

# Fair Observer

Monthly



September 2025

**Fair Observer**  
Independence, Diversity, Debate

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# Fair Observer Monthly



September 2025

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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

Our digital media platform has more than 3,000 contributors from 90 countries, cutting across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. With fact-checking and a rigorous editorial process, we provide diversity and quality in an era of echo chambers and fake news.

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

As a nonprofit, we are free from owners and advertisers. When there are six jobs in public relations for every job in journalism, we rely on your donations to achieve our mission.

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# The G Word: When is Gaza Actually a Genocide?

I.M. Manava  
September 02, 2025

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**Israel continues its military campaign in Gaza while the US and European allies refuse to call the assault a genocide. Bombings, starvation and blocked aid have left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead and many more at risk of dying. Western silence signals complicity and threatens future accountability.**

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**W**hen is a genocide a genocide? You'd think this question would be easy to answer. After all, the official definition of the word is clear. The UN's 1948 Genocide Convention explains it as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part..."

But somehow, the Western world has been tying itself up in knots for nearly two years trying not to call what is happening in the Gaza Strip by its name. Experts have been warning us of it for some time. Now, in the past several months, we've been seeing inarguable proof of it: vivid, disturbing images of an entire people — children and families — displaced, homeless, fighting for food, desperate for health services, and suffering, starving and dying amid the rubble of Gaza. And yet, the Western world has still not called it a "genocide". So, when is a genocide a genocide?

## Starvation, bombings and blocked Aid

Is it a genocide when the people of a region are imprisoned within its borders? Is it when buildings — homes, schools, hospitals, and places of worship — are bombed daily, leading to over 60,000 civilian deaths and over 145,000 injuries? Is it when over 18,000 children have been killed and more still are lying dead under the rubble? Is it when the country's administration blocks desperately-needed aid (including food, medicines, and even water) from entering the region?

Is it when the foreign press is not allowed in the region? Foreign journalists have been prohibited from going inside the Gaza Strip to see or report on the horrific situation. In the meantime, some 270 local journalists have been killed. Most recently, five Palestinian journalists working for international media (Reuters, AP, Al Jazeera and the Middle East Eye) died in a double-strike, apparently a strategy used by the Israeli military; the first strike hits a building, and when aid workers and journalists rush to the scene, there is a second strike. Those who are still alive are now starving, along with the rest of the population.

Is it when South Africa — having suffered apartheid itself — accused Israel of practicing apartheid against Palestinians and worse? Or is it when they brought a case of genocide against Israel concerning the Gaza Strip before the International Court of Justice in December 2023? A case that Brazil later joined South Africa in.

Is it when the current Pope (Leo) — head of the Roman Catholic religion, and moral and spiritual leader of some 1.4 billion people — describes the situation using phrases like "collective punishment", "indiscriminate use of force" and "forced displacement of the population"? Is it when the previous Pope (Francis), before his death, was compelled to write in his book (coming out this November), "According to some experts,



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what is happening in Gaza has the characteristics of a genocide. It should be carefully investigated ... “?”

Is it when hundreds of thousands of ordinary people come out to protest on the streets of major global cities like London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Stockholm, Athens, Toronto, Sao Paulo, Seoul, Sydney, New York and even Israel because they are horrified at the inhumane conditions in the Gaza Strip and the mass murder of Palestinians?

Is it when UN experts, numerous humanitarian organizations (including MSF, Amnesty International, ICRC, and Human Rights Watch), and even two Israel-based human rights groups, say that “the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide”? Is it when the UN passes yet another resolution in support of the Palestinian people? This past June, 149 countries voted for the resumption of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip to prevent starvation. Even the Russian ambassador to the UN has called the situation an “inhumane tragedy”. The US and Israel voted against the resolution.

Is it a genocide when starving people coming to so-called aid stations in search of food are shot and killed by the dozens each day? Last year, Israel banned the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) — the UN organization that has had the responsibility for the past 75 years to provide humanitarian aid and support to the Palestinians — claiming that Hamas had infiltrated UNRWA.

Around four months later, the US and Israeli governments formed their own organization (the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation [GHF]) to supposedly aid the Palestinians; this is like getting the foxes to guard the hen house. In the past two months, nearly 1,400 Palestinians have been killed (mostly shot) by members of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and American mercenaries while

trying to access food aid. More than 859 of them were killed near GHF sites.

### **Palestinians killed while starving**

However, none of this seems sufficient for Western world leaders to say the G word. Although there is now increasing global chatter among common people, humanitarian institutions and non-Western countries, all of it has been met by the Israeli and American governments with charges of “antisemitism”.

For the past 300 years, scholars have used the word “semitic” to mean anyone who is from the Middle East and speaks a Semitic language — including Jews and Arabs (i.e., Palestinians). In 1879, the word “antisemitism” was coined to mean hatred against Jews specifically, not all Semites. And certainly, since the end of World War II, calling someone “antisemitic” is practically like calling them a Nazi.

However, now, the word has been weaponized and lobbed at anyone who is anti-Zionist (disagrees that Israel has a right to occupy Palestine), objects to the apartheid-like treatment of Palestinians or protests against the Israeli government killing Palestinians with bombs and starvation. We need to make the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

So, when do we start calling it a genocide? Is it a genocide only when the perpetrators themselves label it as such? Hitler referred openly to “the final solution to the Jewish question”. Concerning the “Palestinian question”, the thoughts of the founders of Israel were clear. David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister, said simply, “We must expel Arabs and take their places ... and, if we have to use force ... then we have force at our disposal.” And over the decades, other Israeli leaders have made similar comments.

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Today, several far-right Israeli politicians (such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich) have publicly stated that they want to drive all Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip and, indeed, Israel. And in support, Israeli settlers now harass and kill Palestinians in the West Bank, too. Is it a genocide only when the leader of the most powerful country in the world calls it one and demands that it stop?

### Western silence and complicity

If the West needs to wait for the Israeli and US administrations to set moral standards and to declare a genocide publicly, it may be too late for the Palestinians. And perhaps that is the easy and the intended solution — a final solution — for the West, because the “Question of Palestine” will no longer exist.

Many of us, looking back at the genocide inflicted by the Nazis on the Jewish people of Europe, have often asked how such a horrific thing could happen — and yet now, it is happening in front of our eyes, and we, the people, are powerless to stop it.

Our governments are too afraid to call a spade a spade, fearing reprisals on aspects of trade and security; instead, they wring their hands and ask plaintively and ineffectually, “Why can’t we just all get along?” And so, we dance, being led by the morality of the morally corrupt and the agenda of the insatiably greedy, averting our eyes from the daily apocalyptic images and hoping our nations’ leaders know what they’re doing. When is a genocide a genocide? Apparently, not yet.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]

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After a first career in international health organizations and aid agencies, and a second career in academia in Europe and Asia, **I.M.**

**Manava** has retired to golf, grandchildren, gardening, guest lectures and a gorgeous armchair from which she muses on the perplexities of peoplekind. Educated at Erasmus University and Oxford University, she hopes to learn more along the road of life. She’s currently writing a book on the vagaries of geopolitics, tentatively titled *It’s Complicated*.

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## Blood on the Streets: Indonesia Silences Its People’s Pleas

Yeta Purnama, Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat  
September 04, 2025

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**Indonesian protesters took to the streets last week to demand government accountability, fair wages and an end to corruption. During the protest on August 28, police violence in Jakarta resulted in the death of Gojek driver Affan Kurniawan and many others. Their deaths mark a turning point that forces Indonesia to choose between impunity and real reform of its democracy.**

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**I**ndonesia is in shock. Our hearts burn with anger, grief and unrelenting outrage over a profound injustice. On August 28, 2025, Affan Kurniawan, a young Gojek driver, was brutally killed in Jakarta while delivering a food order, in the midst of a protest that embodied the essence of democracy. Let there be no mistake: this was not

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simply an accident. This was the result of state-sanctioned violence — raw, deliberate and utterly unthinkable in a democratic society — inflicted on peaceful protesters demonstrating against soaring unemployment and rising prices.

Affan was no criminal, no threat to anyone. He was simply exercising his constitutional right to protest while trying to earn a living. Yet he lost his life to tactical police vehicles deployed by the Mobile Brigade Corps of the Indonesian National Police, turning an institution meant to protect citizens into a machine of terror. His death was just the first of many to take place.

### **Protests and violence**

Public outrage over government abuse and elite greed fueled the protests that led to Affan's death. On August 25, demonstrators demanded the resignation of President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka, called for the dissolution of the Merah-Putih Cabinet and the House of Representatives (DPR), and condemned the ongoing rewriting of Indonesia's history.

