: our editors, writers and podcast team. I am so proud of the work you have produced this year and so grateful for the care, effort and curiosity you have brought to Circum Mundum.

I have absolutely loved being your Editor-in-Chief and I am so thankful to have been voted into this role. I cannot wait to see what you all get up to next.

With gratitude,

Grace Samuel

Editor-in-Chief, Circum Mundum 2025/26

EDITORIAL TEAM



GRACE SAMUEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

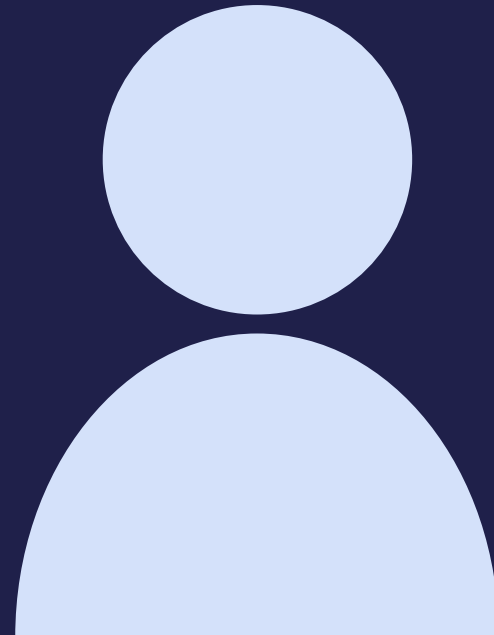


ALEYNA BAHAR
VICE PRESIDENT

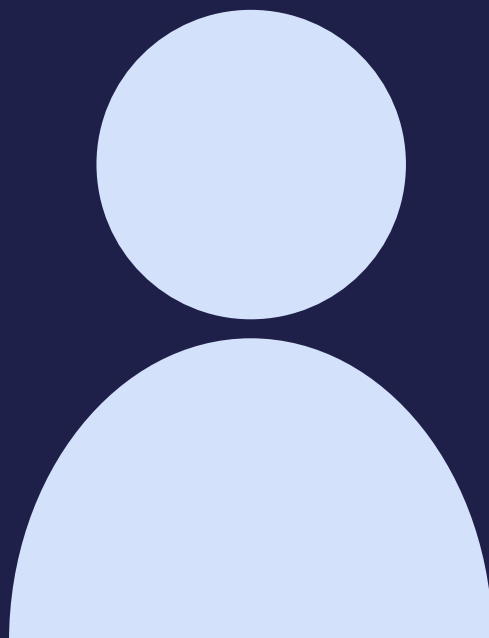
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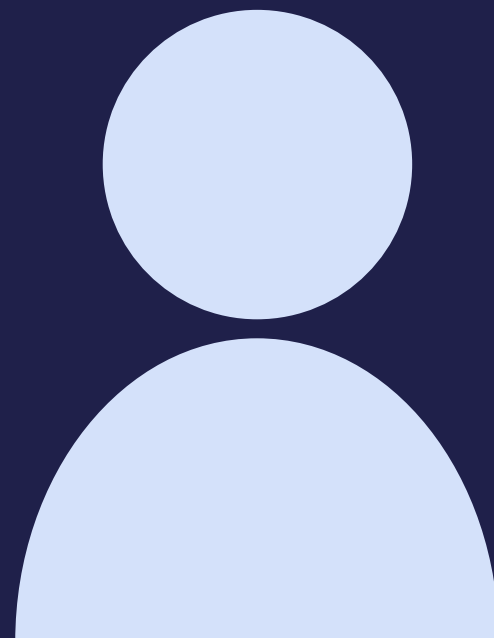
TAISSIYA SHEGAY



BRONWEN SMITH



ELIJAH EATON



ANNA PRINGLE

WRITERS



**ALARICE POW IAN-
NING**
GENERAL



ISOBEL GARNER
GENERAL



HARRIET WILLARS
CLIMATE



KASHVI KAUL
AFRICA



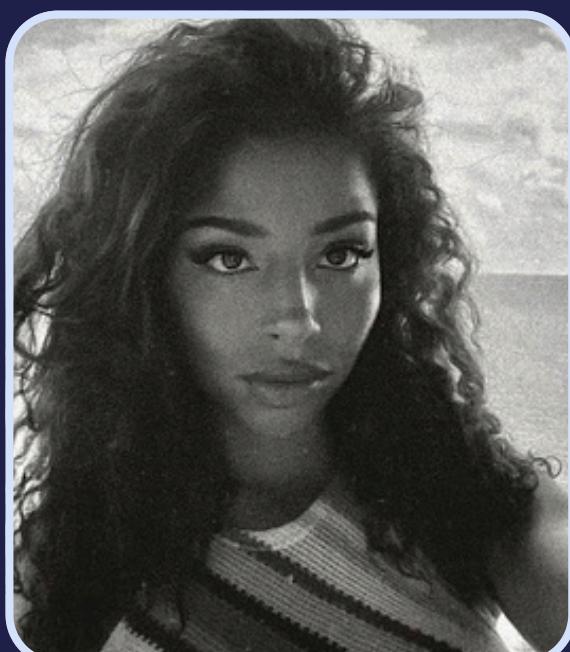
**MARIYA
KURMANGALIYEVA**
CENTRAL ASIA



IRIS TALLON
NORTH AMERICA



KAREN LIU
ASIA-PACIFIC

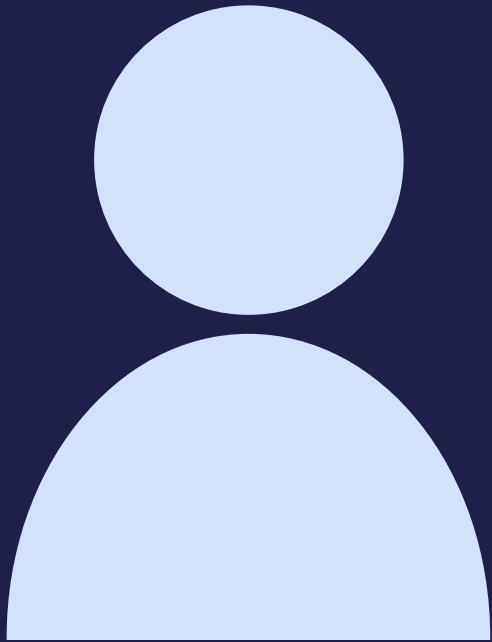


LOLA WADDINGHAM
CENTRAL ASIA

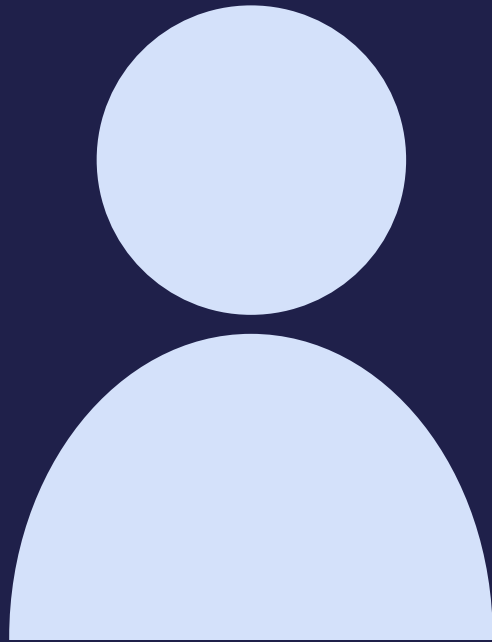


JAGRAVI SINGH
ASIA-PACIFIC

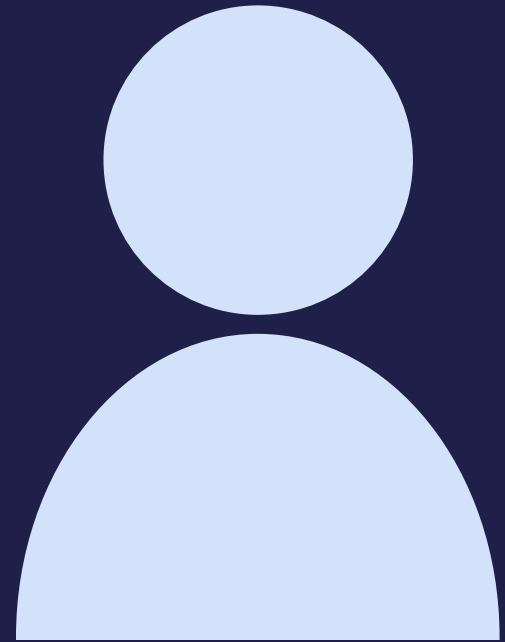
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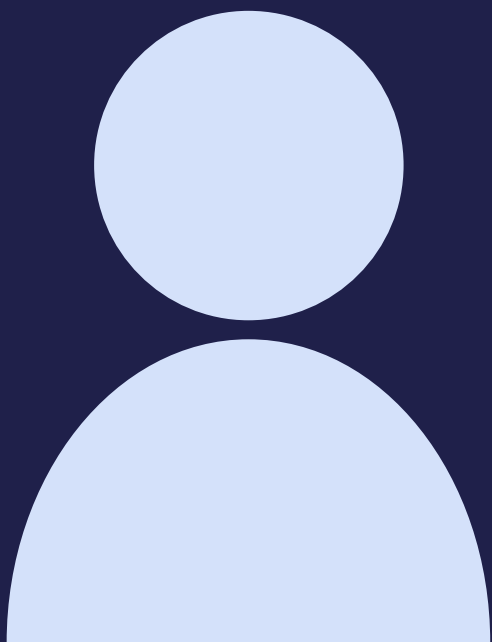
**ORNELLA ROMERO-
GARCIA**
LATIN AMERICA



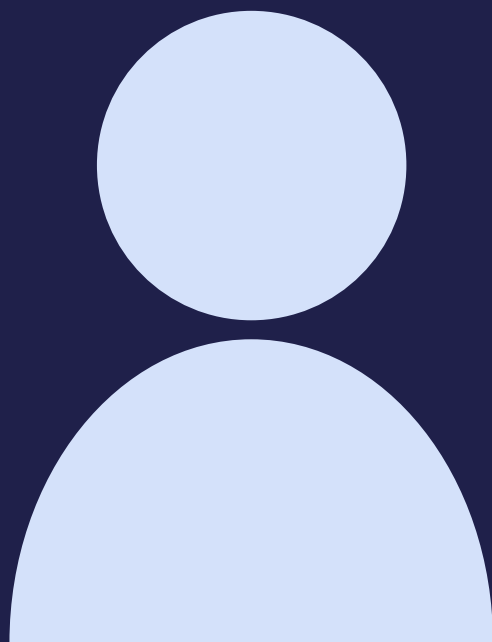
MOLLIE DELHAY
EUROPE



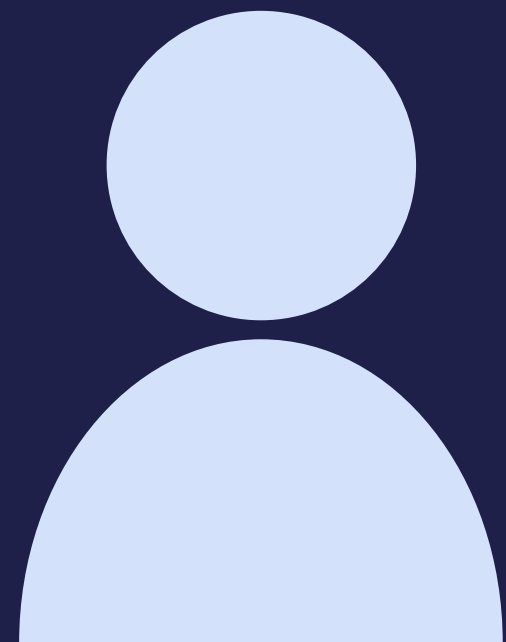
HINNA MOHAMED
AFRICA



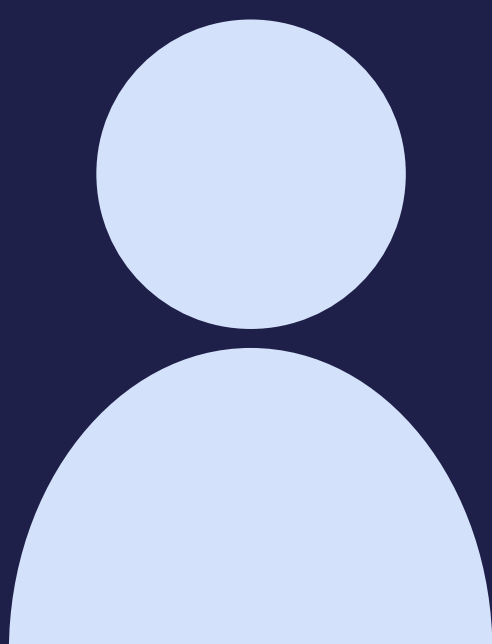
SOLENN BUCKINGHAM
LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN



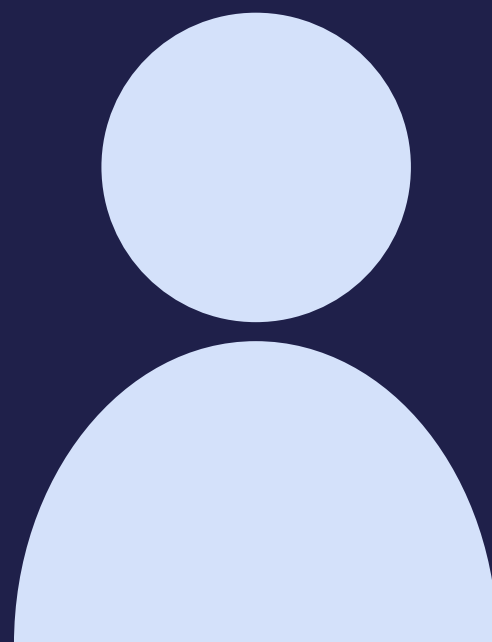
HARRIET WILLARS
GENERAL



ANJALI SANGA
GUEST WRITER



CHARLOTTE HARPER
GUEST WRITER



MARIE BERNARD
GUEST WRITER

PODCAST CONTRIBUTORS



ZUBAIDA HASSAN
HOST



AAMENA DHANJI
HOST



JAGRAVI SINGH
AUDIO EDITOR

JOURNAL ARTICLES



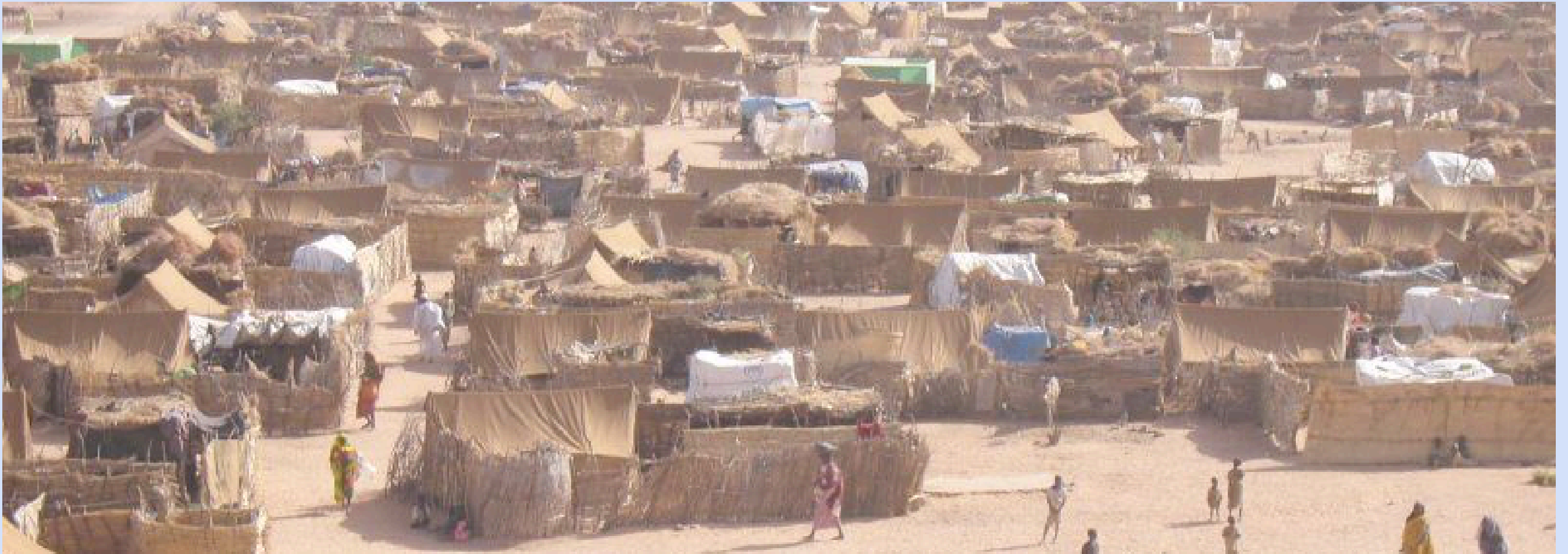
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*The views expressed are the author's own and do not reflect
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THE WORLD'S LARGEST SILENT CATASTROPHE: SUDAN'S UNHEARD CRISIS

edited by: Bronwen Smith



Listening to Sudan means more than following headlines.

How can thousands of families disappear from global attention while living in one of the most dangerous places on Earth?

For decades, Darfur, a region in western Sudan, has been at the heart of conflict and displacement, yet the world's attention has been uneven and fleeting. In the early 2000s, reports of mass killings, forced migration and famine briefly captured headlines, sparking temporary humanitarian responses. Today, many outside Sudan may feel they have already heard this story or assume prolonged conflict makes the suffering inevitable. This sense of distance (sometimes called 'crisis fatigue') can obscure the reality that millions are still at risk, communities remain fragile and lives continue to hang in the balance. Understanding the scale and severity of the situation is essential to grasp why Sudan's current crisis, now the largest humanitarian emergency in the world, demands renewed attention and urgent action.

Understanding who is fighting and what that means for civilians reveals the depth of Sudan's tragedy. The Rapid Support Forces, a powerful paramilitary group, operate outside the army's command and have been accused of looting, attacking civilians and using sexual violence as a weapon of war. Opposing them, the Sudanese Armed Forces struggle to maintain control in a country already fractured by years of political chaos. In this battle for dominance, humanitarian workers risk their lives to deliver food, water and medicine, while their warehouses stand nearly empty and aid convoys come under fire. Caught between gunfire and starvation, civilians have nowhere left to turn.

In El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, silence hides a brutal reality. Once a city of trade, schools and markets, El Fasher is now under the control of the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group notorious for using violence to seize territory. Families carry what little they can salvage through rubble. Children walk long distances for water that is not there. Hospitals struggle to operate without electricity or medicine. Tens of thousands of civilians remain trapped, cut off from humanitarian aid as fighting continues with the Sudanese Armed Forces, Sudan's national military. For most of the world, El Fasher is only a name in news reports. For those living there, it is life or death every day.

After the city fell to the RSF following a prolonged siege, nearly 90,000 people have fled, while thousands remain trapped inside. Survivors recount harrowing journeys, witnessing killings, abductions and sexual violence. Many reach makeshift camps near Tawila, about 70 kilometres away, only to face malnutrition and scarce supplies. Doctors Without Borders reports that more than 70% of children under five arriving after the fall of El Fasher are acutely malnourished and over a third suffer severe acute malnutrition. Humanitarian organisations like the International Organisation for Migration are providing what aid they can, but insecurity, blocked roads and depleted resources mean they are "only reaching a fraction of those in need," according to IOM director general Amy Pope.

To see only the siege of El Fasher, however, is to miss the full scale of the catastrophe. This city is one front in a war that has engulfed the entire nation of Sudan. The conflict has displaced over 10 million people, creating the largest internal displacement crisis in the world. Millions are facing emergency levels of hunger, and the collapse of the health system has allowed diseases like cholera to spread unchecked. The international response has been inadequate, failing to provide the funding and political pressure needed to stop the violence or sustain a meaningful aid operation. The world's inaction has effectively abandoned the Sudanese people to a manmade famine.

The courage of Sudanese women, children and volunteers deserves more than sympathy. It deserves action and solidarity. Seeing, listening and sharing their stories is not passive; bearing witness is a choice. El Fasher is not just a city in crisis; it is a test of whether the world can respond consistently with humanity when lives are at risk.

KAMRAN FOLADI AND THE CRISIS OF AGE ASSESSMENT IN UK ASYLUM PROCEDURES

edited by: Taissiya Shegay



'They took me to a little dark room. Five people were holding me down. I was pushed to the floor. I was unconscious. When I came round, I realised I had no clothes on.' – Kamran Foladi

The road to building a social, cultural and humanitarian haven for all, particularly children, has long served as a core humanitarian principle reflected in the United Nations Charter. This article argues that although increased awareness in advocating for asylum-seeking children has grown, there is still a lack of effective safeguards in age assessments.

Foladi's migration story from Afghanistan to the UK started after losing his family at the age of eight. Seeking refuge with his younger brother, they underwent manual labour in Iran before embarking on their perilous journey to London. Losing his brother at sea, Foladi navigated the new environment, traumatised and alone. His story recounts his experiences at the Harmondsworth Detention Centre and the Colnbrook Detention Centre, after being wrongly identified¹⁴ as an adult.

In his memoir, he recounts security personnel forcefully removing all his clothes, leaving him cold in an empty room until the morning. This is one of many instances that Foladi has been abused and neglected by security. He is also only one of the many asylum-seeking children that have been wronged by the system.

As more children account for a significant portion of the refugees, they have become integral to the international migration landscape. There is consequently heavy responsibility on the international community to uphold children's rights once they have arrived in their destination country

However, instead of receiving proper support and protection to integrate into the new environment, the hardship Foladi faced on his journey was followed by further mistreatment upon arrival. The 2025 report by the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium stated that there remain serious flaws in the age assessment process for children seeking asylum. Age verification becomes a primary obstacle for asylum-seeking children often due to the inability to produce valid identity documents. As a result, appearance and demeanour become the primary determinants for the ascertainment of age. From January to June 2024, local authorities in England and Scotland recorded that at least 262 children had been wrongly assigned to detention centres, subjecting them to extreme conditions and criminal charges.

Language and educational barriers have also made children unaware of the rights they are entitled to. Though Foladi had documentation on hand, he was unable to read. Even when an interpreter ultimately helped him get in contact with the Home Office and Refugee Council, he was informed at the Home Office that he was being considered for deportation.

Under the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, it is asserted that the presumption of minority underpins age assessment procedures if children are not to be denied their rights. It also states in Article 22 that whether accompanied or unaccompanied by their parents, a child shall enjoy the applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in international human rights.

It was only on the day of his intended deportation that Foladi was finally recognised as a child and was taken in by social services. Unfortunately, by then, Foladi had attempted suicide twice. 'I... had not been treated like a human being. I had had enough and didn't mind being deported.' Though he has mentioned finding a new family and friends in the present day, Foladi mentions that he is constantly worrying. 'I am constantly thinking so much... I don't eat. I don't sleep.' This also raises concerns about the current within adult accommodations.

The Home Office Reports from 2025 have highlighted the need for improved age assessment. The Home Office has begun trials to identify the most promising methods to identify age. Working with both scientific technology and artificial intelligence, they have identified facial age estimation technology as a potential tool moving forward. Since early September, they have embarked on its procurement process.

There are, however, still additional aspects that need to be considered in the age assessment process. To avoid re-traumatisation, there is a need to understand an individual's mental health, taking the time to build rapport and making them feel comfortable. There is a necessity to provide sufficient guidance and training to the people carrying out these procedures.

Though there has been a push from the international community to ensure asylum-seeking children receive the appropriate support and humanitarian response, it is imperative to remember that many children continue to be misclassified into adult detention centres today. Foladi's memoir is a statement of his bravery¹⁶ and endurance.

THAILAND-CAMBODIA BORDER DISPUTE: HOW DOES U.S. AND CHINESE INTERVENTION IN PEACE-KEEPING EFFORTS SPEAK TO THE INFLUENCE OF GLOBAL HEGEMONS OVER SMALLER STATES?

edited by: Anna Pringle



The inherent power dynamic embedded within the relationship between global hegemonic states and smaller states is a factor that will undoubtedly affect the course of the peace-making process for regional conflicts. This phenomenon is observed through the recent border conflict between neighbouring Southeast Asian countries: Thailand and Cambodia. The recent violent escalation resulted in a series of violent clashes that raged on for five days, beginning on July 23rd, 2025.

Tensions between the two states have existed for decades, stemming from the ambiguous boundaries drawn by French colonials who previously occupied Cambodia and the independent Siam state. This is further perpetuated by issues such as ethnic overlaps and land disputes that housed significant temples. Recent developments could also be attributed to contemporary domestic political problems in Thailand, specifically the manoeuvrings of the elite to side-line civilian political figures in a period of political discourse between the old, established power structures and an emerging, highly discontent population of youth and the working class.

Both the United States and China have been largely involved in the peace-making process following these recent developments in the regional conflict. Senior officials from both nations were in attendance at the ASEAN meeting held on 28 July 2025, which aimed to broker a ceasefire between Thailand and Cambodia. Both the United States and China have also been entangled in various relationships, militarily and diplomatically, with the states in conflict, formally extending from the last century to present day.

Relationships with the U.S. and China

A relationship with the U.S. and China extends to both Southeast Asian countries, each varying in degrees of cooperation. U.S. and Thailand have formed long-standing bilateral relations, with Thailand as a key non-NATO ally especially in areas such as defence and commerce. Both countries have a strong strategic partnership particularly in matters of security in the form of military equipment, joint-training exercises and the construction and improvement of infrastructure. However, in the last decade, these ties have been strained by the developments of Thailand's strengthening relations with China and the military coups of 2006 and 2014. China's influence, particularly over major Myanmar ethnic armed groups and its political and economic footprint within Thailand, is a pressing point of consideration for Bangkok. It has risen to the extent where Bangkok must consider Cambodia's steps towards military modernisation and the recent intensification of the border dispute, under the context of China's prominent security role in the region. Hence, with the growing gaps in the relationship between the U.S. and Thailand and China's involvement with their neighbours, ties between China and Thailand have grown as a result.

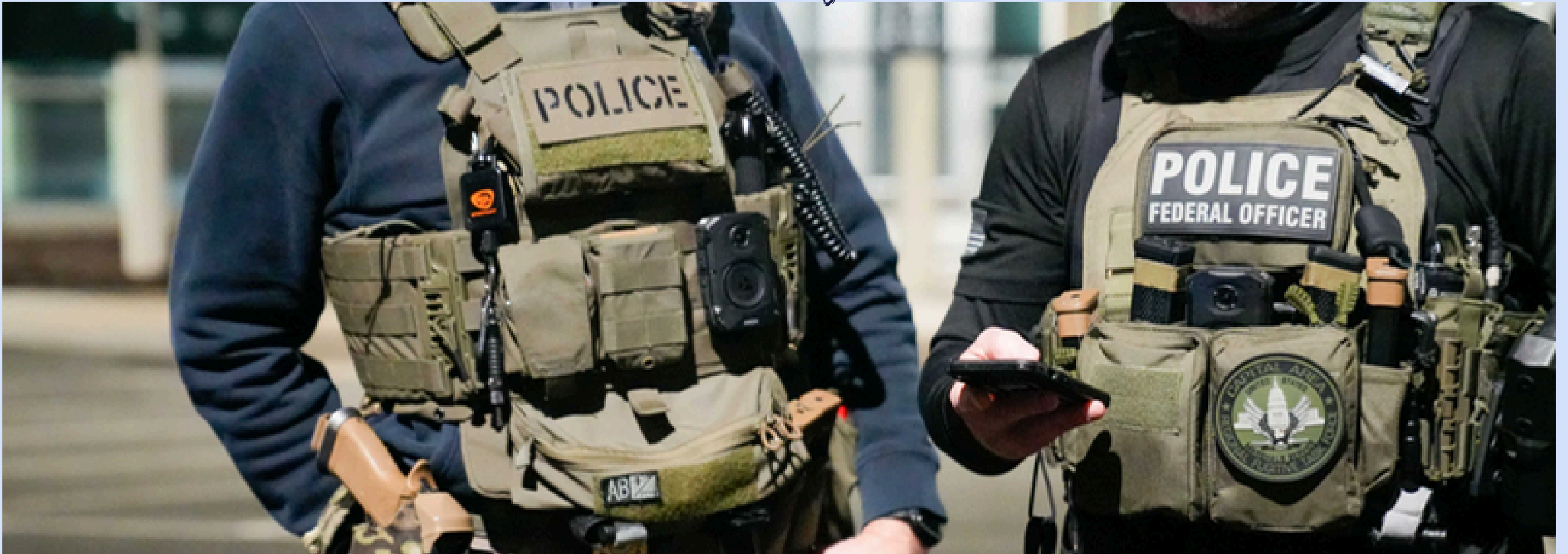
In contrast to Thailand's approach, Cambodia largely leverages its relationship with China to propel its military on to a path of modernisation. This includes the acquisition of advanced military technology such as naval assets and rocket launchers systems, as well as an upgrade to its naval bases such as the Ream Naval Base, efforts that are mainly motivated by the need to increase security measures against its neighbours: Thailand and Vietnam. Nonetheless, to avoid solely relying on China, Cambodia occasionally reaches out to the U.S, especially noted in the latest series of events with Thailand, as well as U.S. president Donald Trump's involvement in the subsequent ceasefire arrangements.