They demanded justice for Minister of Culture Fadli Zon's denial of the 1998 mass rape tragedy, transparency in parliamentary salaries, the cancellation of members' housing allowances and the halting of proposed DPR pay increases. The protesters' grievances were clear: they were fighting unchecked corruption, state arrogance and policies that deepen inequality.

By August 28, the focus had broadened to include workers' rights and economic justice. Protesters demanded an end to low wages, outsourcing and layoffs, an increase in the minimum wage and tax-free income threshold (PTPK), elimination of taxes on bonuses and severance pay, limits on contract work, restrictions on foreign labor and the repeal of the Omnibus

Law (job creation law) in favor of a labor law that truly protects workers. These were urgent, reasonable and non-negotiable demands from citizens suffocating under economic strain.

Instead of listening, the state responded with violence. Police vehicles plowed through crowds. Over 600 demonstrators were detained and held in confinement at Polda Metro Jaya. And in the midst of this, Affan Kurniawan was killed. His death is not an isolated tragedy — it is the inevitable product of a system that values elite comfort over human life, tolerates impunity, and enforces submission through fear. Indonesia might have evolved into a democracy in form but the Indonesian state remains authoritarian in spirit.

Affan is not the only one. As the protests spread across the country, state brutality followed. In Makassar, four people perished when the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) building in Ujung Pandang was set ablaze: Syaiful Akbar, Head of Social Affairs in Ujung Tanah Subdistrict; Muhammad Akbar Basri (Abay), a public relations staff member of the council; Sarinawati, another DPRD employee; and Budi Haryadi, an officer of the Makassar Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP).

The violence did not end there. Rusmadiansyah, an online motorcycle taxi driver, was beaten to death by a mob under the baseless accusation of being an intelligence agent as he passed in front of the Indonesian Muslim University (UMI) campus in Makassar.

In Solo, Sumari, a becak (pedicab) driver, suffocated after being engulfed by tear gas during clashes. In Yogyakarta, Rheza Sendy P., a young student at Amikom University, lost his life in the chaos. And in Jakarta, Andika Lutfi Falah became a victim of the police during the demonstrations near the national parliament complex.

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The violations are blatant and unforgivable. Their right to life, enshrined in Article 28I of the 1945 Constitution and reinforced by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, was obliterated.

This is a culture of impunity. Field officers, commanders and political overseers shield one another while citizens suffer. Every detention, every act of violence against peaceful demonstrators, sends a chilling message: dissent is dangerous, and human life is cheap.

### **Confronting government greed**

Meanwhile, the DPR continues its grotesque display of greed. While Indonesians fight for fair wages, workers' rights and justice, lawmakers voted to increase their own salaries and allowances. Luxury for the elite, suffering for the people. How can anyone respect a parliament that enriches itself while young workers die for demanding transparency? Immediate cancellation of these increases is not negotiable — it is a moral imperative.

We believe the government must confront reality. Words of condolence are meaningless. Apologies cannot restore life. The victims' deaths demand decisive, transparent and unflinching justice. The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) must launch an independent investigation, free from political interference. The National Police Commission (Kompolnas) must exercise genuine oversight, holding both individual officers and commanders accountable for their actions.

The police must remember their oath: they exist to protect, not terrorize. Every detained citizen must be released. Every act of brutality against civilians must be punished. Officers who abuse power must face prosecution and imprisonment. Anything less is a betrayal of the social contract

and a declaration that Indonesian lives are expendable.

These common people's death is a mirror reflecting systemic corruption, moral decay and a government addicted to self-enrichment at the expense of the people. It is a warning: unchecked power, impunity and elite greed can — and will — kill.

### **A call to action**

We cannot allow their life to fade into oblivion. This situation is a defining moment for Indonesia. Authorities must act decisively. Parliament must abandon its greed. Police must prove they exist to protect, not to terrorize.

The expanding number of victims across the country is a stark reminder that Indonesia cannot afford complacency. A movement for accountability, for transparency, for real reform must rise. We must honor them not with silence, but with action: decisive, fearless, unyielding action.

Indonesia now stands at a crossroads. One path leads deeper into impunity, inequality and state violence. The other demands a government that protects its people instead of preying upon them. The choice is ours. The time is now. The deaths of these people were preventable. The injustice was preventable. The collapse of our democracy is preventable — if we have the courage to confront it.

No more excuses. No more delays. No more blood on our streets. Justice must be immediate. Justice must be absolute. True justice requires not just promises, but deep structural change. Across Indonesia, the people's demands are clear, urgent and undeniable.

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First, accountability at the top: we believe that the Finance Minister needs to step down. Parliament's recent decision to raise its own allowances is unacceptable; lawmakers' salaries should be capped at no more than three times Jakarta's minimum wage, with all government pay and benefits made transparent under the oversight of an independent remuneration committee.

Second, fairness in wealth and taxation. A Wealth Tax must be enacted so that the richest contribute their fair share. The long-delayed Asset Confiscation Bill must be passed to allow the state to recover assets from corruption and crime. The broader tax system must be reformed to ease the burden on ordinary citizens, starting with lowering the value-added tax (VAT) from 12% to 8%.

Third, a reorientation of public spending. Indonesia's budgets for police and security forces — including Brimob (the paramilitary police), Koperasi Desa Merah Putih (a village-based cooperative promoting local welfare and economic self-reliance) and Danantara (a government investment management agency established by President Prabowo to consolidate and optimize state assets and investments) — are excessive and should be reduced. These funds should instead be redirected into cash assistance and social support for ordinary Indonesians, who are struggling with rising costs of living.

Fourth, financial responsibility. Government debt needs to be restructured, and reckless borrowing must end. Every rupiah spent should serve the public good, not fuel waste or corruption.

Fifth, enforcement of the law. The Constitutional Court has ruled that ministers cannot hold multiple positions, particularly when they are tied to corporate interests such as Danantara. This ruling must be implemented immediately to prevent conflicts of interest at the highest levels of power.

Finally, an end to wasteful mega-projects. National strategic projects like the construction of the new capital city and the development of nickel industrial zones are draining the country's wealth while benefiting only a small elite. These resources should instead be invested in programs that directly improve the lives of millions of Indonesians.

In short: Indonesia's future depends on redirecting wealth and power away from the few and toward the many.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



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Previously, she interned at the Jakarta-based Institute for

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**Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat** is a researcher with a focus on the political economy of China–Indonesia–Middle East relations.

Based in Jakarta, he serves as the Director of the China-Indonesia Desk at the Center of Economic and Law Studies (CELIOS). Additionally, Muhammad researches Indonesia–Middle East relations as a research affiliate at the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore. He earned his bachelor's in international affairs, specializing in Middle Eastern and Islamic politics, from Qatar University. He further advanced his academic career with an M.A. in International Politics and a PhD in politics from the University of Manchester.

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# In Memoriam: Giorgio Armani and the Rise of Designer Culture

Ellis Cashmore  
September 06, 2025

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**Italian designer Giorgio Armani has passed away at the age of 91, marking the end of an era in fashion. His work represents a cultural shift in the 1980s when style became deeply connected to personal identity and social aspiration. Armani's relaxed yet sophisticated designs democratized fashion, leaving an enduring impact on contemporary culture and lifestyle.**

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**G**iorgio Armani's death at the age of 91 marks the passing of more than a fashion designer. Armani personified a cultural shift in the 1980s, a decade when the idea of style became inseparable from identity, social aspiration and a form of social drama.

To wear Armani, or at least, clothes that resembled Armani, was to make a statement about taste, achievement and modernity. His minimalism, sophistication and attention to detail transformed clothing into an instrument of social expression and lifestyle into a theatrical performance. In this sense, Armani exemplified how culture itself became a stage, influencing not just what people wore but how they thought, felt and, indeed, lived.

## **Style democratized**

Born in Piacenza, south of Milan, in 1934, Armani was the second of three children. He dropped out of medical school and moved to Milan in the

1950s, joining the design team at the luxury department store La Rinascente as a window dresser. Despite lacking formal fashion training, he honed an instinct for style and proportion that would define his work. After a period designing for Nino Cerruti's Hitman line, he founded his own fashion house in 1975 with architect and partner Sergio Galeotti.

Armani's philosophy was simple but, in its own way, revolutionary: Suits should be easy to wear, comfortable and convey swagger. His unstructured take on men's jackets broke with the fitted tailoring of French designers Pierre Cardin and Yves Saint Laurent, who dominated men's fashion in the 1960s and 1970s, creating a more relaxed style, understated yet aspirational.

Armani's breakthrough came with the American screenwriter Paul Schrader-directed film *American Gigolo* in 1980. American actor Richard Gere's performance was inseparable from the Armani clothes he wore, demonstrating for the first time how clothing could project an identity on screen. Armani became synonymous not only with taste, but also with a new kind of social visibility: Style as social capital, enacted through a carefully constructed persona.

This was reinforced by Armani's move to Los Angeles in 1983: He was the first designer to open an office there with the explicit goal of dressing Hollywood actors and other celebrities. The likes of Michelle Pfeiffer, Jodie Foster and Anjelica Huston became ambulant advertisements for Armani, updating the historical link between Hollywood glamor and fashion. But not unattainably haute couture fashion: Anyone potentially could dress in designer clothes and carry them off. Style was, in a way, democratized.

The diffusion of Armani's style went beyond the red carpet. Television shows such as *Miami Vice* turned designer clothes into an aspirational

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shorthand for taste, success and lifestyle. The pastel suits and Italian cars of James “Sonny” Crockett and Ricardo “Rico” Tubbs were visible markers: The clothes didn’t simply cover the actors; they validated a way of living. The cop drama used some Armani clothes, but also drew on his rivals, Hugo Boss and Gianni Versace, among others, as well as his former mentor Cerutti. All were described with the key adjective, designer.

The 1980s was the designer decade. The term itself evoked the kind of sophistication and social distinction to which the cognoscenti aspired, where social distinction, as Pierre Bourdieu would argue, refers to how taste functions as a marker of social differentiation. Clothing, media and even household products coalesced into a new social ecosystem, one in which image, style and personal branding could speak more articulately about people than their class, ethnicity, background or anything else.

Armani hotels, restaurants, homeware and beauty lines exemplified the integration of fashion into lifestyle. American rock band Blondie’s lyric “roll me in designer sheets” on Call Me (on the American Gigolo soundtrack) echoed this: A commonplace bedroom item could signify taste and cultural capital, merely by its label.

### **Liquid modernity and the cultural turn**

We can view Armani’s significance through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu, whose concepts of habitus and distinction help explain how style operates as a social display. Habitus describes the ingrained dispositions and practices that structure how individuals move through society. Distinction refers to how taste functions as a marker of social differentiation.

Armani’s restraint, subtly signalling elegance without ostentation, exemplifies distinction in action: The wearer communicated the social

capital they’ve accumulated and the taste they’ve acquired; they could project identity and status through clothing. (Social capital refers to the value and prestige associated with certain cultural markers, such as designer clothing.)

In the context of the 1980s, this aligns with Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of liquid modernity. Social categories were becoming less fixed, lifestyles more flexible and identity pluralized, so we could swap and change how we thought about ourselves and how we wanted others to regard us as we passed from context to context. Armani’s clothes allowed individuals to navigate this fluidity: An Armani suit, shirt or gown was more than a garment for display: It allowed wearers to inhabit the person they wanted to be.

The aforementioned American Gigolo and Miami Vice dramatized this. They showed a society in which visible image was not incidental to social life, but absolutely central. Where style articulated ambition, mobility and cultural distinction. Scholars of media and fashion have long recognized Miami Vice as a template for the diffusion of designer culture, demonstrating how values and aesthetics could circulate through screens and into everyday life. Armani’s impact was not merely sartorial but social: He participated in the creation of a mediated culture in which taste and lifestyle became determinants as well as reflections of identity and social status.

Armani’s rise coincided with the moment of what academics later called the “cultural turn.” Until then, the prevailing view was that the economy (the production of goods and the circulation of money) was the decisive force shaping society. The cultural turn reframed this, showing that culture, style and everyday practices could be just as powerful in shaping how we live.

Here, Bourdieu and Bauman converge: The fluidity of liquid modernity was navigated through



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acts of taste, and Armani provided a kind of grammar for those acts. His influence was thus structural: He did not simply clothe bodies, he helped articulate a society increasingly defined by image, style and the symbolic markers of distinction.

## Beyond clothing

Armani crystallized a moment when culture itself was acknowledged as a structuring force in society. The 1980s cultural turn represented a broader shift in social life and the way we study it. Aesthetic choices, media and consumption became potent instruments of identity, aspiration and social negotiation. Armani was part of this shift. Through his designs, his brand and, indeed, his cultural presence, he created a method for the accrual of social and cultural capital.

In this sense, Armani was not only a designer but a cultural agent, a figure whose influence illuminates how performance, taste and social navigation were central to modern life. His passing marks the end of an era, but the culture he helped codify continues to shape how we dress, present ourselves and understand social distinction today.

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

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



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

professor of sociology who has held academic positions at the University of Hong Kong, the University of Tampa and Aston University.

His first article for *Fair Observer* was an obituary

for Muhammad Ali in 2016. Since then, Ellis has been a regular contributor on sports, entertainment, celebrity culture and cultural diversity. Most recently, timelines have caught his fancy and he has created many for *Fair Observer*. What do you think?

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## Doctor Strangelove: Or How I Said Goodbye To Mickey Mouse And Now Love Pandas

Franthiesco Ballerini  
September 07, 2025

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**As President Trump continues to escalate his tariff wars across the world, this Brazilian author and many others thumb their noses. China's economic partnership with the largest country in South America continues to strengthen, and Trump's actions only accelerate the US's wane. The balance of soft power is now tilting towards the east.**

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**D**ear Mr. President,

You'll never know me, so my sincerity here could not be greater. I'm from the country you recently tried to impose a 50% tariff barrier over, even though your nation has had a trade surplus over us since 2009, and this year, jumped 500%, reaching \$1.7 billion. I'm from Brazil, the fifth-largest country and the tenth-largest economy in the world. It wouldn't surprise me if you don't know anything about us, since your only visit here was for a tournament in Rio, with your former wife Ivana, in 1989.



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I'm one of the millions of Brazilians who were historically seduced by the greatest soft power of your nation over the last decades. And you got huge profits from it. Brazil has the fourth most users of Facebook, the third of Instagram and fourth of LinkedIn. From 2004 to 2024, we jumped from the 11th to the 6th most frequent visitors of your country. Hollywood has earned an incalculable fortune with us. From 2009 to 2019, Hollywood's box office in Brazil was 77%, against 13% from national movies and only 1% from China. We are the second with the most subscribers of Netflix, the largest VOD market in Latin America and one of the biggest globally, reaching 40 million subscriptions by 2027.

Millions of us also felt your government's hard power in different ways in recent history, like when the US supported the 1964 Brazilian coup that led to 21 years of military dictatorship, secretly supporting opposition leaders and police training to overthrow the democratically elected president João Goulart during Brazil's best attempt at deepening reforms, like the long-awaited agrarian reform. Ironically, the US provided support to the dictatorship through USAID, which you recently shut down. Over those two decades, we witnessed deaths, human rights abuses, censorship and political repression under the dictatorship your government supported. In fact, it resembles what we are watching in your streets now.

But the reason for this letter is to express my shock at how fast you are melting US soft power in all areas, except, maybe, sports. Diplomacy, science, arts, entertainment and political values were all pillars of soft power that the US was admired for by other nations and cultures for almost a century are going down the drain faster than the hair on your head.

And if you think about it, soft power is the only long-term power the US can rely on after World

War II, which, by the way, was the last war your nation had won in traditional terms, followed by the loss of Vietnam war, the mess left in the Gulf War, the false pretext of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction that led to a new war and hundreds of thousands of deaths since the 2003 invasion and the shameful withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021.

I know you love bombs just like Putin and your other role models in Doctor Strangelove. But deep down, you know you can never rely on nuclear weapons as hard power. Those weapons, tested by your government over civilians 80 years ago in Japan, triggered a worldwide race for the same device and initiated the Cold War, making the world a more dangerous place with weapons that can eliminate civilization in the hands of countries like North Korea, Pakistan, Russia and, of course, your own. No one can use it; otherwise, your golf club, hotels, mansions and family lifestyle will turn into dust.

And then there is China. The second-richest nation on Earth is learning to use soft power as fast as you melt yours. First, diplomacy: China has publicly condemned Israeli actions in Gaza and has a better relationship with Russia for a possible mediation over Ukraine. Although Beijing only stands on rhetorical support for peace, Xi Jinping uses diplomacy rather than blunting imposing tariffs or sabre-rattling with nuclear power to get his way.

Second, science. China has become a scientific superpower faster than any other country. Just in 2024, Chang'E 6 returned soil samples from the far side of the moon for the first time; developed the first primitive-based vision processor with complementary pathways, the first optical storage device with petabit capacity; a new approach in helium-free cryogenic technology and a treatment with genetically engineered CAR T cells for refractory autoimmune diseases.

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Third by arts and entertainment. China's domestic films are thriving. 'Ne Zha 2' became the only movie in history to reach \$1 billion at the box office in just one market and the only non-Hollywood film to cross \$2 billion globally. China's music economy became the fifth-largest recorded music market in the world in 2023, with 25.9% revenue growth, making it the fastest in the world, with cultural policies emphasizing international competitiveness and developing talents by formal education and independent labels.