Implications of Hegemonic Intervention

The entanglement of major global powers of the United States and China in the various operations of smaller states, reflect their undeniable influence, regardless of the scale of the issue. Not only do smaller states depend on hegemonic states in a myriad of sectors such as markets, security and diplomatic cover, these hegemons shape the definition of peace even when a conflict has no direct correlation with these larger states. As evidenced by the recent phase of the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia, heavy U.S. involvement in the peace-making process delineates Washington's efforts in framing its reputation as both a responsible crisis manager and an agent of democracy. However, this mere facade as a neutral mediator masks their true agenda that prioritises alliance management and its military position in Southeast Asia. In the same interest of protecting one's own interests, Chinese intervention in the dispute aims to prevent instability near its borders and western domination of regional conflict mediation frameworks, to ensure the protection of the Belt and Road initiative and the Mekong economic corridors. Although the U.S. and China are both united by the hegemonic ability of quick peace-making through intervention, this phenomenon can potentially result in entrenching dependency and limiting the policy autonomy of smaller states, as both Thailand and Cambodia must calculate their actions to the U.S. and China's reactions accordingly. Ultimately, this regional border dispute delineates how global hegemonic intervention inevitably penetrates the peace-making process. This is due to their structural power and the prioritisation of their strategic interests, thus not only defining if and when the conflict stops, but also criteria for peace based on their own terms.

LEGAL TODAY, ILLEGAL TOMORROW: ICE AND IMMIGRATION UNDER TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION

edited by: Elijah Eaton



Under the Trump administration, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (hereafter ICE) has taken pride in arresting 'the worst of the worst' offenders and protecting Americans from criminal and illegal immigrants. Most recently, ICE agents have flooded into the city of New Orleans, causing fear among the immigrant population who make up most of the workforce in the restaurant industry. Many workers have decided to stay home, restaurants are momentarily closing and food is running out. However, recent data shows that most arrestees have no criminal record and that immigration agents are increasingly relying on racial and ethnic profiling, regardless of immigration status. Large-scale ICE crackdowns are being increasingly normalised by an administration that constructs migration as a threat and encourages its citizens to tolerate unlawful enforcement. Legal protections are being eroded, and pathways to immigration continue to narrow every day. In the United States one can be legal today and illegal tomorrow.

On social media, videos and testimonies of ICE's arrests are proliferating. Their violence is striking – immigration agents are driving unmarked vehicles, wearing face coverings, entering residences without warrants, kidnapping people off the streets and outside courthouses, leaving teenagers forced to care for their siblings as parents are arrested. How can a country built on immigration and celebrated as the land of the free justify such aggressive immigration law enforcement? Part of the answer lies in Trump's portrayal of migration as a national security threat, outlined in the 2025 National Security Strategy, which presents mass migration as the West's main danger, compromising national identity through "a stark prospect of civilizational erasure". Since the threat of migration is socially constructed, it can be mobilised through dehumanising and alarming language by the Trump administration to present its immigration enforcement methods as necessary.

After the recent shooting of two National Guard soldiers in Washington, President Trump broadcast the attack as an act of terror and its alleged perpetrator, an Afghan migrant, an animal. This discourse matters because its dehumanising characterisation has real-life consequences. Following the attack, all Afghan immigration applications were suspended, effectively halting Afghans from entering the country, including holders of Special Immigrant Visas issued during the Afghanistan War to individuals who had assisted U.S. forces. The shooting has also motivated the Trump administration to deploy National Guard troops in other cities, a decision that is traditionally reserved in American law for risks of invasion or rebellion. Overall, recent developments have shown how dehumanising language and hateful discourse, deliberately utilised to generate panic, function to legitimise large-scale and often violent immigration law enforcement.

The threat of 'civilizational erasure' is not only socially constructed and sensationalised but also empirically unfounded and conceptually unstable. Despite ICE's claims, more than half of the arrestees in recent major crackdowns have no criminal record; in fact, under President Trump, the share of people without criminal charges detained by ICE has steeply increased. Similarly, the alleged 1,000% increase in attacks against ICE, used by the Trump administration to justify deploying the National Guard in a rising number of cities, has also been proven untrue. Beyond portraying migrants as criminals, Republican political discourse also labels them as 'illegal', claiming those with a legal migration status have nothing to fear. This representation is misleading due to the constant redefinition of immigrant legal status, which is a political construct and not a stable protection.

Since the shooting of two National Guard members in Washington, pathways to legal immigration have become increasingly uncertain; asylum applications submitted within the United States have been paused, naturalisation ceremonies cancelled and migrants from the 19 countries subject to the travel ban are expected to have their green cards and citizenship reassessed. As a result, individuals who previously complied with legal immigration procedures and were granted lawful protections, including protection from persecution, can today be reclassified as 'illegals'. For instance, Vietnamese immigrants who found refuge in the United States after the end of the Vietnam War and who had long benefited from special legal exceptions, such as exemption from deportation and from detention beyond 90 days for those who arrived before 1995, have now seen these policies weakened or removed.

ICE's aggressive methods and the breakdown of legal protections for migrants should remind us that crime and legality are ever-changing and at the mercy of administration-led political abuse. In the United States, criminality and illegality have been redefined and weaponised by the Trump administration against migrant minorities. Beyond this discursive power, it is time to acknowledge the real consequences for immigrants in the U.S., who are facing relentless marginalisation and brutality. Americans must move beyond the terms of 'illegals' or 'aliens' and advocate for policies that honour the human rights and dignity of migrants as neighbours, friends and family.

KICK-OFF: WHEN THE MATCH BEGAN BEFORE THE WHISTLE

edited by: Anna Pringle



How much of politics is about trust? And how relevant is the public court of opinion? The recent game between Maccabi Tel Aviv, an Israeli football team, and Aston Villa, one of the many British teams, may suggest an answer. As a part of the UEFA Europa League tournament, the teams faced off on Thursday, 6 November 2025, at the Villa Park pitch. It was transformed headlines into an all-you-can-read buffet of geopolitical tension, violent arrests and questionable reactions. This match undoubtedly reflects the current dividing lines that the genocide in Gaza and the West Bank has created. It is a crisis that no longer involves just heads of state and their governments but has encouraged the political action of players used to a different kind of game.

Background Information

In October, concerns for public safety led to Maccabi Tel Aviv fans being banned from attending the match at Aston Villa's home stadium. This announcement came in reaction to advice from Birmingham's Safety Advisory Group who rely on intelligence from the West Midlands Police. It was considered that the biggest risk of violence were the extremist fans of Maccabi Tel Aviv. Police intelligence cited their sources well, recounting the events in which Maccabi fans had attacked Muslims in Amsterdam at a game last year. It involved around 5,000 Dutch police officers attempting to calm the violence and stop the "racist taunts" that surrounded it.

The current prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, has since condemned this ban and suggested it a "wrong decision." This is despite this ban serving as a clear example of the zero-tolerance approach to crime that Starmer's government has both popularised and supported. Our political memory does not have to stretch far to remember Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood's branding of protests as arrestable offences. Notably, Conservative leader, Kemi Badenoch, and Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, have also criticised the decision of the West Midlands Police.

On the day of the match, this rising boil of political tension spilt over into 11 arrests made by the West Midlands Police, dominated by hate crime and racist abuse. Match officials were briefed on the day to prepare contingency plans, as over 200 protestors, both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine, surrounded the stadium.

Israel's Role in UEFA

To some, the fact that Israeli teams such as Maccabi Tel Aviv are able to compete in the UEFA games despite being an Asian country makes this a senseless debate. Israel is located in the Mediterranean region, bordering countries such as Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. It has no direct claims to European geography, is not and has never been a part of the European Union. Israel's only tie to the continent is political. With its history steeped in Western influence and Western assertion, from the 1917 Balfour declaration of a Jewish state out of British-owned Palestine, to modern trading patterns, in which Israeli arms rely on European countries, the connection to Europe is manmade. Relating this back to UEFA, the Israel Football Association (IFA) may be seen as a sign of Western interest within an Arab context. It was expelled from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in 1974 following a forced withdrawal from hosting in 1972, as the contempt for Israel in the Arab and Muslim nations meant they refused to play them. This culminated in the IFA beginning to compete in the European Intertoto Cup in the 1970s and 1980s, translating to UEFA allowing them to compete as an associate member in 1991 and then a full member in 1994. Currently, all Israeli national and domestic teams can compete in all European competitions.

Thus, it can be seen that the undercurrents of political strife felt in this game are not new. They are perhaps borne out of a much older, almost imperial, Western tradition of spreading European authority and ignoring the natural landscapes of our world.

SOVEREIGNTY'S SUPREMACY: REALISM AND THE DEADLY THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER

edited by: Bronwen Smith



'Thailand launches airstrikes on Cambodia as Trump's peace agreement hangs in the balance' screams the headline of CNN's first news report of the renewed tensions along the Thai-Cambodian border. It suggests a familiar story: another flare-up, another failed diplomatic effort, another fatality. Yet this assumption of global familiarity hides a deeper question. How can a border dispute that began in 1907 still be just as lethal today? With over 58 people dead in 2025 alone, what does this enduring violence reveal about the limits of international law and regional cooperation in resolving territorial conflicts, when viewed through the lens of realism?

At the heart of the conflict lies the 508-mile border between Cambodia and Thailand, shaped by colonial ambiguity. When Cambodia was part of French Indochina, the 'Annex I Map' attempted to define the border between the two territories. Roughly drawn and imprecise, the map placed the 11th century Preah Vihear temple on the Cambodian side, despite its drainage flowing northward into Thailand.

Despite no formal objection from the Thai government at the time, the disputes began to intensify over the cultural and religious significance of the territory. The temples Prasat Preah Vihear and Prasat Ta Muen Thom, both of Hindu origin from the Khmer Empire, represent more than land. They are sites representative of cultural inheritance, historical legitimacy, and national prestige, stoking nationalistic intensity on both sides, and turning the border disagreement into a question of identity. This begins to explain why the dispute has periodically escalated into violence, first erupting in armed clashes in July 2008.

That year, according to United Nations Cambodian ambassadors, 'about 50 Thai soldiers moved into the Keo Sikhakirisvara Pagoda vicinity', merely 300 metres from Preah Vihear, within Cambodia's territory. Accusations of attempted Thai annexation followed, and skirmishes continued until April 2011, when clashes between troops left several dead. A unanimous decision to withdraw all troops from the disputed areas seemed the only solution. In May 2025, the death of a Cambodian soldier during a routine border patrol reignited hostilities, culminating in what The New York Times described as a 'brutal 20-day border war' in July, with over 500,000 people still displaced from their homes - a stark reminder of the human cost behind geopolitical rivalry.

However, it is through the theory of political realism that a compelling explanation for this conflict is unearthed. Realism assumes an anarchic international system, through which states are rational actors seeking to preserve sovereignty and uphold security. Often cited as one of the forefathers of political realism, Thomas Hobbes' seminal work *Leviathan* asserts that 'the war of all against all', made probable because of humanity's inherent nature, could only be avoided by legitimate, powerful, and authoritative governments - something that simply does not exist at an international level.

The attempts of international law to reach a permissible conclusion to the disputes were first examined in 1962, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled against Thailand's unlawful occupation of Preah Vihear and ordered Thailand to withdraw all military personnel from Cambodian territory. Decades later, in 2011, Cambodia requested that the ICJ clarify its ruling by explaining the extent to which Cambodia could claim the territory surrounding the temple. As a result, in its 2013 ruling, the ICJ confirmed ultimate Cambodian sovereignty over the whole promontory. Yet, despite the legal clarity of these decisions, Thailand's intermittent refusal to comply exposes a key political realism insight: international law lacks enforcement power. States often only adhere to legal rulings when they fully align with national interests.

Regional diplomacy has faced similar constraints. Since 2013, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has played a mediating role, grappling with the struggles of keeping two of its member states from violence. The current chair, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, facilitated phone calls between the Cambodian and Thai Prime Ministers in order to encourage dialogue and peace. However, ASEAN's strict adherence to the principle of non-interference means that state sovereignty reigns supreme, allowing ASEAN to manage tensions, but never fully resolve them.

External intervention has fared no better. In late October 2025, US President Donald Trump presided over the signing of the 'Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord' witnessed solely by the leaders of both countries and the ASEAN chair. The accord's primary success resulted in Trump even being nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize by the Cambodian Prime Minister. Despite the threat of increased tariffs from the USA if the agreement was violated, it collapsed within months. By December 2025, border clashes had resumed, resulting in further fatalities. From a realism perspective, the failure was predictable since diplomatic symbolism and economic pressure are insufficient to override entrenched concerns over sovereignty within a multipolar international system.

Ultimately, the Thailand-Cambodia border dispute is not just a legacy of failed maps or discreet phone calls, but of a world where power overrules principle. Realism suggests that as long as sovereignty and national pride outweigh legal rulings and peace accords, even century-old borders can remain deadly fault lines. Until their interests align, peace along the Thai-Cambodian border is likely to remain signed on paper but contested on the ground.

VENEZUELA'S HISTORIC ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY: DOES REGIME CHANGE, CHANGE ANYTHING?

edited by: Bronwen Smith



Venezuela's oil industry has marked all areas of life in the country, from political structures, economic life, and civic life. The country's historic instability has continued into the 21st century with soaring poverty rates, a crisis of forced displacement, and violent repression against civilians and political opponents. The new year in Venezuela started with a forceful regime change, and will likely continue the legacy of authoritarian measures, now backed by the most powerful state in the world.

Being home to the largest oil reserves in the West has defined Venezuelan history, economy, and political structures. Following the discovery of oil in Venezuela in 1922, foreign companies actively produced oil in the dictatorship-backed industry. This allowed Venezuela to become the second-largest exporter of oil by the end of the 1920s, which represented over 90% of total exports. This arguably led to Venezuela's transition to a 'Petro-state,' a country that is highly dependent on fossil fuel income, with concentrated power and embedded corruption.

By 1976, ex-president Carlos Andrés Pérez had nationalised the oil industry, introducing Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), the nation's state-owned oil and gas company. During his second term in February 1989, the collapsing oil prices and massive foreign debts led Pérez to seek a financial bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), defying his 1988 election campaign that rejected neo-liberal policies. The economic reforms, designed to secure IMF support for new loans, included the rise of gas prices to match international prices, an increase of 30% meant bus fares also increased. Then, the Caracazo began, the streets of Caracas (the capital city of Venezuela) erupted in 4 days of violent protests and looting, with forceful military and police responses. To this day, the official death toll of 300 has been contested for decades since the Caracazo, as estimates indicate up to 3,000 people.

In 1998, the beginning of the 'Bolivarian Revolution' would shape Venezuela's political landscape for the following decades. During Hugo Chávez's presidency (1998-2013), Venezuela witnessed radical shifts to its social policy with the introduction of 'Bolivarian Missions,' a social welfare program aiming to expand access to food, housing, healthcare, and education, which was subsidised using Venezuela's oil revenues. Despite reducing poverty by up to 20%, Chávez's expensive missions were not adequately delivered due to a combination of Venezuela's reduced oil production and the 2008 recession, declining the available revenue used to fund the missions.