At last, there is social media. Since you got back to power, Chinese influencers flooded TikTok with very popular videos showing how fast and modern their cities became; one Chinese influencer, with perfect English, has gone viral with a bold critique on how America killed its middle class and guys like you blame China; there's even a version of you, called Chinese Trump, with the exact same voice, showing the beauties of Chinese culture and habits.

We Brazilians will survive your random tariffs. We've been through worse with previous US administrations. As you read in the Washington Post, it's pointless to distortedly use the Magnitsky law over our Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes and cut his credit card as a veiled pretext to save your friend, former extreme-right president Jair Bolsonaro, now in house arrest for supposedly leading a coup after the 2022 presidential election.

After 44 years, and half my life researching cultural soft power, I found myself divorcing Mickey Mouse and flirting with pandas. Which, by the way, is a Chinese tool of diplomacy and wildlife conservation since 1941. Soft power.

[Casey Herrmann edited this piece.]

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**Frantjesco Ballerini** is a Brazilian writer, journalist and filmmaker. Holding a PhD in media communications, his book *Soft Power* was chosen as a finalist at the

60th Jabuti Awards for its investigation of cultural influences like Hollywood, tango, anime and Bossa Nova. His other works include *History of World Cinema* and *Cultural Power*. He addresses issues such as language, aesthetics, industry and power in film and entertainment.

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## **Forty Years After the Oregon Cult Commune: The Girl from the Osho Ranch**

Anke Richter  
September 11, 2025

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**Indian spiritual leader Osho's communes drew thousands of seekers to India and the US, where children like Sarito Carroll endured neglect and sexual abuse under the guise of spiritual freedom. Carroll now recounts her childhood in a memoir and documentary that expose the crimes long hidden from public view. Her testimony signals renewed calls for accountability and justice for survivors of cult abuse.**

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**S**arito Carroll lived in Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's commune in Oregon, which collapsed under criminal charges 40 years ago. Like most teenagers in Rajneeshpuram, she was sexually abused there. Now she is holding the cult of "Wild Wild Country" accountable.

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Sarito Carroll holds two pairs of shoes in her hand and looks undecided. For the stroll through town, she opts for the more stylish ones: “I definitely don’t want to look like a hippie!” The author and acupuncturist from Boulder has flown to California for a discussion on stage the next day. The recorded live event will be about Osho. The name stands for an ideology that has liberated many people and destroyed others — especially former children of the new-age movement, who still have a stronghold in the Rainbow Region.

Carroll’s father was a junkie from New York; her single mother was a hippie. In 1978, the restless seeker and her young daughter ended up in the Indian commune of Osho, who was known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh back then. Thousands of followers from all over the world flocked to his ashram in Pune, India, dressed in orange and later red. Most were middle-class and educated, and more than half were female.

The sannyasins danced, meditated, played music and toiled in a state of perpetual euphoria for their guru. The mystic and philosopher loved to provoke as a capitalist rebel with diamond watches and a fleet of Rolls-Royces. His promise was divine ecstasy through sexual freedom.

In encounter workshops, his followers howled, screamed and lashed out. There were mental breakdowns, broken bones and even rape. The goal was to overcome parental conditioning and old moral values. To surrender, let go. Transforming into a new person without shame, fear, attachments or jealousy. Open relationships were the norm. Young women got sterilized because the master didn’t want children, claiming they would hinder spiritual development.

“Bhagwan always said that we don’t belong to our parents, but to the community,” Carroll recounts on her way to the café. Her copper-colored curls bounce. She speaks fast and

precisely, and appears composed. Thanks to decades of therapy, any bitterness or anger is barely noticeable. She even sounds dry when she says, “They were meant to give us up to be happier.”

The girl hardly saw her mother in the ashram anymore. They lived separately, and their relationship was permanently shattered at that time. In the sea of new people, the nine-year-old felt lonely and lost.

### **French kissing and touching**

Soon after arriving in Pune, everyone received new Indian names. American Jennifer became Ma Prem Sarito, meaning “River of Love.” For her, it meant that she finally belonged. The photo of the sannyas initiation, where the bearded guru laid his hand on her, is the cover of her memoir *In the Shadow of Enlightenment*. This shadow is disturbing when you read the book. It describes the dark side of a parallel world where “love and light” were preached. Always be radiantly positive. Above all, don’t be a victim.

Bhagwan also said that one should follow one’s “energy”. Give in to your sexual urges and also act them out in front of children so they wouldn’t become uptight. “Our cultural norm shifted,” says Carroll. “We were desensitized. There were no boundaries, no one was looking out for us.” The ashram children mocked the uninhibited adults or imitated them. Nothing could shock them. “I saw many erections,” Carroll writes in her book.

She was only ten when a security guard pulled her onto his lap in front of others and practiced French kissing with her. Another man urged her and her friend to give him a hand job. When he ejaculated, the shy girl tried to suppress her nausea: “I didn’t want anyone to see that I wasn’t carefree like we were expected to be.”

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## Departure to Oregon

In 1981, the enterprising sex cult expanded to the US. In the Oregon hinterland, the Rajneeshees bought the deserted Big Muddy Ranch from which they planned to take over world domination. The utopian dream required volunteers to transform 260 square kilometers of desert that was covered in snow in winter and in mud in spring into a thriving oasis with its own city. A new wave of maroon-clad pilgrims started: free labor as “worship”.

Sarito was one of the first to arrive, without parents or guardians. Her move across the world for what she now considers child labor had been decided from above. Once again, the 12-year-old was a stranger and lonely. The cold dormitory, where she was housed alone with 14 men, had mattresses instead of beds and only one bathroom. No one locked the door. The shower and toilet were used in front of everyone, naked.

Sarito tried to shower secretly at night, ashamed of being so prudish and hiding her body. It wasn’t “juicy” like all the sensual women of the commune. Before falling asleep, the pubescent girl heard people compare their conquests of the day and comment on her own sprouting breasts and pubic hair. “All of this was normal to me,” Carroll says, looking back. “Only I didn’t feel normal because I had this old-fashioned idea of pure, romantic love.”

## Youngest with a boyfriend

In her first month, she met Milarepa (Augustus Pembroke Thomas III), the star of the Rajneesh Country Band. Most nights, the American left the communal dining room with his arm around a different “Ma”. After playing Eagles songs on his guitar, he invited Sarito to a poker game.

When Milarepa held the cards in one hand, he casually slid the other under her t-shirt and played

with her breast. She froze and tried not to react, because no one else seemed bothered. Since the scenario soon repeated itself, Sarito believed, “I’m special to him”. That was what she longed for. Not the fondling.

Milarepa was 29 and part of a gang that prided itself on taking someone’s virginity. The first time with him, in his trailer, was painful. There was none of the ecstasy everyone raved about. He didn’t use a condom and curtly excused himself the next morning for his 12-hour shift. Sarito was upset and disappointed. But she told herself that she should actually be proud: “I was the youngest girl on the ranch with a boyfriend. It was an honor.”

The week after her deflowering, she was summoned to the commune’s clinic with three other minors to have diaphragms fitted. To this day, Carroll doesn’t know who arranged this. None of the “moms,” as the motherly women in charge were called, had mentioned Milarepa to her. Let alone ever offering proper sex education. “But someone in a high position knew.”

The nights with Milarepa continued. Sarito believed it to be a relationship, a secret love story. All her thoughts revolved around her first lover. Even though she was the youngest, she wasn’t the only one: Carroll estimates that 80% of the approximately 40 teenagers on the ranch were sleeping with adults. She knows of one girl who was with 70 men before the age of 16. Another with 150. “It was statutory rape,” the 56-year-old clarifies. “Child sexual abuse.” Sanctioned, covered up and ignored.

## Flying for the master

Sarito hardly attended school anymore. At first, she worked in the commercial kitchen and then in the office, in the inner circle under Bhagwan’s infamous secretary Ma Anand Sheela. The

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“Goebbels to the guru” was tasked with transforming the makeshift enclave into the model city of Rajneeshpuram with a hotel, its own airline and a paramilitary unit. 2,500 “orange people” lived there on average. For the annual World Festival, the number rose to 15,000.

Publicity mattered for this megalomaniac mission. A model in Bhagwan’s wake suggested Sarito have her photo taken. This landed the poster child on the cover of *The Rajneesh Times*. At 14 years old, she became an air hostess and flew in a maroon uniform for Air Rajneesh.

Even though she didn’t feel like a woman, she was regarded as one. More men approached her. The girls who gave in gained respect: “The more ‘liberated’ you were, the better.” But she was still hopelessly in love with Milarepa, who also slept with others. “For over three years, with several hundred,” Carroll says over lunch. His friends jokingly nicknamed him “rapist”. Some of the boys, therefore, called the musician “Milaraper”.

A teen disco was held every week at Rajneeshpuram’s ice cream parlor. Always present were the men and women who were sexually interested in teenagers. A 16th birthday party ended in an orgy with blindfolds. A dressing-down from Sheela followed this. The drill sergeant was angry about the noise and alcohol, not the men’s assaults.

To get over her heartbreak, Sarito also became promiscuous. She had lost all self-respect. Someone seduced her by insisting that it would cure his back pain. Then she thought she was in love with a British guy in his thirties, an Eton graduate — the same old story. Each time, she felt used when the erotic interest in her was only fleeting, because everyone lived “in the moment”. Her underlying anger grew, and with it her cognitive dissonance. Because what she always heard was that she was lucky not to live in the

outside world among the unenlightened, but in Bhagwan’s presence.

### **German disco tour**

The Rajneesh movement spread to more than 30 countries in the early 1980s. In Germany, the cult’s main European base, 43 centers were established, with 13 discotheques that welcomed half a million visitors in their first year. Sarito was suddenly asked to leave the country again. For five months, she was shuttled through communes from Munich to Zurich, where she worked behind the bar. In Amsterdam, she injured her back on a construction site.

Today, she suspects that one reason for the “foreign exchange” was to cover up the abuse. During her absence, the top Moms compiled a secret list of those who had sexual relations with minors. There were more than 100 names. Those were simply advised to behave more discreetly in the future so that nothing would leak to the press. “When journalists showed up,” Carroll recalls, “we always pretended that we were totally happy, and everyone was going to school.”

External and internal tension in Rajneeshpuram rose to a maximum. The animosity between the tiny neighboring town of Antelope and the paranoid ranch dwellers escalated to criminal activities: mass-scale immigration fraud, drugging homeless people to get their votes and even attempted murder. 700 people in Dallas were poisoned with salmonella in the largest bioterror attack in the US — plotted by Bhagwan’s right-hand woman.

The empire in red collapsed when the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrived. On September 14, 1985, Sheela fled to Germany, where she was later arrested and extradited. By the end of October, her master was arrested too, and the commune came to a standstill. The outside

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world was horrified by the crimes committed under the guise of a new religion. But no one cared about the youngest victims.

When the crime saga was retold in the 2018 Netflix documentary *Wild Wild Country*, the filmmakers omitted the fate of the Osho kids, although the facts were known by then. A 121-page survey from 1983 by the US Ministry of Justice had explicitly stated that sex between adults and children was the norm in the community. “That was a turning point,” says Carroll, who binged the six-part series in two days. “We didn’t want to stay invisible any longer.”

### **Escape into Society**

The Oregon commune dispersed in panic in the fall of 1985. The Byron Bay area became an international catch basin for many displaced devotees from the US. Sarito didn’t know where to go. She had had little contact with her mother for four years. Without money or family, a new odyssey began — with a brutal awakening about her ex-lovers: “I finally realized the truth about them.”

The truth about Osho and his accomplices only dawned on her much later. After a short stint in a US jail, the cult founder returned to India, where he died in 1999 at 58 years old under mysterious circumstances. He only rebranded himself as Osho shortly before his death.

Adjusting to the cultural norms of the outside world was tough. “I felt like an alien reintroduced to society as part of a social experiment,” Carroll describes this time in her book. She hid her body under oversized sweaters. Friends from the ranch supported themselves through sex work — “some still do.”

The biggest hurdle was her lack of education. Sarito got her school-leaving certificate to study

literature. When she read Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* in her freshman year, the plight of the sexually exploited handmaid felt disturbingly familiar. From then on, the student knew she had to tell her story. But it took more than 30 years before she fully ventured out of the shadows of the past.

During this period, she lost close friends from the Ranch who had experienced similar abuse. One ended up in a psychiatric ward and attempted suicide. Another died of an ectopic pregnancy after reversing the sterilization she had undergone at a young age in India. In the so-called “second generation”, as from other cults around the world that are now under scrutiny, there are disproportionately high rates of suicide, depression, illness, drug addiction, prostitution and poverty. Carroll describes this legacy of the utopian dream as a “path of devastation”. She calls herself lucky to have survived it.

### **Reconciliation and repression**

Neither her mother nor Milarepa wanted to talk about the past. In 2018, Carroll sent a letter with registered mail to him, demanding accountability. There was no response. He continued to tour the world as “Osho’s musician”, still a star of the scene.

Finally, in 2021, Carroll and another woman appealed to the entire remaining community, estimated at over 100,000 members worldwide. They named names, demanded clarification and reparation. Suddenly, Milarepa spoke out via video and posted an “Apology to Sarito and the Osho-Sangha.” For his victim, his words rang hollow and came too late. “It was a PR stunt to save his reputation.”

Some members of the first generation reacted with compassion. But very few saw any complicity in their own actions and silence, let alone that of

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their long-dead guru. They were stuck in the old ideology: If you have a problem, then you alone are responsible for that and need to work harder on yourself.

“This gaslighting is crazy making,” says Carroll. “We were marginalized as children, and now again.” The last time she ran into local Osho devotees, they shunned her. Nevertheless, she considers most of them to be “warm-hearted, kind and idealistic.” That’s why it hurts so much.

Despite the internal denial, the flood of exposure could no longer be stopped. Media reports with paedophilia allegations from the Rajneesh schools in England followed. And then the answer to Wild Wild Country arrived in 2024 with the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) nominated documentary *Children of the Cult*, in which Sarito participated along with European women. It will screen at the Dutch Film Festival in the Netherlands at the end of September.

Director Maroesja Perizonius, a commune kid herself, interviews the 76-year-old Sheela, who still claims her ignorance. Perpetrators are confronted on camera too, including Milarepa — again without further consequences. The statute of limitations for his crimes has long passed. Earlier, he claimed that “there was no grooming or molestation”.

The estimated number of children abused in the communes runs over a hundred, but not a single perpetrator has ever been in court. A British law firm gave up on a class action lawsuit after six months, says Sarito. The OIF (Osho International Foundation), which manages the cult founder’s intellectual property and books that have sold millions of copies, denies any responsibility. “There is no one in Osho International who had any organizational function in any of the entities mentioned, and so they know nothing of these accounts,” an OIF spokesperson told the Sunday

Times in 2022. The former ashram in Pune, where Sarito’s story began, is now an expensive meditation resort run by the old believers.

“Each of us should receive decent compensation for all our years of therapy,” says Carroll, pushing her half-eaten salad aside. “I could have bought a house with my therapy fees alone.” Now she’s agitated. Her voice is coarse when she mentions her broken relationships and why she never had children. “I was just too afraid of becoming a single parent myself. Because I experienced it as so horrible.”

### **Return to the ranch**

Why did she keep her Sannyas name then, once she was fully aware of the negative association? “When I wrote my book, it was a protection mechanism,” she explains. “Those who want to threaten me will only come after Sarito.” Jennifer is still her legal name. She can hide behind it and not be found. And she’s also not shying away from wearing red again. “I’m taking the color back. It doesn’t belong to Osho. And it suits me.” She almost packed a scarlet top in her suitcase for the upcoming event.

Carroll’s cell phone buzzes while she finishes her iced tea: a message from a friend from back then, who will be coming to San Francisco tomorrow and will sit in the audience. One of the few who didn’t duck away after the tell-all book. They haven’t seen each other since escaping the Ranch together 40 years ago, but the memory is still fresh: “I sat in the back of the car with my few belongings and was in shock.”

This spring, the author returned to the fateful place for the first time for a television interview. It is now a Christian summer camp. Again, she was overwhelmed, but this time by the beauty of the landscape, the vastness and the tranquillity, “without the thousands of people back then.” The

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tour around the old buildings was healing. Nothing triggered her anymore, she says. “It felt like closure.” At Krishnamurti Lake, which the freedom seekers had once built as a huge water reservoir, she performed a spontaneous ritual and threw stones into the water. Then the tears came.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]

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**Anke Richter** is a New Zealand correspondent in the Weltreporter network and an international observer of cults. She is the author of four non-fiction books. Her last one, *CULT TRIP: Inside the world of coercion & control* (HarperCollins, 2023), is an investigative and personal exploration of former and current sex cults.

Richter’s reporting has been published in *Die Zeit*, *Spiegel*, *FAZ*, *taz*, *New Zealand Geographic*, *North & South*, *The Spinoff*, *Stuff*, *RNZ*, *TVNZ* and many more. She is now the founder and pro bono director of DECULT, a grassroots charity that organized the first cult awareness conference in New Zealand. Richter was awarded New Zealand Skeptic of the Year in 2024 and won the Ethical Media Award from the Freedom Express Awards in 2025.