Chávez's presidency is believed to have established the correct environment in which the destruction of checks and balances, termination of competitive elections, suspension of political rights and civil liberties could occur. In essence, 1999 marked the beginning of an increasingly authoritarian regime, started by a new Chavista constitution, despite it being unauthorised by the National Congress.

In 2013, after Chávez's death, Nicolás Maduro gained power as interim president and established his presidency after the 2013 elections with a narrow 50.6% of the vote. Since the mid 2010s, Venezuela has faced its most critical humanitarian crisis and economic decline, which is believed to have been partly caused by U.S. sanctions that resulted in declining oil production and severe underinvestment in the oil sector. The consequences of authoritarian rule have resulted in a lack of access to basic goods, including food and medicine, ending 2024 with nearly 82% of the population living in poverty (25 million out of the total population of 31.8 million). In attempts to flee violence and poverty, almost 8 million Venezuelans have been forcibly displaced, with 6.5 million seeking refuge in neighbouring Latin American countries.

The 2025 Freedom House report labelled Venezuela 'not free,' as the 2024 elections failed to adequately evidence his victory, accompanied by the Supreme Tribunal Courts of Justice support for Maduro's re-election. Opposition coalitions contested the vote by publishing over 80% of the voting tallies online, which showed opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez had won a majority with 67% of the vote. Political opposition and anti-Maduro protesters have faced violent repression; many have been harassed, attacked, imprisoned and impeded from participating in the political process. Figures from the human rights organisation Foro Penal estimated a total of 863 political prisoners at the end of 2025.

Throughout 2025, growing tensions between Venezuela and the United States have erupted into a U.S. intervention in the country. Between January 2025 and December 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump had designated Venezuelan criminal groups as terrorist organisations, accusing Venezuelan leaders of overseeing these, although the existence of one of these is widely contested.

After seizing 5 Venezuelan oil tankers and killing over 100 in the process, U.S. airstrikes hit Caracas during the early hours of the 3rd of January, leading to the abduction and arrest of Maduro, who now faces drug-trafficking charges in the U.S. In Trump's words, the U.S. currently "runs" Venezuela with interim President Delcy Rodriguez, the previous vice-president under Maduro, devaluing the Venezuelan fight for freedom of political opposition. The Trump administration currently demands unrestricted access to Venezuela's oil, encouraging up to 20 U.S. oil companies to take part in a costly investment of \$100 billion. While some political prisoners have been freed, the illegal attack on Venezuela threatens to further destabilise the country and possibly neighbouring nations. The historic precedent of U.S. intervention in Latin America led to civil wars (Guatemala), the establishment of dictatorships (Chile), all of which do not foster any prosperity for the people of Venezuela; who's elected leaders and demands are sidelined in the U.S. interest of acquisition of the Venezuelan oil industry.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN 2025: A YEAR IN REVIEW — PROGRESS, PITFALLS, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

edited by: Elijah Eaton



With just five years remaining to meet the Paris Agreement targets, 2025 has been quite the year for extreme weather, climate goals and pending answers to the questions of what future climate policy will, and must, look like.

Extreme Weather

Early 2025 saw record-breaking wildfires in Southern California. Fuelled by powerful winds and dry conditions, the first signs of the blaze were reported on the morning of the 7th of January. From Sacramento to San Diego, several 'SoCal' counties went up in flames, the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighbourhoods in Los Angeles County shouldering the hardest blow. Over 180,000 people were forced to evacuate from the greater Los Angeles area alone. The tragedy plagued the headlines, with many losing their homes. Among them were several Hollywood A-listers, including Paris Hilton and Eugene Levy.

As 2025 comes to a close, Sri Lanka is experiencing severe flooding after the powerful cyclone Ditwash struck the capital, resulting in heavy rains and mudslides across the island. As the death toll rises to 366, many still missing, monsoons exacerbated by tropical storms have caused some of the worst flooding in years across Southeast Asia.

Not unlike the European trend of considerably wet autumns, the 'ber' months in the United Kingdom have seen atypical weather conditions this year. The season saw above-average rainfall across the UK, following an agonisingly warm and dry summer. Rainfall in September was classed as "above normal" in England for the time of year. Regardless, the Met Office has only assured us that increasing rainfall will only be the new normal for the UK.

2025's catastrophic collection of weather events naturally prompts reflection on how we define our evolving climate. Climate change results in more frequent and more extreme weather events; a notion all too familiar at this point, yet many of us are still seemingly unbothered by it. This year provides us with a glimpse into what future years unfortunately have in store as the walls of the climate crisis close in. Perhaps we need to begin by redefining what comes to mind when we think of 'climate change'. Per the Oxford Reference definition, it is considered the long-term shift in world weather patterns, including temperature and rainfall. What this definition fails to account for is arguably its most significant feature: its variability, and how prone our climate is to rapid and unexpected change. Our current perception of climate change, a steady increase in the Earth's temperature, does not holistically capture the major threat the climate crisis poses to the livelihood of current and future generations.

Climate goals

Amidst the severity of weather, 2025 has also been a critical year for climate policy and action. Some pledges have been met, others have fallen short, so what are the key takeaways?

Arguably, the most notable climate policy closest to home was the UK government's Carbon Budget Delay and Growth Delivery Plan, published in October this year, which outlined strategies to meet emissions targets for carbon budgets. The plan focuses on leveraging clean energy to grow the economy while simultaneously improving energy security. Sceptics have been vocal about this ambitious scheme, with Friends of the Earth being particularly critical of its "overall optimistic expectations for new technology". Chief Executive Asad Rehman admitted it's too soon to say how truly effective this plan may be: "There are some encouraging signs that, at long last, we have a government ready to step up and get the UK's climate targets back on track. But we won't know for sure until we have studied the full details of the plan."

COP30, the second-largest COP in history, was held from 10th to 21st November in Belém, Brazil. Ironically, the conference saw torrential thunderstorms outside the "windowless" venue, providing a suitable backdrop and sense of pressure to the talks. While international pledges were agreed upon, including more than \$9 billion of funding towards the conservation of rainforests in Brazil, the glaring absence of the US from the talks paints the future of international climate cooperation as uncertain. US President Trump's apathetic stance on the climate agenda has been overt. From "drill, baby, drill", a common slogan indicating his desire to boost oil and gas drilling, to his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, the 45th and now 47th US president is not backing down from his objectively anti-climate stance. While the USA continues to play a large role in accelerating global warming, the landscape of inconsistency in US climate policy is undeniably detrimental to the rest of the world, especially in the Global South, where countries are most vulnerable to evolving climate conditions.

What comes next

2025 has been nothing short of a watershed year for the climate. Defined by record-shattering heat, cascading environmental disasters, and a mounting sense of global fragility, this current year reminds us how much remains unresolved. The pieces of the climate puzzle are still very much in motion. Yet even amid uncertainty, the imperative to push forward has never been clearer. As climate advocate Harjeet Singh put it, “we can’t discard [COP] entirely... but it requires retrofitting.” His point underscores a deeper truth: conversations and international platforms to discuss the climate crisis matter. They may be imperfect, often frustrating, but essential for accountability and steady, collective progress.

Looking ahead to 2026, the conversation cannot cease. Major gatherings such as the 2nd International Conference on Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability in Tokyo, and the Climate and Energy Summit in London this coming March, will carry the climate debate into the next chapter. Whether they deliver policy breakthroughs or enhance ever-mounting public pressure, they represent the continuing work of a world that has no choice but to confront its climatic future.

SMALL ACTORS, BIG VOICES

edited by: Elijah Eaton



Growing up in Southeast Asia, I noticed that the climate crisis was never an unimaginable situation for me, as it was visible in the beaches I visited, the unpredictable monsoons, and the growing presence of plastic in places that once felt untouched. As coastal and suburban towns started to modernise, I witnessed how environmental degradation quietly reshaped daily life, often hitting local communities first and hardest. These encounters made it clear that while climate negotiations often feel distant and occur in major economies such as France or Brazil, the most immediate actions are often led by people on the ground.

Across Southeast Asia today, there are "small actors" who are transforming their climate anxieties into grassroots movements and actions, pioneering the roadmap for sustainable development. In Thailand, community-led beach cleanups and conservation efforts have helped restore fragile ecosystems, including the renowned Maya Bay, where Leonardo DiCaprio's film 'The Beach' occurred and is closed annually from August 1st to September 30th to enable ecological restoration and for marine life to thrive. Other parts of Southeast Asia are taking similar steps by temporarily closing beaches and islands to the public to allow ecosystems to recover, following the catastrophic impacts of mass tourism, flooding and low air quality.

Building on dangerous climatic events, grassroots movements are also tackling plastic pollution, which releases massive amounts of greenhouse gases as it accounts for "8% of the world's oil production." As a result, eco-bricking initiatives, which turn plastic waste into reusable building materials, are spreading across youth networks in the region, demonstrating community creativity overcoming unsustainable practices. Complementing this, Vietnam's traditional bamboo practices are being reimaged as a sustainable industry that supports local livelihoods while providing low-carbon alternatives to plastics and fast furniture. These efforts demonstrate that impactful climate action doesn't always originate from international forums; instead, it begins with grassroots actors whose voices grow louder through collective responsibility and cooperation.

Thailand's Ecological Recovery

In Thailand, coastal environments are illustrating how local action can support ecological recovery alongside broader conservation policies. When I visited Maya Bay in Southern Thailand in June 2024, I saw firsthand a once-overcrowded tourist destination turn into a thriving landscape for marine recovery, with pristine waterways and beaches with few signs of plastic pollution. The restoration effort by the local community is a sign that, by regulating mass-tourism in the area and having a clear annual restoration timeframe, there can be significant positive rebounds for the local ecosystem. Besides restoring the precious beaches, there's another community-led initiative focusing on restoring mangrove plants throughout the country, which act as natural defences against storms, store large amounts of carbon and provide habitats for countless species. They are currently under threat due to over-irrigation, urbanisation, deforestation, and industrial pollution. In response, youth-based organisations have begun to operate within schools in Thailand called 'Mangrove Teens' that actively plant and nurture mangroves in local conservation areas. I have previously been a member of this organisation in my high school and focused on raising awareness of mangrove loss and revitalising efforts to restore the plant species by highlighting its role in carbon sequestration or storing carbon, benefiting climate resilience.

While challenges remain in bridging all potential actors together, Thailand's blend of strong government regulation, grassroots activism, and youth participation emphasises how small actors can create major impacts on sustainable development and coastal resilience, which often go unheard of in major climate summits.

Vietnam's Grassroots Initiatives

From my decade-long lived experience in Vietnam, I have seen the increase in grassroots movements taking shape as more climate disasters occur. From witnessing severe flooding, air pollution, and climate displacements, I joined the eco-bricking society in school, where I went to rural farms to turn the eco-brick bottles into homes for orphanages, reinforcing how simple actions can create tangible environmental and social change. Across Vietnam, similar youth-led eco-brick movements are gaining momentum, with volunteers raising awareness and planting eco-bricks to steadily reduce CO2 emissions. These initiatives provide practical, decentralised solutions in a country where millions of tonnes of plastic waste are generated annually.

Alongside these circular waste solutions, Vietnam's resilient bamboo industry shows how traditional resources can support climate action and sustainable livelihoods. Bamboo, a rapidly renewable resource with high carbon sequestration potential, has long provided communities with low-impact materials for housing, tools and crafts while reducing dependence on carbon-intensive alternatives. Local artisans and entrepreneurs have elevated bamboo weaving into internationally recognised sustainable products, preserving cultural heritage while advancing economic growth. Companies such as 'EQUO' focus on creating compostable, plant-based alternatives sourced from natural materials such as bamboo.

From being based in Vietnam, the company aims to empower communities to take individual action by replacing plastic with sustainable resources, whether it's bamboo straws or toothbrushes. Each purchase goes directly into supporting natural restoration, and incentives are provided, such as discounts or by becoming an affiliate ambassador and earning commission. Together, these initiatives highlight Vietnam's grassroots actors - from students to artisans to entrepreneurs, who are redefining climate action, proving that sustainable development is built from the ground up.

Ultimately, the movements occurring in Vietnam and Thailand demonstrate that climate action doesn't necessarily have to start with global agreements, but with climate upstanders deciding to act within their own local contexts. Through planting mangroves, eco-bricking, or revitalising the bamboo industry, these local efforts show how small steps can restore ecosystems. By using locally available resources or homegrown products, communities can create sustainable economic opportunities that are resilient, inclusive and rooted in long-term stewardship. When led from the ground up, environmental restoration can become a foundation for sustainable growth, empowering small actors to create lasting global impact.

BLOOD MINERALS: HOW NEOCOLONIALISM PERPETUATES MINING DEATHS IN CONGO

edited by: Elijah Eaton



At the start of February this year, a deadly mine collapse in the town of Rubaya took the lives of over 200 people in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). But for communities in North Kivu, such collapses are neither shocking nor rare. Rather, they are a predictable outcome of a mining system that has for over a century treated Congolese land and labour as expendable. The DRC is one of the most mineral-rich areas of the world, with vast deposits of diamonds, gold, copper and cobalt, the latter essential for various technological advancements such as smartphones and electric cars.

So how can a country with such massive potential for wealth be plagued by extensive conflict and instability? To investigate this, focus must be brought to the neocolonial exploitation of African countries such as the DRC; a process that began in the colonial era and continues into the post-colonial world of today.

Congo's deadly mining economy can be traced back to the era of colonial Belgian rule, which transformed the territory into one of the most brutally exploited regions in modern history. Under King Leopold II and the Belgian colonial enterprise, Congo's economy was organised almost entirely around the extraction of copper, rubber and other raw materials for European profit. From the rubber that fed the Victorian bicycle craze, to the uranium used to make the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, imperial exploitation of Congolese resources via slave labour has spilt the blood of many.

Formal independence in 1960 did not dismantle Congo's extractive economic structure. Instead, the country inherited an economy designed for export rather than domestic development, leading to the instability, conflict and human rights violations seen in the territory now. Direct colonial rule ended on paper, yet the post-colonial activity of foreign corporations, international markets and 'global demands' has replaced it, continuing the logic of extraction and exploitation.

Today, this neocolonial system is most prevalent in the mining sector. Multinational companies and foreign buyers dominate global mineral supply chains, capturing the majority of the profits through processing, manufacturing and technological innovation abroad. Meanwhile, Congolese communities are left with the most dangerous and least rewarded stage of production: the extraction itself. The value of the DRC's minerals is realised and clinched elsewhere, while the risks are borne locally, rendering Congolese labour expendable.

Further, armed factions such as the M23 have perpetuated violence in the DRC by seizing strategic, mineral-rich areas. M23 has occupied and taxed key mining sites, including around Rubaya, using mineral revenues to fund its operations and consolidate territorial control. While often framed as purely regional and ethnic conflict, the rise of groups such as M23 can be traced back to legacy arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers during the Scramble for Africa. Without the counsel of the local, cost-bearing people, ethnic communities were fractured and forcibly merged, producing long-term instability which continues to this day.