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## The Trial of Jair Bolsonaro: The Future of Brazilian Democracy

Luiz Cesar Pimentel  
September 13, 2025

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**The Supreme Federal Court in Brazil judges former President Jair Bolsonaro and other officials accused of planning a coup and undermining democracy. Investigations describe a plot beginning in 2021 that culminated in the January 2023 attack on Brasília. The trial defines Brazil’s institutional strength while US pressure under Donald Trump heightens tensions.**

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In a historic milestone for Brazilian democracy, the Supreme Federal Court (STF) convicted former President Jair Bolsonaro and seven other defendants for participating in a coup plot that sought to subvert the results of the 2022 elections — when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defeated him — and remain in power. The trial, concluded on September 11, by the First Panel of the Court, established prison sentences and ineligibility for the eight individuals involved.

Brazil witnessed for the first time the trial of the architects of a plan to destabilize institutions and the democratic rule of law. The seriousness of the charges and the importance of the verdict for the country’s future reflect the unprecedented nature of the case.

Bolsonaro is the tenth head of state to be punished for this crime in the world, and the first in Brazil’s history. The newspaper O Globo conducted a survey of leaders convicted since 1946 and identified a total of 186 convictions of 128 heads of government in 69 countries. Most of these convictions, however, were for corruption crimes, not attempted coups.

Brazil has experienced at least 15 coups or coup attempts since the end of the monarchy in 1889. The most infamous and damaging was the seizure of power by force in 1964, when a military



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uprising overthrew President João Goulart, ushering in a 21-year dictatorship.

Jair Bolsonaro defended this stance throughout his political career, since the 1980s, and refused to call the regime that was imposed a dictatorship, classifying it as a period of “order and progress” (which is the motto written on the Brazilian national flag).

When he voted in favor of the impeachment of then-President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, he dedicated his vote to Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, “the terror of Dilma Rousseff,” in his words — Ustra had tortured the president during the dictatorial regime.

### **The decision and the sentences**

The final decision was four votes to one. Justices Alexandre de Moraes (rapporteur), Flávio Dino, Cármen Lúcia and Cristiano Zanin voted for conviction, while Luiz Fux voted for acquittal. The sentences, based on evidence such as notes, live videos, use of the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN) for espionage and draft coup documents, were established as follows:

Jair Bolsonaro: Sentenced to 27 years and three months in prison, to be served in a closed regime, in addition to a fine of more than 447,000 Brazilian Real (about \$80,000). The former president and the other defendants were sentenced to ineligibility for eight years, added to the eight years already determined by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) in 2023. The reporting minister, de Moraes, pointed to Bolsonaro as the leader of an armed criminal organization that sought the violent abolition of the democratic rule of law.

Other defendants: Walter Braga Netto (general and former minister), Almir Garnier (admiral and former Navy commander), Anderson Torres (former Minister of Justice), Augusto Heleno

(general and former Minister of Institutional Security), Paulo Sérgio Nogueira (general and former Minister of Defense) and Alexandre Ramagem (federal deputy and former director of Abin) were also convicted, with prison sentences ranging from 16 to 26 years. Mauro Cid, Bolsonaro’s former aide-de-camp, received a two-year open prison sentence, benefiting from a plea bargain.

The defendants were convicted of various crimes related to the attempted coup, including armed criminal organization, violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, aggravated damage to federal property and deterioration of listed heritage sites.

### **Context: The chronology of the alleged coup**

What led Brazil to this decisive point was a series of events that, according to investigations by the Federal Police (PF) and allegations by the Attorney General’s Office (PGR), form the basis of the indictment.

According to the complaint, the plot began in March 2021, when the STF annulled former President Lula’s convictions, and his release from prison made him eligible to run for office. From then on, Jair Bolsonaro’s support group allegedly began a campaign to question the electoral system and delegitimize the possible victory of an opponent. In July 2022, the PGR and the PF indicated that a criminal organization had been structured with plans to interfere in the elections.

After Bolsonaro’s defeat by Lula in the presidential election in October 2022, the movement allegedly became more radical, with supporters camping in front of Army barracks calling for military intervention. Investigations revealed the existence of a coup plan, the “Green and Yellow Dagger,” which was reportedly presented to military commanders in December

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2022 but was rejected by the Army and Air Force leadership. The complaint points to the existence of a “coup decree,” which provided for the annulment of the elections and the arrest of Supreme Court ministers.

The crisis reached its peak on January 8, 2023, with the invasion and destruction of the headquarters of the Three Powers in Brasília, in acts that investigations by the PF and the Joint Congressional Investigating Committee (CPMI) concluded were part of a planned and financed mobilization. In July 2023, the investigation also found a draft decree on Law and Order at the home of former Justice Minister Anderson Torres, which would confirm plans to arrest Minister Alexandre de Moraes and annul the election.

The culmination of this investigation occurred in November 2024, when the PF indicted Bolsonaro and 36 other individuals. The PGR formalized the complaint to the STF in February 2025, and the court accepted the request in March 2025, turning the accused into defendants.

### **Trump on the scene: the international dimension**

The trial took on a complex international dimension. The lawsuit is a domestic matter, but the shadow of US President Donald Trump looms over the case with profound political and diplomatic consequences.

According to analysts, the relationship between Brazil and the US is experiencing a deepening crisis, with Washington imposing tariffs on Brazilian products and sanctions against members of the Supreme Court. These measures are seen as a direct reaction by the Trump administration in support of Bolsonaro.

The strategy of rapprochement with the US was articulated by federal deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro,

son of the former president, who traveled to the country to ask for international support and seek “fair punishment” for de Moraes and the Federal Police.

Trump’s support for Bolsonaro was not limited to statements. The American president spoke out against the legal proceedings, calling them a “witch hunt,” and imposed 50% tariffs on Brazilian products. The US government then announced sanctions against de Moraes, revoking his visa and those of his family members, and opened a trade investigation against Brazil, accusing the judiciary of “censoring” American technology companies. Experts believe that these acts of intimidation and bullying reflect Trump’s personal affinity with Bolsonaro, as both have been accused of attempting to overturn election results and incite their supporters.

The political and diplomatic consequences of this interference are notable. US pressure has worn down Brazilian public opinion and, according to polls, has reinforced the perception that Bolsonaro participated in the coup plot. However, this interference does not seem to have changed the opinion of his most loyal supporters. In the political arena, the growth of negative views about Bolsonaro had led parties to rethink the costs of a strong defense of the former president.

### **The protagonists and the next steps**

The progress of the process reflects the actions of two key figures: Alexandre de Moraes and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

As rapporteur for the investigations, de Moraes has become the main face of the judicial response. His actions have been marked by conducting investigations, authorizing searches and seizures, and now, by reporting on the trial, with a vote that points out that the defendants not only planned but

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also initiated concrete actions to discredit democracy.

For his part, Lula has taken on the role of defender of the rule of law, vehemently condemning the acts of January 8 and defending the work of the PF and the judiciary. His stance has reinforced the autonomy of institutions and the country's democratic legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.

The defendants' defense can still appeal the decision, which prevents immediate imprisonment. Bolsonaro is currently under provisional house arrest, and the final decision on where he will serve his sentence will be made after all appeals have been exhausted. The loss of the convicted men's military rank will be reviewed by the Superior Military Court (STM) after the final judgment.

This trial was not just an isolated case. It served as a global reminder that democracy, even in consolidated nations, is not immune to internal (and external) threats. The way Brazil dealt with this plot determined the strength of its institutions and its reputation as a nation that, above all, submits to the law and the Constitution.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



**Luiz Cesar Pimentel** is a Brazilian journalist and writer, currently working at the intersection of AI and journalism. He has been in the communication field for 30 years, specializing in digital media, strategy and transmedia storytelling. Luiz led the Brazilian branches of MySpace, Jovem Pan and R7. His career includes roles as a reporter for Folha de S. Paulo and Carta Capital, editing the magazines Trip and Istoé and serving as

an international correspondent in Asia. Luiz has also authored ten books on communication. He holds a postgraduate degree in international journalism from the Poynter Institute in Florida, a degree in artificial intelligence for communication from the University of California, Berkeley and a master's degree in Social Sciences (Religious Studies).

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## The Great Repricing of Sovereign Debt

Masaaki Yoshimori  
September 14, 2025

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**Global sovereign debt markets are undergoing a structural repricing, as long-dated yields in Britain, the United States and France rise to astronomical levels. Investors increasingly demand higher risk premia amid weakening fiscal positions and the retreat of central banks as price-insensitive buyers. What looks like short-term volatility today foreshadows shrinking fiscal space, shifting demographics and the return of bond-market discipline.**

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**F**or much of the past decade, investors fretted about the dearth of safe assets. Central banks hoovered up bonds, yields slid to record lows and governments could borrow for a generation at barely positive interest rates. That era is decisively over. Across the advanced world, long-dated yields have climbed to heights last seen before the global financial crisis. Britain's 30-year gilt — a debt security issued to finance its spending and investments — touched 5.8% this

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summer, the highest since 1998. The United States' 30-year Treasury pierced 5%. Even the once-reassuring spread between Italian and French debt narrowed as markets reappraised the fiscal standing of Europe's second-largest economy.

The upward march of yields is often attributed to fleeting events; an unfunded budget here, a tariff ruling there. Yet the deeper story is more structural and less reassuring. Fiscal positions are weakening, political stability is in doubt, central banks are retreating from their role as price-insensitive buyers and long-term savers are rebalancing away from government paper.

The result is a world in which sovereign bonds, once the unquestioned safe asset, increasingly trade like risky credits.

### **Britain: haunted by Truss**

The United Kingdom offers the most dramatic case. The gilt market meltdown of September 2022, triggered by former UK Prime Minister Liz Truss's unfunded tax cuts, was thought at the time to be an aberration — a tale of poor communication and pension-fund leverage. In reality, it marked a structural shift. Investors, once inclined to give Britain the benefit of the doubt, now demand a higher premium to hold its long bonds.

Recent months illustrate this loss of confidence. Yields on 30-year gilts surged to levels last seen a quarter of a century ago, without a single dramatic budget announcement. The rise reflects doubts about fiscal sustainability under a Labor government faced with anemic growth and heavy spending pressures. Chancellor Rachel Reeves has promised discipline, but the space for maneuver is vanishingly small: raising taxes risks choking recovery, while higher borrowing invites comparisons with the Truss debacle.

Markets have not forgotten how swiftly confidence can collapse. The “doom loop” of weak demand for gilts, rising yields and still weaker demand may yet return. Britain is not on the verge of a 1976-style IMF rescue — sterling floats and its debt has long maturity — but the mere fact that economists air such comparisons shows how fragile credibility has become.

### **US: privilege under strain**

If Britain provides a cautionary tale, the US is testing the patience of bondholders in real time. Debt held by the public already exceeds 119% of GDP. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that interest payments alone will exceed defense spending by 2028.

Treasuries still enjoy exorbitant privilege: unrivaled liquidity, the backing of the world's reserve currency and the credibility of the Federal Reserve (or the Fed). Yet even this privilege has limits. Investors demand a larger term premium — the extra compensation for holding long-dated bonds in a world of fiscal uncertainty. In the 2010s, quantitative easing (QE) and low inflation pushed this premium close to zero; today, persistent deficits and political brinkmanship are driving it up again.

The temptation to draw parallels with Britain's “Truss moment” is understandable. The US's proposed fiscal packages could expand deficits by around 1.5–2% of GDP, similar in scale to the shock Britain attempted in 2022. The difference is that US debt is in dollars, its central bank is firmly independent and markets are deeper. Yet complacency invites danger. Britain shows how swiftly markets can revolt when policy appears unanchored. The US's fiscal trajectory, coupled with polarized politics, invites similar doubt.

### **France and the eurozone: core no more**

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Across the English Channel, France is discovering the perils of losing its “core” status within the eurozone. Long viewed as being nearly as safe as Germany, French debt has come under pressure. Yields on 30-year Obligation assimilable du Trésor bonds touched 4.5% this September, the highest since the eurozone crisis that peaked in 2011–2012, while the spread over Bunds widened to levels not seen in a decade.

Politics have triggered this. French Prime Minister François Bayrou leads a fragile minority, pushing through a budget that relies on €44 billion (over \$51 billion) of cuts. Investors doubt his ability to deliver, especially amid street protests and a hostile parliament. Unlike Italy, which is supported by loyal domestic savers and currently enjoys relative political stability, France relies heavily on foreign buyers. Japanese investors — once enthusiastic holders of French paper — have retreated as hedging costs rise.

It is telling that the spread between French and Italian debt has narrowed to near-record lows. Italy has long been treated as the eurozone’s weak link; today, markets view France with almost equal skepticism.

### **The structural undercurrents**

Fiscal and political dramas explain much of the repricing, but two deeper forces amplify it. First, demographics and savings patterns are shifting. In the 2000s and 2010s, global imbalances generated a glut of savings, pushing investors toward sovereign bonds. Aging populations in Europe and Asia now draw down savings while pension funds rebalance. The Netherlands’ pension reform, one of the largest shifts of its kind, is nudging vast pools of capital out of long-dated derivatives and into equities, reducing natural demand for government paper.

Second, the era of central-bank largesse has ended. For more than a decade after the financial crisis, QE artificially depressed long yields. Today, balance-sheet reduction is the norm. The Fed, the European Central Bank (ECB), the Bank of Japan and the Bank of England are all allowing bonds to roll off. With inflation still above target, few expect them to resume large-scale purchases soon. As many economists and newspapers call it, the “QE backstop” that once underpinned bond markets has vanished.

### **Volatility and narrative**

The bond market’s recent gyrations reflect not just fundamentals but also thin liquidity at the long end. When buyers hesitate, even modest shifts in sentiment can cause sharp swings. A weak US jobs report can send yields tumbling; political headlines can push them back up. Commentators, searching for tidy explanations, latch onto single events. But the more accurate story is cumulative: deficits, structural change and political doubt are gradually chipping away at the notion that rich-country debt is risk-free.

The old trader’s adage still applies: Yields rise when there are more sellers than buyers. The question is why buyers are now harder to find.

### **Beyond the cycle**

It is tempting to attribute today’s rising yields to cyclical forces: sticky inflation, hawkish central banks, heavy issuance. But the deeper story is structural. The world has exited the “great moderation” in which disinflation, globalization and QE kept yields compressed. We are entering an era where fiscal arithmetic matters again, where bond vigilantes are no longer mythical and where governments must earn the confidence of investors.

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That does not mean a crisis is inevitable. Advanced economies still borrow in their own currencies, with deep capital markets and strong institutions. But the cost of complacency has risen. Investors will demand a premium, and those with weaker fiscal reputations will pay more.

### Policy lessons

The repricing of sovereign debt is not yet a crisis. Governments can still borrow, and yields, though higher, remain manageable. But the warning is clear: Credibility, once lost, is costly to regain. Britain learned that in 2022. France is learning it now. The US risks discovering it soon. Sanai Takaichi, the Liberal Democratic Party and new Japanese prime minister candidate, will notice that right-side fiscal populism will trigger a meltdown.

The way forward is not financial trickery but credible medium-term consolidation plans. That does not mean immediate austerity — markets can tolerate deficits if they are embedded in a growth-enhancing strategy. But it does mean clarity, discipline and political stability.

Bond yields are more than numbers on a Bloomberg business screen. They are a referendum on trust. And once eroded, trust exacts a steep price before markets will extend it again.

### The policy dilemma

For policymakers, this is an acute conundrum. Raising taxes or cutting spending risks stifling growth at a delicate moment. But ignoring the problem risks embedding higher borrowing costs permanently. In the US, this could mean interest outlays consuming a fifth of federal revenues within a decade. In Britain, it could force renewed austerity or inflationary finance.

In Europe, it could reopen questions of fiscal sovereignty and ECB credibility. The more lasting

consequence is that fiscal space is shrinking, just as geopolitical and demographic demands expand it. Defense spending, climate investment and aging populations all require resources. If bond markets will no longer finance them cheaply, societies must choose: higher taxes, reduced consumption or higher inflation. None of these options are politically easy.

What we observe now is volatility; the more consequential fiscal and structural issues are still future-facing.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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# Suffer the Palestinians: The Flaws in Israel's Zero-Sum Primitivism

Alan Waring  
September 14, 2025

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**Israel's relentless military onslaught against 2.2 million Gazans, plus its state-backed ethnic cleansing and land theft in the Occupied West Bank, has shocked and enraged the civilized world. Still, the global silence has been deafening. Will the growing international momentum against Israel be enough to curb the regime's hegemony, or will the Israeli Cabinet's Darwinian genocidal plan prevail?**

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Since early 2024, Israel has repeated incessantly the assertion that its military operations in Gaza seek only to crush Hamas for the latter's cross-border terrorist atrocity of October 7, 2023, and thereby prevent any repetition, and that its military conduct is strictly lawful and mindful of keeping civilian casualties to a minimum. The plight of Israeli hostages taken into Gaza was, and remains, high in the Israeli public's mind. For the first few months after October 7th, in sympathy, the world's nations granted Israel great latitude in its Gaza conduct, presumably on the assumption that Israel was relatively reliable, decent and trustworthy and, in many cases, even an ally and friend.