To describe mine collapses as tragic accidents is a means to obscure responsibility. Heavy rain does not kill miners; unsafe working conditions do. These conditions persist not because safer systems are logistically challenging, but because the global extractive economy has little incentive to fund and reform them. Therefore, this recent collapse is not an isolated 'tragedy', but a predictable outcome of a system rooted in a history of imperial extraction, sustained through modern, neocolonial economic relations. Until these structures are challenged, the neocolonial exploitation of some of the most materially rich countries in the world will continue while their people suffer, sustaining the decades-long imperial system built on unequal sacrifice.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE: EPSTEIN FILES RELEASE PROMPTS EX-PRINCE ANDREW'S ARREST

edited by: Taissiya Shegay



News of the arrest of former Prince Andrew made international headlines on 19 February 2026, as the 66-year-old spent his birthday being taken into custody for 11 hours by Thames Valley Police.

This follows the fallout from the release of more than three million documents relating to American financier and child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein by the Department of Justice (DOJ) earlier this year. The release came six weeks after the deadline of US President Donald Trump's signed mandate of the release of Epstein-related documents to the public under the Transparency Act. The documents exposed images from Little St James and Epstein's personal interactions with members of the political elite, in which the former prince is mentioned.

His Majesty had initiated a "formal process to remove the style, titles, and honours" of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor back in October 2025 over his close relationship with Epstein. He had also received sexual assault allegations from one of Epstein's victims, Virginia Giuffre. The federal lawsuit was later ended in an out-of-court settlement, where Andrew had paid an undisclosed sum to Giuffre and her charity, settling without admission of liability.

The newly released files have prompted an investigation by British police into concerns that Andrew Mountbatten Windsor had shared confidential trade information with Epstein in 2010, while he was serving as the UK's trade envoy. As the investigation widens and the British police continue to search his home at the Royal Lodge in Windsor, he is under suspicion of what is known in the UK as misconduct in public office.

The British Parliament has begun discussions that involve proceedings to remove the former prince from the line of succession altogether. Although he had given up his royal titles, Andrew Mountbatten Windsor remains eighth in line to the throne. However, his removal would be a lengthy process that can only be initiated after the full investigation has concluded. Furthermore, it would need the approval from all 14 Commonwealth realms to be enforced. So far, the Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has affirmed his full support for any UK government proceeding to remove him from the line of succession.

King Charles had made a public statement later that day, the day of his brother's arrest, stating that what now follows is the "full, fair and proper process" of official investigations, and they have the Royal Family's full cooperation.

Support for his removal has also been backed by members of the UK public. According to a YouGov poll, 82% of Britons supported the removal of ex-Prince Andrew from the royal line of succession. Family of the late Virginia Giuffre, who died by suicide in April 2025, spoke to 10 News following his arrest, feeling vindicated and calling it a victory for both Virginia and all survivors.

The arrest of the former Prince has since sparked discussions among the global public, which has commended Europe and the UK for holding the powerful and privileged accountable. This includes the criminal investigation and resignation of Peter Mandelson from the House of Lords, as well as the charging of former Norwegian Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland for "gross corruption". The measures taken by the court against disgraced elites mentioned explicitly in the files in the United States, on the other hand, have significantly paled in comparison.

DEMOCRACY IN DOUBT: THE CASE OF HONDURAS'S 2025 ELECTIONS

edited by: Grace Samuel



In December 2025, Conservative National Party candidate Nasry Asfura was declared president of Honduras for the 2026-2030 term. And yet, his rise to power raises inevitable questions on the global recession into right-wing ideologies. Surpassing his rival from the centre-right Liberal Party, Salvador Nasralla, with a supposed majority of 27,000 votes (40.3%), his influence is undeniable. However, the consolidation of his presidency has equally faced backlash for fraudulent elections and US president Donald Trump's interference. In this way, Nasfura's steps for presidency and its consequences must be assessed.

Asfura vs. Nasralla: the fight for power

Nasry Asfura initially served as mayor in the capital Tegucigalpa for two consecutive periods between 2014 and 2022, focusing on urbanisation through improved infrastructural projects and vehicle mobility. During the presidential elections, Asfura especially sought support from both the rural and urban spaces in his promises of foreign backing, employment, infrastructural production, strengthening the agricultural sector and the implementation of projects for the local economy. Through the use of carefully crafted slogans promoting "trabajo y más trabajo" ("work and more work"), the president's political branding is rooted in diligence and productivity, which seeks to mobilise the masses.

His popularity is only furthered by president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries of Cortés (CCIC) Karim Qubain's assertions of the "positive impacts that Asfura could have for the economy of the country". In a country where poverty is rife, affecting 60% of the 11 million inhabitants, a cult of personality promising stability and progress proves particularly effective in consolidating control. In contrast, Nasralla's more centrist positioning mobilised support through denouncing irregularities within Honduras's political sphere, inciting institutional distrust.

Fraudulent elections/ corruptions

Similar to Nasralla's former government accused of fraudulent elections and complaints of inconsistencies, Asfuranow faces central criticism for his disregarding of democracy. Honduras' day of elections faced major obstacles due to supposed technical issues, where president of the National Electoral Council, Ana Paula Hall, blamed the private company in charge of presenting the results for the delay. Consequently, a backlog meant 15% of tally sheets were counted by hand, with only a mere 36% being actually processed. What is more, Asfura's inauguration ceremony exacerbated tensions. Taking office at the Parliament Headquarters instead of the National Stadium traditionally used, as with his refusal to invite presidents and heads of state from other countries, confirms a deliberate departure from established political norms.

Trump's interference

Honduras's bilateral relations with the US have been integral to economic security, where remittances make up 31% of GDP. From the outset, Asfura intends to strengthen these relations with the US. Yet, Trump's interference reflects the wider dangers of neocolonialism within a global recession to far-right ideologies. The presidential elections came during a politically tumultuous climate, ruptured by Trump's increased pressure⁴⁵ on Venezuela.

The US president stated that "democracy is on trial" in Honduras, foreseeing a "takeover" if Asfura's rivals won the election. Two days after threatening to cut off aid in Honduras if Asfura did not win, Trump pardoned Hernández, Honduras's right-wing ex-president, accused of turning his country into a narco-state. Contrary to previous crackdowns on drug flows in the US, this measure shows an inconsistency in policy, reinforcing the favouring of political alliances over state objectives.

Consequences of the election results: the rise of the New Right

Asfura's ascent to a presidency backed by Trump reflects the broader wave of the New Right in Latin America. Understood by Alberto Vergara, radical New Right parties are defined by their institutional and partisan dimensions, which differ from the traditional Right in the sense that they seek to mobilise the masses through polarisation, antagonisation, and most harrowingly through a romanticisation of colonial history. In this way, the New Right should not be seen as an immediate construct, but rather a trajectory within specific national, institutional and political contexts. Asfura's presidency comes to mirror the emergence of Kast's own far-right presidency in Chile. Public events, rallies, and mobilising their base have become a clear way of polarising against adversaries.

Asfura's presidency not only represents the derailment of democracy within a Honduran context but also calls for a reflection on how these dominating discourses redefine our understanding of democratic legitimacy itself. In other words, the results raise a central concern: can an election be considered legitimate when shaped by foreign influences?

HEADLINES FROM CENTRAL ASIA: THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

edited by: Anna Pringle



Several developments, ranging from ISIS arrests in Uzbekistan to political shifts in Kazakhstan, showcase the variety of challenges Central Asia currently faces. Though each country's issues are distinctive, they highlight how Central Asian governments respond promptly and thoroughly to address security concerns and economic pressures.

Uzbekistan - Security as Preventive Governance

Last month, Uzbek law enforcement detained 17 young men in the Tashkent province for allegedly preparing to travel abroad to join the Islamic State (IS). According to Uzbekistan's Interior Ministry, these boys had 'fallen under the influence of extremist ideas on the Internet'. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) terrorist group, operating in Afghanistan, has increased its propaganda, now targeting disillusioned Uzbeks and Tajiks. The ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack on Moscow City Hall in March of 2024, an attack that left more than 140 people dead. Most of the suspects in connection with the attack were Tajik nationals.

Authorities across Central Asia have ramped up their watch over their majority Muslim populations since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021. The detention of alleged ISIS-linked plotters reflects the ongoing efforts to prevent militant spill over from Afghanistan, showcasing the centrality of pre-emptive security policy in maintaining stability across the region.

In Kyrgyzstan, however, stability has been pursued through political process rather than security measures. The decision to hold early elections comes against a backdrop of recurrent political unrest in the country and reflects an effort to manage uncertainty through institutional channels, rather than allowing prolonged political contestation to destabilise governance.

Kazakhstan - Economic Stability under External Constraints

A Ukrainian drone strike on infrastructure tied to the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) on the Russian Black Sea has majorly disrupted Kazakh oil exports. The CPC handles about 80% of all exports, so the damage here is significant. In response to these disruptions, the Kazakh government has diverted all shipments that would normally go through this pipeline, and they have appealed to American and European partners to help secure alternative oil transport routes in the Black Sea. Though the disruption originated outside Kazakhstan's borders, the authorities responded promptly by acknowledging it, engaging diplomatically with partners, and immediately rerouting exports via secondary channels, highlighting the state's capacity to manage foreign shocks and maintain economic stability amid external pressures.

Tajikistan & Afghanistan – Border Security and Regional Partnerships

Last month, there were cross-border attacks from Afghanistan into Tajikistan that killed Chinese workers involved in mining and infrastructure projects near the Tajik-Afghan frontier. Tajik authorities reported that the attacks involved both firearms and drones, and took place in remote border regions such as Shamsiddin Shohin. Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the incident as an 'act by criminal groups' crossing over from Afghan territory, and strongly condemned the violence.

While no group has publicly claimed responsibility, Tajik officials have blamed groups inside Afghanistan and urged Afghan authorities to act to improve border security. Afghan authorities under the Taliban have expressed regret over the incidents and offered to strengthen border cooperation and joint investigations. Relations with China are crucial for both countries. Amid biting sanctions and international isolation, the Taliban has chased Chinese investment since it retook power in 2021, while China is Tajikistan's largest trade partner, foreign investor, and lender, with Beijing owning more than half of Dushanbe's foreign debt. The Chinese embassy described the security environment as complex and severe and called for measures to protect Chinese nationals and projects. However, these developments have led to diplomatic engagement and added focus on tightening border controls, reinforcing how state actors in the region respond to external security challenges. This reflects a pattern in Central Asia of addressing episodic security threats through institutional channels and coordination with neighbours and partners.

Turkmenistan, meanwhile, remains largely absent from regional headlines.

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The broader question these developments raise is whether Central Asia will ever shed the stereotypes that have long shaped external perceptions of the region. While the post-Soviet era has included authoritarian governments and human rights concerns, these are not unique to Central Asia, and many states in the region have taken considerable steps toward stability and democracy through economic reform and institutional control. Additionally, much of the region's current security issues can be directly linked to the fallout from the unsuccessful two-decade long Western military presence in Afghanistan, an intervention that has left unresolved threats along the border and a legacy of regional instability. As Central Asian states increasingly position themselves as reliable partners in security and trade, the question remains whether international policy and public discourse will begin to reflect the lived reality on the ground, rather than long-standing preconceptions.

KAZAKHSTAN'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

edited by: Grace Samuel



A major transformation swept through Kazakhstan, and the constitutional referendum held on 15 March 2026 led to an increased concentration of presidential power under the guise of democratic reform.

Kazakhstan is a landlocked country between Russia to the north and China to the east, and as the region's largest economy, it has surpassed China in GDP per capita growth in 2025, making it a bellwether for political trends across the former Soviet republics. Originally, the emergence of Kazakhstan's independent constitution was formalised in 1995, four years after the country declared independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The only other major constitutional changes undertaken in the year of 2022, a year marked by violent unrest that left 238 dead.

The reform was led by Tokayev, a president who was initially seen as a democratic contrast to Nazarbayev, but who has instead overseen one of the most extensive constitutional changes that the country has seen in history.

Spanning across 77 articles and amending over 80% of the constitution, the referendum has established a key change from a bicameral to a unicameral parliament. An increasingly popular change is gaining traction across the Central Asian region. **51**

The January 2022 protests – Qandy Qantar, or Bloody January – have left a haunting mark, pushing Tokayev to centralise the executive power. The 2026 referendum is a direct extension of that logic, by abolishing the Senate entirely and replacing the bicameral parliament with a unicameral parliament, one with a single chamber named Kurltai; it was justified under the assumption that it would result in more efficient decision-making. Further consolidating executive authority, Tokayev will have the power, as president, to directly appoint the head of the Supreme Court, the Central Electoral Commission, the Supreme Audit Chamber, the State Security Service, and the Human Rights Commissioner. Completely reversing the post-2022 changes that the West saw as an opportunity for a New Kazakhstan. It aims to fully transition into a proportional representation system for parliamentary elections.

But besides direct executive changes to the way that the political system functions, the referendum also suppresses LGBTQ rights, a change that is consequential to the suppression of the propaganda enacted in December of 2025, as of the date, its established marriage will be defined as a union only between a man and a woman. Moreover, there are finer details like increasing centralisation because of Tokayev's growing fear of elite defection and civil society influence. As NGOs are now obligated to make their foreign funding sources completely transparent and publicly accessible, a feature designed to expose independent civil society.

The constitutional reform is Tokayev's attempt to stay one step ahead: to signal to the elite that the situation remains fully under control, the system is manageable, continuity is assured, and there is no need to panic. A decision that has directly affected power, regime durability, and values: The ability for it to empower presidential power undermines the role of international human-rights law. Amnesty International's Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia has even contended that Kazakhstan's political changes are creating a rollback of international law by increasing concentrations of power in one hand, deterring the progress the country has strived to make since its independence after 1991. By reducing LGBTQ rights and those of other minorities, the state restricts the freedom that individuals possess.

Moreover, a consideration is that the draft was "prepared without inclusive public consultations or meaningful input from independent civil society," prompting questions on the legitimacy of the state.

The referendum posed only one question – "Do you accept the new Constitution?" – conveying that citizens could not vote on any individual amendments, only accept or reject the entire package.

But this pattern also carries regional significance, as it has persisted throughout Central Asia. Once having all been led by the USSR, their systems are still building institutions under the weight of corruption. It may signal to Russia and China, with the area overflowing with autocracies, brutal leaders, and corruption. As one of the region's leading economies, with the largest landmass, it may prompt swift change among other leaders. May lead to the continuation of Tokaev's power after his term is completed in 2029.

It was approved by nearly 90% of voters with 73% turnout, a percentage that exhibits "no real opposition," but what will it really mean for the country?

The nearly 90% voter approval and the 73% turnout will be cited as a democratic mandate in history. But in a state where opposition has no institutional foothold, with citizens having only the choice between yes or no on 77 articles simultaneously, it reveals the architecture of consent rather than the will of the people. As the new constitution takes effect on 1 July 2026, the question is not whether Kazakhstan has changed – it has. The question is whether anyone outside its borders is watching closely enough to notice.

"BORDERS HAVE GUARDS AND GUARDS HAVE GUNS"

(JOSEPH CAREN): THE ETHICS OF IMMIGRATION

edited by: Grace Samuel



In today's world, ethics challenge the conventional structure of power-based realpolitik, dictating not what states should be, but rather what they ought to be. As a constituent reflection of morality, this article argues the need for the precedence of ethics in the discussions of immigration. It will not prevent answering to what extent these systems are being exploited and misused.

Practised partiality in state decision-making remains a familiar though controversial cornerstone of international ethics today, especially when it concerns which persons fall inside or outside the scope of moral concern. What justifies the exclusion of immigrants from borders? Answering this question from a generalistic worldview seems obvious: sovereignty. The notion that a country holds the power to admit or exclude non-citizens then presumably becomes a recognised norm of self-determination. Furthermore, if these policies are said in the name of a country's national interests and state capacity, who is to dispute the prohibited entry of foreigners, whether or not they come as peaceful beings? With this reasoning from a political perspective, then, opening up a country's borders inadvertently becomes a nonstarter.

Immigration has since become central in modern political discourse across the UK. Amongst issues such as climate change, poverty, the cost of living and the NHS (National Health Service), immigration was voted the top priority amongst all British voters in a recent poll released in January 2026, totalling to 23%. Furthermore, 115,990 hate crimes were recorded in March 2025 in England and Wales, with a 6% increase in race hate crimes. Statistics alone reflect the public's role in placing immigration at the heart of the country's lawmaking concerns.

In discussions of the legitimacy of immigration control, political philosophers often tend to assert the argument of whether or not states can ever have the right to dictate who can or cannot have the right to enter their territories. The answer to this question remains simply the set of moral values a state attributes to itself. Lawmaking policies are often backed by the notion of legality. However, it is to be established that legality does not always equate to morality. As HLA Hart maintained throughout *The Concept of Law*, any law, even after being legitimised by a legislature, has no obligation to uphold any particular set of moral ideals.

Though there is no consensus on the definition of a migrant, it is often defined by an individual's foreign citizenship. Many overlook that an individual's birthright is ultimately a product of historical contingency. Many also do not account for the exuded class privilege and enhanced life opportunities that come from citizenship in Western democracies. This complacency runs deep in the Western superiority complex. Should an individual's path be limited just because they are born in a different country?

Another prominent idea in immigration discourse is the separation of "legal" and "illegal" immigrants. With the surge of anti-immigration policies across the globe, politicians argue that these restrictions are simply put in place to regulate the lawful entry of foreigners into the state. The term "illegal" then effectively functions in their favour as a safeguard for a country's sovereignty. However, immigration policies implemented by the Home Office indefinitely impact "legal" and "illegal" immigrants alike.

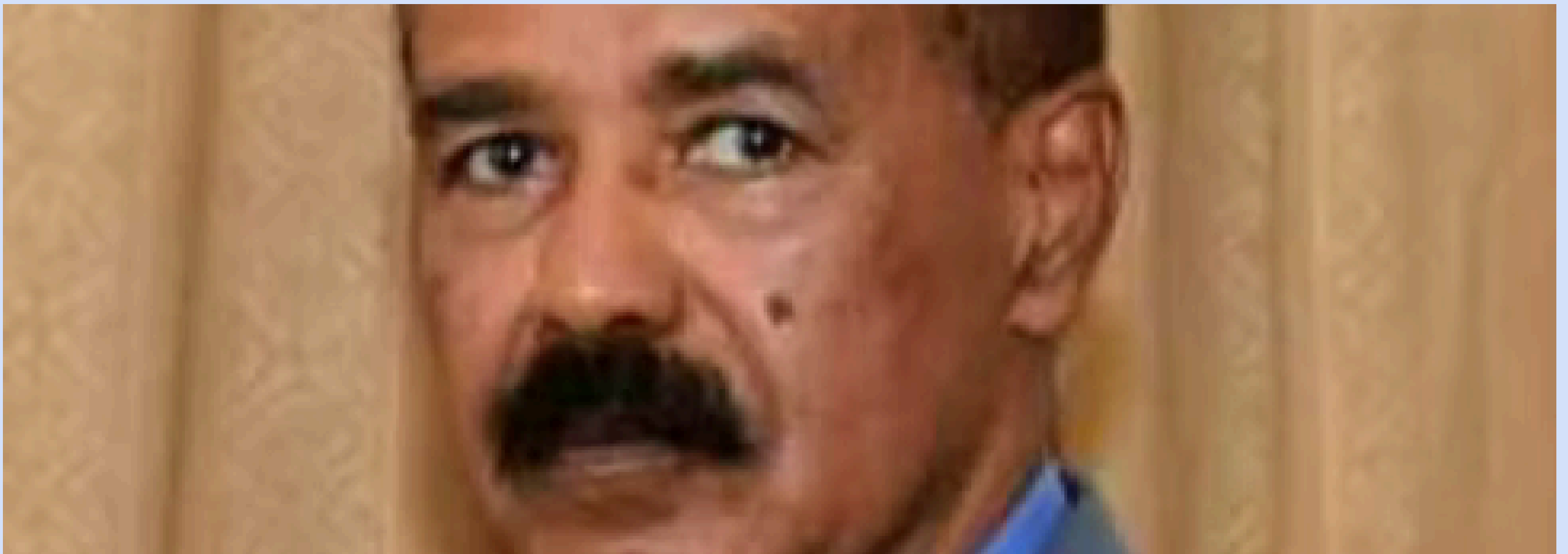
One of the most notable proposals by the Home Secretary in 2025 was the increase in the qualifying period for permanent residency in the UK. The initial period of 5 years was doubled to 10, while the period for migrants who relied on benefits was extended to 20. In regard to education, ministers are abandoning the initially implemented "international student recruitment targets" and are instead expanding British educational providers overseas in efforts to reduce immigration. The Graduate Route Visa too has shortened from 24 to 18 months, while maintenance thresholds continue to rise. Though London has long been cited as an international talent hub. These increased restrictions on migration processes have ignited a wave of insecurity amongst immigrants for their future settlement plans. Furthermore, an inculcated culture of the "race against the clock" for international postgraduates searching for jobs.

What institutions fail to recognise is the opportunities that migration brings, not only for the individual but for the country. In a study published by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and Together with Refugees, research conducted by the London School of Economics (LSE) shows that every refugee accepted in the UK has the capacity to contribute £266,000 to the economy with fair and humane changes within the asylum system. The report analysed overall benefits and potential savings that come with the expansion and modification of the UK's current asylum system.

Migration is movement, and movement is humanity. This article acknowledges that structurally induced interests play a significant role in the lawmaking of migration processes. However, it in no way gives it a moral philosophical seal, and does not prevent us from asking to what extent these policies are self-serving and linked to material benefits and opportunities that are only offered to some individuals and not others.

ON ERITREA AND GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC HEALTH

edited by: Taïssiya Shegay



News Bias and How it Manifests

Turn on the news right now, or pick up the latest print, and the same countries' names will most likely appear: the United States, Palestine, Israel, Ukraine, Russia, and China, among a handful of others. Most people don't realise that they've been reading stories about the same places every day, and the focus on these countries is understandable considering the ongoing, heated conflicts occurring in most of these countries. For a moment, though, ponder on the last time you read about Eritrea in the news or heard about the political climate there. Chances are you won't remember because the country is comparatively less relevant to you, and especially because it is less relevant geopolitically. Maybe it would surprise you to know that Eritrea is on the brink of war with Ethiopia, with whom there have been bloody encounters for decades. Eritrea's news matters, the state of its domestic climate and regime matters, and the condition of Eritrea's democracy, while crippling, is revealing of global democratic backsliding occurring around the world.

Eritrea: Situating it on the Geopolitical Stage

Eritrea is a country located on the Horn of Africa with a coastline on the Red Sea. It borders Sudan, Djibouti, and Ethiopia, the latter of which had control over Eritrea until 1993, when it became a sovereign state following a war for independence that lasted nearly 30 years. The population is composed of a variety of ethnic groups, with the two largest being the Tigray and Tigre, and the primary religions of the region include Sunni Muslim and Eritrean Orthodox.

These facts are important, but do not reveal in actuality the daily life that the average Eritrean experiences. These facts don't reveal that Eritrea is one of the most rapidly depopulating nations in the world, as thousands flee the country every month, usually to escape the compulsory military service that is required by every civilian upon finishing school and which has no definite end. They also don't reveal the lack of energy infrastructure and the issues with transportation and telecommunication that contribute to poverty and food insecurity in the country. However, what is also neglected from this narrative are the improvements that have been made, such as rising literacy rates and primary school enrollment, as well as Eritrea's health care system, which is one of the best in Africa. Mainstream media focuses on the conflicts, the flashy, the fatalities, but often neglects the beautiful culture present around the world and the day-to-day improvements, however small, being made to the quality of life in various countries.

Eritrean Domestic Politics: What's the Story?

A primary cause of increasing tensions within Eritrea is the deterioration of relations with Ethiopia. Post-independence in 1993, Eritrea and Ethiopia engaged in a deadly border war from 1998 to 2003, framing the hostile relationship between the two countries. Ethiopia lost coastal access after losing Eritrea, and they are continuing, with desperate attempts, to regain this access. Rather than pursuing a path of peace, Eritrea, however, has strengthened ties with Egypt, in addition to the government being accused of working with an opposition group based in Ethiopia's Tigray region known as the Tigray People's Liberation Front, according to Al Jazeera. This international conflict has thus increased inner turmoil within Eritrea and created an environment stricken with illiberal practices that have become structural issues today.

What is the State of Democracy in Eritrea?

Freedom House is a democracy indicator, using a two-tier system to score countries using an aggregate political rights score, on a scale of 0-40 and an aggregate civil liberties score, on a scale from 0-60. To put this into perspective, Eritrea has a score of 3 out of 100, with 1 out of 40 in political rights and 2 out of 60 in civil liberties as of 2025. It is considered a militarised authoritarian state and "has not held a national election since independence from Ethiopia in 1993", indicating its lack of free and fair elections, which is usually a cornerstone of democratic practices. The sole political party is that of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, and the media is completely censored as independent media was shut down in 2001. The only function of government that is deemed supportive of democracy is that of the safeguards against official corruption, which are considered strong and effective (still with only a relative score of 1 out of 4). Similarly, the only freedom of expression allowed is the freedom for citizens to express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private (again with only a relative score of 1 out of 4). Lastly, individuals do enjoy certain personal social freedoms, such as choice of marriage, size of family, appearance, and protection from domestic violence, still with a relative score of 1 out of 4. It is apparent that democracy is scarce in Eritrea, not protected, not practised, and not a historical fact either. While there is a global trend of democratic backsliding, Eritrea, since its independence, seems to have never been democratic at all, contributing to the mass exodus of citizens out of the country. This migration outwards seems to be a direct manifestation that citizens enjoy democratic practices where their civil liberties and political rights are protected, where there are free and fair elections with safeguards against corruption, and where the economy and government are open and checked accordingly to protect against authoritarianism and geo-politically controlled economic policy.

Why is this trend important?

Evidently, Eritrea has never been that democratic of a country and democracy for most countries is a recent achievement. While there are more democracies than there were in 1900, the key pattern to observe and take action against today is that more countries are in periods of autocratization than democratisation. According to the V-Dem report in 2025, 45 countries have been affected by a wave of autocratization, while only 19 countries are considered to be democratising. Liberal democracies are also considered to be the rarest form of government in the world, reaching 2009 levels with only 29 governments around the globe being classified as liberal democracies. These trends are important to notice and keep in mind during policy decisions because the democratic values that have driven the liberal international order for decades are unentrenching themselves from the global order, which could wreak havoc on democracy as we know it. In order to adequately protect civil liberties, to support open economies, and to create governments with checks and balances that can defend against corruption, action needs to be taken to support free and fair elections everywhere and to ensure that democratic values remain central to government creation.

WHEN WILL THE LESSON BE LEARNED? THE IMF'S FAILING PRESCRIPTION FOR DEBT CRISES

edited by: Tassiya Shegay



In early January 2026, Pakistan's streets erupted in protest. Workers demonstrated outside press clubs in Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi against IMF-linked reforms, including the privatisation of electricity distribution companies and soaring power prices. Demonstrators burned effigies not of Pakistani politicians, but of the IMF itself, an institution 7,000 miles away in Washington, DC.

This pattern is quite familiar. From Jakarta in 1998 to Athens in 2012, the pattern repeats: a country faces a crisis, the IMF arrives with a bailout and harsh conditions. Yet in 2026, the question resonates more urgently than ever, especially across the Global South. Why do so many countries still end up back at the same point?

The International Monetary Fund's approach to sovereign debt crises has remained consistent since the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s. The IMF calls this 'structural adjustment'. In practice, it follows a predictable pattern: cut government spending, raise taxes, devalue the currency, privatise state assets, and remove subsidies on essentials like food and fuel. The stated aim is to restore investor confidence and stabilise public finances quickly. The cost, however, is usually immediate for ordinary citizens.

Recent programmes stick rigidly to this template. Sri Lanka's \$3 billion IMF bailout in 2023 required major preconditions: tax rises, sharp energy tariff increases, and subsidy cuts. Egypt's \$8 billion Extended Fund Facility demanded rapid fuel subsidy removal while inflation exceeded 30%. Pakistan, now on its 25th IMF arrangement since 1950, is again being required to intensify tax collection and restructure parts of the economy despite declining household incomes and growing unrest, the very conditions that sparked January's protests.

These reforms may look coherent in theory, but their impact on everyday life is severe. As Egypt implemented IMF-backed currency reforms from 2023 to 2024, the Egyptian pound lost more than half its value. This wasn't an abstract market adjustment: ordinary Egyptians faced unaffordable imports, falling real wages, and collapsing savings.

If these sacrifices reliably delivered recovery, they might be defensible. Yet the historical record suggests otherwise. Argentina has signed 23 IMF agreements since 1956, yet defaulted again in 2020. Greece remains one of the most striking examples. Between 2010 and 2018, Greece underwent three bailout programmes totalling roughly €289 billion. Severe austerity measures drove the economy to contract by around 25%. Youth unemployment peaked at 62.5% in 2013. Yet by 2018, Greece's debt-to-GDP ratio had climbed to 189%, higher than the 145% recorded when the crisis began in 2010. In other words, the country endured immense hardship while its debt problem became worse, not better.

Other cases tell the same story. Jamaica spent much of the 1990s under IMF reforms but saw near-zero GDP growth despite adopting structural changes. Tunisia's IMF programmes from 2013 onwards failed to significantly reduce unemployment, which remained above 15%, feeding instability that contributed to the 2021 constitutional crisis. Different regions, different economies, but the same theme: austerity brings social damage without guaranteeing financial recovery.

So why does the IMF keep repeating the same approach?

Much of the explanation lies in political economy and institutional incentives. The IMF's largest shareholders (the United States holds 16.5% of voting rights, followed by Japan, China, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) are precisely the countries whose banks and investors have lent money to developing countries. IMF programmes, therefore, operate as both a crisis support for borrowers and a mechanism to reassure creditors. In practice, IMF loans are often used to meet external debt payments, even as austerity deepens. The stability of the global financial system is protected, even if the social cost is pushed onto the most vulnerable.

Institutional culture reinforces this dynamic. The IMF's economists tend to be trained in a Western policy tradition that strongly favours liberalisation and treats state spending with suspicion. Bureaucracies also reward predictability: sticking to an established framework is safer than designing radically different programmes for each crisis. When criticised, IMF officials often refer to 'programme ownership'. Yet countries in financial collapse rarely negotiate as equals. When the alternative is default and chaos, signing is not a genuine choice.

Growing economic research challenges the IMF's foundational assumptions, suggesting the approach is not just politically convenient but empirically flawed. Research demonstrates that fiscal multipliers are much larger during downturns than IMF models had assumed. Put simply, cutting government spending during a recession shrinks the economy more than expected, reducing tax revenue and worsening debt ratios. Policies intended to fix debt often end up reinforcing it. IMF officials argue that conditionality ensures reforms happen, and that governments often delay necessary adjustments until crisis forces action. But when conditions deepen recessions and worsen debt dynamics, the cure can prolong the illness.

If the IMF's approach is failing repeatedly, reform becomes unavoidable. Economists, including Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, argue that bailout programmes should focus on recovery rather than rapid fiscal adjustment. Instead of demanding rapid fiscal tightening, programmes should allow longer adjustment periods and recognise that growth is often the only realistic route out of debt.

Furthermore, debt must be restructured earlier and more aggressively. Too often, programmes focus on rescheduling payments rather than cutting the debt burden itself. Greece is frequently cited as a case where debt should have been written down far earlier. The G20's Common Framework for debt treatment, introduced in 2020, is a step forward in principle, but its weak results suggest it lacks enforcement and coordination. By 2022, only three countries had requested treatment under the framework, and all three processes suffered significant delays due to limited private sector participation.

Beyond restructuring, conditionality cannot be one-size-fits-all. A country with high unemployment and low inflation may need stimulus, not austerity. For the poorest states, some economists argue the IMF should reduce conditionality dramatically and provide counter-cyclical financing with minimal strings attached, especially as crises become more frequent due to climate disasters, pandemics, and geopolitical shocks.

Pakistan, Egypt, and Sri Lanka will eventually emerge from their current crises, as countries often do. But unless the IMF seriously rethinks how it handles sovereign debt and emergency support, this cycle will continue. In a few years, journalists will write the same story about different countries, asking the same question that should have been answered decades ago: when will the lesson finally be learned?

THE WOMEN'S ISSUE, AND WHY IT'S NOT JUST

WOMEN'S

edited by: Grace Samuel



When reflecting on International Women's Day this year, it is perhaps important to return to the "women's issue" and why female politicians are so much better at addressing them. Recent studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between 'women's issues' being raised in political chambers and the number of female politicians in that chamber. Furthermore, elected women have been found to be better at predicting the political concerns of their female constituents. However, issues within policy that are labelled as "women's issues" can range from childcare to gender-based violence, often affecting far more social groups than women. And in the current political context of dwindling support for EDI initiatives, the call for the representation of women in political chambers has become more urgent.

This correlation has significant implications for voting behaviour, as constituents increasingly vote based on shared characteristics as they may profile certain candidates. Women can feel a greater level of protection or safety when represented in public offices, and they would be right to. To illustrate, one study has revealed that within Brazil, the presence of a female mayor correlated with a 50% average reduction in violence against women in her 4-year tenure. This study compared municipalities to conclude that women in office more effectively address gender-based violence. Moreover, it was the most gender representative cabinet in British history that termed the levels of violence against women and girls in the UK a national emergency, and that same cabinet has now begun implementing a new VAWG strategy to protect children from the misogyny that encourages this. On the other hand, if women become solely responsible for raising 'women's issues', then they risk becoming siloed in the political sphere. In times of national crisis, 'women's issues' may be seen as less urgent, and almost fanciful, if they are misunderstood and mislabelled in this way.

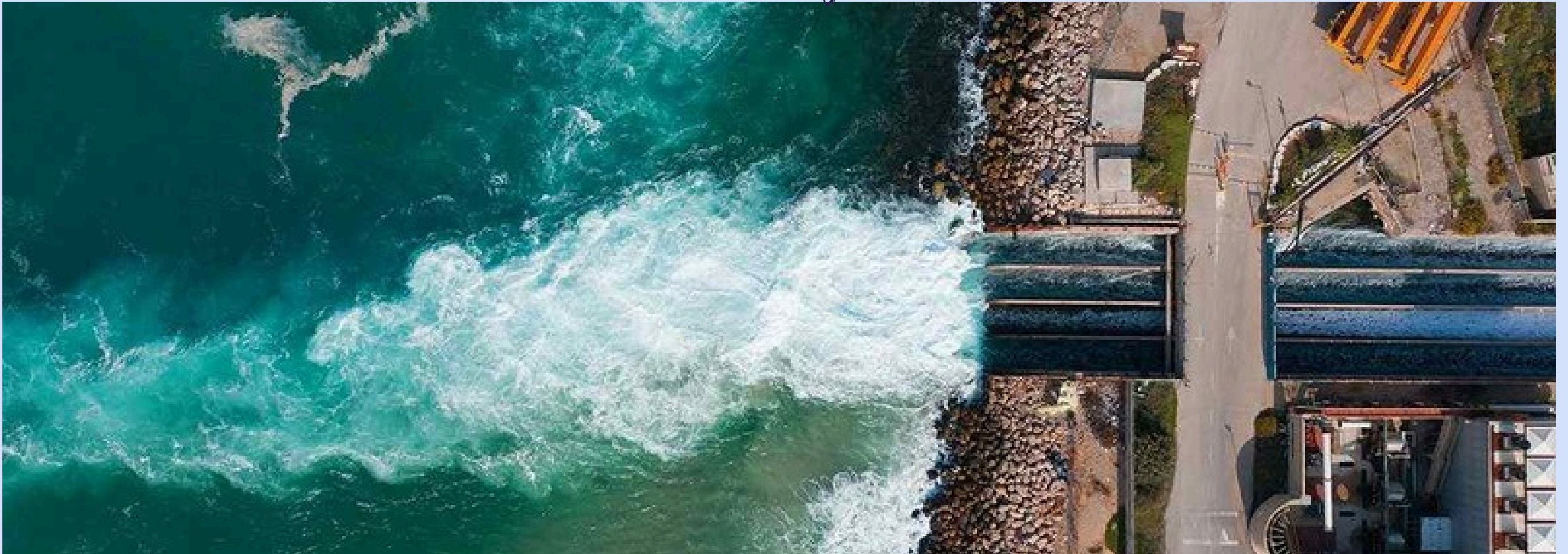
Thus, it is important to unpack what 'women's issues' are exactly. They often refer to policy areas or rights that disproportionately affect women, or seek to address gender inequality. They can include access to healthcare such as reproductive rights, equal pay, childcare access, and as aforementioned, gender-based violence. Yet, as the scope and remit of a 'women's issue' is so large, it inevitably impacts the majority of a given population. For example, childcare reforms, being a 'women's issue' - such as parental leave and childcare allowance - do recognise that the burden of household responsibilities and domestic labour often falls upon the mother. But, the narrative that this is therefore a 'women's issue' only recreates this unequal division, therefore adversely contributing to the gender inequality that policy reforms seek to mitigate. Additionally, the concern of equal pay applies to more social groups than women. As shift work in general is increasingly devalued, it is often migrant workers who experience unequal pay. The disparate labour laws around the world are a concern for workers' rights writ large. Concerning the idea of 'equal pay' only with 'women's issues' perhaps dilutes this multifaceted problem of exploitation. Ultimately, the labelling and mislabelling of key policy issues perpetuates a damaging assumption that women's issues only affect women. It can compartmentalise these issues and push them further away, or ignore other social groups who may experience certain discrimination.

What's even more concerning is that the current political vortex is not particularly receptive to arguments that favour representation. If we must call them 'women's issues,' then we need more women in office talking about them. But, this is not helped when EDI and DEI policies are beginning to be disregarded as threats to meritocracy and identity politics is feared in the case it creates unneeded culture wars. Nonetheless, it is clear that women's continued political engagement is essential to ensuring their security and also spotlighting key social issues. Hope remains, though, as international organisations such as UN Women have continued to echo this sentiment. They advocate for gender-sensitive reforms and fund local initiatives, such as Women's Leadership Training in Papua New Guinea, and the Programme for Enhancing Rural Women's Leadership and Participation in Nation Building in Timor Leste. In the case of an election, women are helped prepare for official duty, and if not, they are guided to remain active citizens within their local communities.

Not just on International Women's Day, but year-round, it is incumbent upon all of us to pay attention to our women in office, or more crucially to those 'women's issues.'

WATER WEAPONISED - WHY DESALINATION PLANTS ARE PRIMARY TARGETS IN WAR

edited by: Elijah Eaton



Bombed buildings and ambushed oil rigs make for familiar headlines. But the destruction of desalination infrastructure may be the most disturbing tactic of modern warfare. Nowhere is this more apparent today than in the turbulent Middle East, where access to clean water is quickly becoming a matter of survival.

Water has always been used as a weapon in conflicts dating back to ancient Greece. A particularly striking case occurred in 416 BC when Hermocrates, a Syracusan general, forced the Athenians to remain in a malaria-infested plain near Syracuse, leading to their defeat. Similarly, Operation Chastise (1943) during WWII saw British RAF bombers destroy German dams. The lesson was clear even then: control over water is a major form of political and military power.

Water sources have always been precious; their sabotage in times of war triggers a particular kind of destruction, one that is disproportionately felt by civilians. Although there is an abundance of water on the planet, it is unevenly distributed in space and time, with humid and arid regions as well as wet and dry seasons. These disparities have made the seizure and destruction of water sources a deliberate strategy of war.

Water scarcity is a defining feature of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Approximately 42 per cent of the United Arab Emirates' drinking water comes from desalination plants, while that figure is 90 per cent in Kuwait, 86 per cent in Oman, and 70 per cent in Saudi Arabia. This shortage of abundant fresh water offers an opportunity for intervening states' self-interests to be realised. We can see this unfolding now through the USA's "preemptive" attack on Iran. Trump's illegally waged war, supposedly aiming to "eliminate threats to Americans and allies from Iran and proxies", has recently taken a water-destroying approach. Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi accused US drone strikes on Sunday, 8 March, of "attacking a freshwater desalination plant on Qeshm Island". It was later confirmed to have restricted water supplies to 30 villages.

Gulf states, in one of the harshest climates in the world, are heavily dependent on processing seawater to satisfy the needs of their growing populations. As such, desalination plants are perhaps the region's most critical infrastructure. Without them, the region would be, for the most part, uninhabitable. The destruction of desalination plants paves the way for damaging and irreversible harm in the MENA region, with critical areas such as the Persian Gulf acting as a crucial supply for desalination. It is precisely this essentiality that makes them a target in warfare.

The MENA region, to satisfy the freshwater needs of its population in a naturally arid climate, as well as their history of being a destination for imperialism, played a major role in the initial development of large-scale desalination plants. It wasn't until 1869 that the British government built a distillation plant in what is now Yemen in order to provide steamships passing through the Gulf and Red Sea with freshwater. One of the very first extensive desalination plants was constructed in MENA.

The deliberate targeting of water infrastructure is one of the most tactically cruel and strategically calculated forms of modern warfare. Where previous conflicts saw the systematic destruction of energy assets – namely, Operation Nimble Archer on 19 October 1987, in which United States Navy forces struck two Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf – contemporary warfare has expanded this logic to encompass something far more immediately lethal: water itself.

Water infrastructure has been weaponised as an active theatre of conflict. The world is entering a new era of acute water scarcity, and armed conflict is rapidly accelerating that trajectory. As water stress intensifies globally, it creates dangerous asymmetries. Some nations will bear the consequences of a shortage far worse than others. This disparity itself becomes a geopolitical instrument. For states with the leverage to exploit it, water scarcity is not merely a humanitarian crisis to be managed but a strategic condition to be cultivated – a lens through which the United States' actions in the region may warrant closer scrutiny.

AT DAVOS, MARK CARNEY WARNS AGAINST THE TRUMP ERA

“IF YOU ARE NOT AT THE TABLE, YOU ARE ON THE MENU”

edited by: Grace Samuel



At the World Economic Forum in Davos, in a barely veiled criticism of Donald Trump, the Canadian Prime Minister called on states to unite against hegemonic powers. Experts and North American media see it as a risky change of tone from Ottawa at a time when the global order appears more fragmented than ever.

“Never has a Canadian prime minister gone this far,” marvels La Presse in its coverage of Carney’s address at the World Economic Forum on 20 January. Mark Carney used the stage in Davos to declare before the world’s economic and political elite “the end of the rules-based international system”, denounce major powers that turn economic integration into “a tool of pressure” and insist: “Middle powers must act together, because if you are not at the table, you are on the menu.”

In the room, several European and Asian delegations privately welcomed what they described as a “clear-eyed” intervention, according to The Economist, but diplomats also acknowledge that Ottawa is exposing itself to political and trade retaliation. Canada remains deeply dependent on the American market, which absorbs nearly 75% of its exports.

Beyond the immediate diplomatic fallout, Carney's speech also reflects a deeper strategic anxiety within Canada's political and economic elite. For decades, Ottawa has built its prosperity on the assumption of a stable, predictable partnership with Washington. That assumption is now openly questioned. With Trump signalling a return to transactional diplomacy, tariffs as leverage and alliances treated as optional, Canadian policymakers are forced to rethink their long-standing dependence on the United States.

Several analysts at Davos noted that Carney's message was aimed as much at domestic audiences as at foreign capitals. As reported by the CBC, by framing the moment as a "rupture", he prepares Canadians for a period of adjustment in which diversification of trade, defence cooperation and technological partnerships becomes a necessity rather than a slogan. Europe, Southeast Asia and parts of Africa are increasingly seen as alternative markets and political partners capable of reducing Ottawa's vulnerability to American pressure.

At the same time, the Prime Minister is walking a delicate line. Openly challenging Trump risks provoking retaliation, yet silence could leave Canada strategically exposed. "Carney is betting that collective action among middle powers can compensate for a weakening US commitment. The question is whether others are ready to follow."

In Davos, his words resonated. Whether they translate into lasting coalitions, however, will determine if the warning against the Trump era becomes a turning point or merely a symbolic stand.

"Has Carney just announced a major shift in Canada's foreign policy orientation?" asks the CBC. Former Canadian ambassador to the United States Derek Burney told the broadcaster that the Prime Minister "laid out a fairly clear strategy for what could be done to avoid becoming completely subject to the whims of a superpower". In his view, Carney is seeking to reposition Canada as a pivot player between Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

By declaring that the world “is at the heart of a rupture rather than a transition”, Mark Carney “offers a vision of the future”, continues The Brandon Sun. His speech was widely perceived in Davos as a “cry from the heart in a turbulent period of global politics”, notes the Toronto Star. The paper also underlines that Carney is breaking with Canada’s tradition of diplomatic caution in favour of a more assertive, almost Gaullist, posture.

For The Globe and Mail, he “warns the world that the wolves are at our door. And essentially, the wolf he is warning about is Donald Trump.” The National Post judges that “Carney risks drawing Washington’s fire” at a time when North American trade negotiations remain fragile.

“A mistake”

The tone is just as sombre in the American press. The New York Times observes that Mark Carney is “seeking new allies to help his country survive” the end of the Pax Americana. Watching Ottawa’s renewed outreach to Beijing, The Washington Post judges that “Canada will regret moving closer to China in order to provoke Trump”, recalling past tensions over Huawei and tariffs.

Interviewed by La Presse, former national security adviser to Donald Trump, John Bolton, says the Canadian leader made a “mistake” by declaring the end of the rules-based international system and believes that “Canada-US relations could pay the price”.

The Wall Street Journal reports that in Davos, Donald Trump said Mark Carney was ungrateful: “Canada lives thanks to the United States. Remember that, Mark, the next time you make statements.” President Trump has also continued his provocative hints about making Canada the 51st American state. On Tuesday, he posted on his social network Truth Social a series of AI-generated images showing him in the Oval Office with European leaders in front of a map on which the American flag covers not only the United States but also Canada, Greenland and Venezuela.

In Ottawa, some MPs now fear that the rhetoric heard in Davos could translate into a lasting cooling of bilateral relations, while others believe, on the contrary, that Carney merely said out loud what many capitals are thinking quietly: the era of automatic American protection is coming to an end.

WILL ETHIOPIA WAGE WAR WITH ERITREA?

AN INTERVIEW WITH AN EXPERT

edited by: ...



At the beginning of this year, I predicted that Ethiopia would start a war with Eritrea. So I sat down with an expert...

At the start of 2026, Ethiopia felt as though it was moving through one crisis while preparing for another. The war in Tigray had formally ended, but its consequences had not. Fighting continued in Amhara and Oromia. The political settlement in Tigray remained fragile. Addis Ababa was being remade through glossy corridor developments while many residents struggled with inflation, fuel shortages, displacement, water shortages and power cuts. Above all of this sat the return of an older fear: war with Eritrea.

Ethiopia's demand for access to the Red Sea has become one of the defining questions of Abiy Ahmed's current rule. For a landlocked country of more than 120 million people, the economic argument for sea access is easy to understand. The danger lies in the way that argument has been folded into nationalism, military suspicion and the survival politics of a government already facing armed resistance at home.

In January, I interviewed Dr Samuel Bekalo, one of the UK's leading expert consultants on Horn of Africa geopolitics. We spoke again in June, after Ethiopia's election and after he had recently returned from the country. His warning was direct.

"War with Eritrea is not off the table."

From TPLF rule to Abiy's promise

Ethiopia's current crisis did not begin with Abiy. It grew out of a longer political history shaped by centralised power, ethnic federalism and the afterlife of authoritarian rule.

After the fall of the Derg in 1991, Ethiopia was governed by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, the EPRDF. The coalition was formally multi-ethnic and built around Ethiopia's system of ethnic federalism. In theory, this system recognised the country's diversity by granting regional self-government to communities including Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan, Somali and other groups. In practice, power remained heavily concentrated within the ruling coalition and especially around the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the TPLF.

The EPRDF period cannot be reduced to one story. The government expanded infrastructure, drove economic growth and built a strong developmental image. It also governed through surveillance, repression and restricted political competition. Elections were held, but meaningful opposition was limited. Civil society and media faced pressure. Many Ethiopians experienced the state as both developmental and deeply authoritarian.

By the mid-2010s, the system was breaking apart. Protests in Oromia and Amhara exposed anger over land dispossession, political exclusion and TPLF dominance. The federal structure promised autonomy, yet many people felt locked out of real power. Hailemariam Desalegn resigned in 2018 and Abiy Ahmed became prime minister.

His arrival carried extraordinary hope. Abiy released political prisoners, welcomed exiled opposition figures and promised democratic reform. His peace deal with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki ended two decades of formal hostility and won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. For a short time, Abiy appeared to offer Ethiopia a way out of the old EPRDF order.

That promise unravelled quickly. In 2019, Abiy dissolved the EPRDF and formed the Prosperity Party. His supporters saw this as a move beyond ethnic fragmentation. The TPLF refused to join, reading it as a centralising project that threatened Ethiopia's federal settlement. Relations between Addis Ababa and Mekelle deteriorated. In 2020, after Tigray held its own regional election in defiance of the federal government's decision to postpone national polls, the dispute became war.

The Tigray war was catastrophic. Ethiopian federal forces, Eritrean troops and allied regional forces fought the TPLF in a conflict marked by mass displacement, hunger, reports of atrocities and widespread conflict-related sexual violence. The Pretoria Agreement formally ended the war in November 2022, but it did not resolve the deeper political question at the heart of the conflict: who has the right to govern Ethiopia and on what terms?

This is the shadow hanging over Abiy's Ethiopia. He inherited a state already shaped by authoritarian habits and unresolved ethnic grievance. Yet inheritance does not absolve leadership. In 2018, Abiy was given rare political capital. Eight years later, much of that hope has curdled into fear.

"He was given an opportunity, even a mandate, the support of the public to do this. But he did the exact opposite."

A state fighting in too many directions

Ethiopia's internal conflicts are often discussed separately: Tigray, Amhara, Oromia. Together, they point to something deeper than isolated regional unrest. They show a federal state unable to rebuild trust with the communities it claims to represent.

In Amhara, Fano forces have become a major challenge to federal authority. In Oromia, conflict involving the Oromo Liberation Army has continued for years. In Tigray, the peace settlement remains fragile and political tensions have not disappeared. The government continues to speak the language of national unity, but much of the country is living through conflict, military pressure or distrust.

"He is fighting with everyone, everywhere."

That line cuts through the polished language of reform. Abiy's early appeal rested on the promise that Ethiopia could move beyond the old politics of ethnic competition. Yet his government is now in conflict with Oromo forces, Amhara forces and Tigrayan actors. This makes it difficult to explain his politics through simple ethnic favouritism. The pattern is wider and more troubling. It looks like a governing style organised around centralisation, coercion and survival.

Abiy's pan-Ethiopian language still appeals to many people who are tired of fragmentation. The idea of a shared Ethiopian project is not inherently authoritarian. It becomes dangerous when unity is defined from above and enforced through force. A genuine national project would require democratic participation, equal rights and meaningful power-sharing. Each new conflict makes those conditions harder to imagine.

The election and the exhaustion of politics

In June 2026, Ethiopia held an election that delivered another overwhelming victory for the Prosperity Party. Officially, the result strengthens Abiy's mandate. Politically, it exposes how narrow the democratic space has become.

Voting did not take place in Tigray. Insecurity disrupted parts of Amhara and Oromia. Major opposition forces were absent, weakened or boycotting. Many of the groups with the strongest claims against the federal government were either outside the process or actively in conflict with it. On paper, the election produced continuity. On the ground, it took place in a fractured country.

"There is not a fair playground to even start competing."

The most revealing part of the June follow-up was not the formal result. It was the mood. During his recent visit, Bekalo saw election campaign trucks calling on people to vote for the Prosperity Party. Many people barely seemed interested. Their attention was on food prices, rent, fuel and the difficulty of getting through daily life.

"People are really tired and fed up of everything. They don't see any point of protesting."

Silence should not be mistaken for consent. In exhausted societies, people may stop protesting because they support the government. They may also stop protesting because they are afraid, economically vulnerable or disappointed by every previous promise of change. Bekalo described people who feared losing social support, housing or work. He also described a deeper political fatigue, shaped by years of protest, war and betrayal.

"They don't see the point of sacrificing their life. They are just waiting quietly for something to happen."

That waiting is politically important. Ethiopia's crisis is often described through the actions of leaders, parties, armed groups and foreign powers. Yet another form of politics sits beneath it: people who know something is wrong, but no longer believe they can alter it.

The dark side of the Dubaification of Addis Ababa

Abiy's Ethiopia is also being built in concrete, glass and asphalt. Addis Ababa has become the stage for a dramatic urban transformation. Roads have been widened. Corridors have been cleared. Parks and public spaces have been redesigned. The capital is being made to look cleaner, brighter and more cosmopolitan.

The image is deliberate. Addis is being asked to perform modernity.

"Urban development should be centred on people."

That line should be obvious, but it is often the first principle abandoned in prestige development. A neighbourhood is not only a physical location. It is childcare, trust, credit, work, memory and social protection. When people are moved quickly or inadequately compensated, the loss cannot be measured only in rent or square metres.

"Their livelihoods depend on neighbourhood support, so the human cost is really massive. It is really a tragedy."

The problem is not development itself. Cities change. Infrastructure matters. Addis needs roads, drainage, water systems, housing and public space. The issue is what kind of development is being pursued and who is expected to absorb its costs. If the poor are displaced so that the capital can look modern, urban renewal becomes another form of dispossession.

The infrastructure beneath the new image also matters. Roads and buildings photograph well. Drainage, electricity, water supply and green space shape how people actually live. Recent flooding in Addis has exposed the weakness of drainage systems. Areas that were farmland or forest a decade ago have become concrete and barren. The city is being polished at the surface while many residents still face shortages and insecurity beneath it.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam raises a similar tension between national spectacle and everyday life. The dam is a symbol of Ethiopian ambition and sovereignty. It has the potential to expand electricity access and strengthen the economy. Yet ordinary households have not necessarily felt that promise in daily life. Power cuts remain. Costs remain high. Infrastructure and corruption still shape whether electricity reaches people.

The gap between national image and ordinary life runs through much of Abiy's project. Ethiopia is being asked to believe in greatness while many people struggle to afford survival.

"Without peace, you cannot do much."

That may be the simplest explanation of Ethiopia's crisis. Peace is not an abstract moral wish. It is the condition that makes development real. Without it, roads, dams, elections and speeches about national greatness become part of the scenery of crisis.

Assab and the return of the Eritrean question

Ethiopia and Eritrea have moved through several reversals in a short period. The two countries fought a brutal border war from 1998 to 2000. Abiy's 2018 peace deal with Isaias Afwerki appeared to transform that relationship. During the Tigray war, Eritrea fought alongside Ethiopia's federal government against the TPLF. Now the relationship has deteriorated again.

The Red Sea sits at the centre of this shift. Ethiopia lost direct access to the sea when Eritrea became independent in 1993. Since then, Ethiopian governments have depended heavily on ports in neighbouring countries, especially Djibouti. The desire for sea access is not new. The danger is the way it is now being spoken about.

Assab, an Eritrean port that once served Ethiopia, has become a symbolic flashpoint. Abiy has repeatedly spoken about Ethiopia's need for sea access. In Eritrea, such language is heard as a threat. Many Ethiopians understand the national argument for access to the Red Sea, but the method matters.

"Everyone agrees and buys [the idea of Red Sea access], but how you do it is a different matter."

Diplomacy, commercial agreements and regional cooperation are one path. Military pressure is another. Eritrea is a recognised sovereign state. Any attempt to seize or force control over Assab would risk a devastating war.

By June, the regional map appeared to have shifted again. Eritrea and Tigrayan actors, once bitter enemies during the Tigray war, seemed closer because of their shared hostility towards Abiy. Some Amhara actors also increasingly see the federal government as the main threat. These alignments are fluid and contested, but the broader point is hard to ignore: the old map no longer works.

"Before, it was Amhara and Eritrea against Tigray. Now it is the reverse."

The danger does not come from Abiy having unlimited power. In fact, the limits are clear: a damaged economy, stretched military capacity and a public with little appetite for another war. The danger is that leaders under pressure do not always act cautiously. A government whose survival depends on crisis may be tempted to create one more.

"They are at a war footing. From the Ethiopian side, it depends on [whether] they have the resources or the public backing. Abiy Ahmed is reckless."

A regional fire waiting for sparks

A war between Ethiopia and Eritrea would not remain contained. The Horn of Africa is already strained by Sudan's war, refugee movements, Nile politics, Gulf state competition and Red Sea militarisation. Regional powers have interests in ports, food security, gold, water and influence. Any conflict between Addis Ababa and Asmara would immediately enter that wider web.

"It just adds fuel to the fire."

That is why Ethiopia's internal politics matter beyond its borders. Ethiopia is one of Africa's most populous countries and a central state in the Horn. Its instability affects Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya and the wider Red Sea. The country's internal conflicts, refugee movements and port politics are already regional questions.

The international community often responds to Ethiopia through crisis management: a peace agreement here, an election statement there, a humanitarian warning after the worst has already happened. That is not enough. The pressure to avoid war with Eritrea has to be matched by serious support for an internal political settlement.

"Unless all groups in Ethiopia get together around the table and have proper dialogue, monitored by independent bodies, I don't see a way forward."

That is the unresolved demand at the heart of Ethiopia's crisis. The EPRDF system closed political space while promising developmental success. Abiy arrived promising democratic renewal and national unity. His rule has instead produced a more personalised, militarised and distrustful political order.

The danger now is not only one possible war with Eritrea. It is the accumulation of unresolved crises: Tigray's fragile peace, Amhara's insurgency, Oromia's violence, a contested election, economic despair, urban displacement and Red Sea brinkmanship.

Ethiopia does not need another grand promise from above. It needs a political settlement that people can live inside. Without that, roads, dams, elections and speeches about national greatness will not be enough. They will become the scenery of a country waiting for something to break.

OUR PODCAST



A LETTER FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT...

My work as Vice President of Circum Mundum was really about helping Grace where I could and focusing on the podcast. After creating a team of ambitious and motivated hosts, content researchers and editors we started deliberating on what we wanted the podcast to be about.

We quickly realised we did not want long and boring episodes about IR, we wanted to break down politics to make it more accessible. Our motto became "politics from politics students". We aim to explain and analyse current political phenomena or events and link them to what we learn at uni.

Even though producing a podcast is not very easy (especially without a working podcast room at the department building), our team has done great work with the resources we have. We have created an episode about Women's History Month and a lot more episodes in the works.

Therefore I would like to thank my amazing hosts Aamena and Zubaida for interesting conversations and navigating these sensitive, confusing and very polarising issues with grace and intellect. I also want to thank Mikael for researching the content and coming up with topics, establishing the foundations of every episode. Lastly, I want to thank Jagravi for editing and never getting tired of my endless suggestions.

I have enjoyed my time as the vice president of Circum-Mundum immensely and I am very excited for what's to come for the journal and podcast.

-Aleyna

EPIISODE 1

listen here!



WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH AND GENDER EQUALITY: A BIG HOAX?



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