However, the Gazan civilian deaths and injuries at the hands of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) were growing by the thousands month after month, as was the obliteration of vast residential and commercial areas and all means of survival under the IDF's "devastated terrain warfare" strategy. Voluminous news footage, video footage and personal testimonies of civilian casualties, medical

staff, international aid agencies and UN authorities emerged day after day that all flatly contradicted the Israeli government's self-certification that it and its IDF are a paragon of virtue, rectitude and humanity.

By late 2024, certified civilian deaths in Gaza were well over 40,000, plus over 90,000 wounded, the vast majority being women and children. Targeting of hospitals and clinics by IDF aerial and ground forces, as widely reported, added to the physical danger, terror and despair of the civilian population. By August 13, 2025, verified civilian deaths in Gaza from IDF action had risen to over 61,000, plus at least 12,000 missing presumed dead under rubble, and over 154,000 wounded.

While a large number of Israeli hostages held by Hamas were released in 2024, almost exclusively by negotiation, a significant number have remained captive. For the last year, Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Netanyahu has relegated their importance from high to lower priority, only warranting lip service.

Relatives feel the hostages have been abandoned in favor of Netanyahu's determination to negotiate a ceasefire and peace only on his terms, if at all, and which have been framed to ensure rejection by Hamas and therefore justify his continued military onslaught. A consensus argues that Netanyahu is cynically determined to prolong the war, not out of military or national security necessity but simply to keep him in power.

In addition to the ever-present threat of death and destruction from IDF attacks, the hapless 2.2 million civilian population has also been subject to stop-and-go interference with supplies of essential food, water, medicines and other provisions (largely from international aid agencies) into Gaza. From March 2, 2025, all such international aid has been blocked by the IDF save for a small token provision by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a

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US-Israel creation controlled by Israel and much mired in controversy, including complicity in multiple deliberate shootings of starving Palestinians desperately seeking food.

From mid-July 2025, reported deaths from starvation in Gaza began to rise exponentially, embarrassing Israel into reluctantly agreeing in August to air drops by a coalition of other countries (Jordan, the United Arab Emirates [UAE], Spain, France, Germany, Egypt, Belgium, Netherlands) but these supplies are only a small portion of the 600-1,000 trucks per day required now to stop mass famine and death by starvation. Thus far, after nearly 6 months, Israel is still refusing to allow such daily overland supplies at anything more than a trickle.

Gaza is a territory that is totally fenced off and surrounded by massive IDF forces. Its Palestinian population has no automatic entry or exit right at its external borders. To all intents and purposes, they have been trapped in a giant internment camp for decades. Even its coast is totally controlled and patrolled by the IDF. There have been several reports of local fishermen (2017, 2018, 2024) and children on the beach being shot at by the IDF.

For the IDF, Gaza has become a place in which to inflict as much terror, torment and misery as possible on the Palestinian population, to collectively punish them for the Hamas atrocity of October 7, 2023, to exterminate as many of them as possible under the cloak of “war directives” and military necessity, to corral the surviving population into a so-called “humanitarian zone” or ghetto of less than 20% of the Gaza land mass and to terrorize, starve and coerce those still alive into fleeing Gaza “voluntarily” or face the prospect of permanent repression and few human rights courtesy of whatever regime Israel imposes on them next. This assessment is not idle speculation but is confirmed many times over in public statements by several of Netanyahu’s Cabinet

Ministers e.g. Itamar Ben-Gvir (Jan 1, 2024; May 6, 2025; Aug 2, 2025), Bezalel Smotrich (Mar 19, 2023; May 6, 2025; Aug 8, 2025), Amihai Eliyahu (Nov 5, 2023; Jan 6, 2024; May 6, 2025), Israel Katz (Apr 17, 2025; Jul 7, 2025), May Golan (Feb 21, 2024; Oct 21, 2024).

Indeed, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who is viscerally opposed to Netanyahu’s Gaza War policy and conduct to the extent that he has openly described IDF conduct in Gaza as “war crimes” (Haaretz and CNN), has referred to the proposed “humanitarian zone” as little more than a giant “concentration camp”.

Israeli human rights organizations such as Physicians for Human Rights Israel and B’Tselem have also now openly condemned the Israeli government for committing “genocide” against the Palestinians in Gaza. The International Association of Genocide Scholars has similarly concluded that Israel is committing such genocide.

The stated Israeli Gaza strategy post-October 7, 2023, has remained vague, ambiguous and fluid. After a very long period, apart from its vengeance mission against Hamas, any coherent military and political objectives remained elusive, and the “what comes after?” question about Israel’s intention for Gaza’s long-term post-war future was anyone’s guess. Maybe this uncertainty was deliberately feigned to mask the true Israeli intentions and plan for Gaza.

Statements from Netanyahu and individual cabinet members have swayed back and forth, variously suggesting no intention to govern Gaza. First, it was a temporary partial occupation, then “safe zones” that proved to be unsafe, then corralling all Palestinians in a “humanitarian zone” in southern Gaza near the Rafah Crossing to Egypt, and so on.



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One “big fanfare” announcement by Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump was for the majority of Gaza, when finally cleansed of Palestinians, to be taken over by joint US-Israeli real estate businesses that would convert the entire territory into up-market holiday and gaming resorts with residential opportunities for Israelis and international buyers (but not for Palestinians).

Netanyahu has now changed tack again by recently announcing new IDF military orders for the total reoccupation of Gaza on an indefinite basis. He asserts that his reoccupation plan is not to govern Gaza permanently but to banish Hamas and restore civilized order, reconstruction and rehabilitation under a multi-national Arab force.

However, he has not named the Arab countries or indicated whether they had been asked, much less agreed, to participate. Few Arab leaders would dare run the risk of insurrection by their own often volatile populations (e.g., anti-Israeli unrest in Bahrain in early September 2025), accusing them of unforgivable treachery by participating, thus rendering the plan unworkable. Israel’s own IDF and intelligence chiefs have also openly told Netanyahu that his military reoccupation plan will likely be a catastrophic failure on many counts, including the high probability that remaining Israeli hostages in Gaza will die.

Despite Netanyahu’s denials, the most likely intention is to permanently annex Gaza into Israel, carry through a “clearance” mission against the Palestinian population and repopulate Gaza with Israeli settlers — all as expressed unequivocally by his Cabinet ministers Ben-Gvir, Eliyahu, Smotrich, Katz and Golan, and Netanyahu’s own proposed commercial real-estate deal with President Trump.

Netanyahu’s zero-sum strategy is based on the ultra-Zionist assertion (restated by Bezalel Smotrich on August 8, 2025, and again on August 14, 2025 regarding expanded illegal colonies in the

Occupied West Bank) that the Jewish nation state (enshrined in the Jewish Nation State Law of 2018) can only be protected by the forced removal and/or extinction of all Palestinians from Eretz Yisrael and the denial and prevention of Palestinian sovereignty. While a sizeable minority of Israelis have long rejected the Gaza War and this zero-sum approach, polls suggest that the majority who were once persuaded to back the Gaza War are now rejecting the latest Gaza reoccupation plan and demanding an end to the war.

### **Israel’s real objectives for its Gaza War**

After more than 23 months of his Gaza War, it is now evident that the common trajectory of Netanyahu’s political and military decisions and their execution has been towards a single short-term objective. This objective is the total removal of Palestinians from Gaza by whatever means (intimidation, settler violence, military attack, ethnic cleansing, forced relocation, starvation, denial of medical care, homicide, land theft) and the total absorption of Gaza into Eretz Yisrael, followed quickly by a similar fate for the Occupied West Bank. All of this is just the prelude to the much larger regional territorial expansion objective for Greater Israel relentlessly promoted by ultra-Zionists, inside and outside the Israeli Cabinet, as discussed on Fair Observer in December 2024 and July 2025.

Defeating Hamas following its October 7, 2023, terrorist attack became a convenient pretext, if not a golden opportunity, that provided Netanyahu with a plausible justification for the Gaza War. However, his government’s “devastated terrain” total annihilation execution and the manifest use of mass starvation as a weapon of war (which Netanyahu denies but which several of his Cabinet Ministers openly and frequently brag about), meet all the criteria for recognizing the “proverbial

duck”. Or, res ipsa loquitur — the thing speaks for itself.

Netanyahu’s zero-sum strategy of total erasure of Palestinians from Gaza (and closely followed by those in the Occupied West Bank) is as bold and breath-taking as it is megalomaniacal. However, it is also short on factual, theoretical and empirical underpinning from history, anthropology and psychology. While such a strategy may bring short-term wins, its long-term success is decidedly shaky.

**Fatal flaws in supremacist assumptions and wishes**

Totalitarian regimes, dictatorships, authoritarian states and the ideological extremists who steer and support them are nearly always led by compulsive high-risk gamblers who really do believe that they can always beat the odds and impose their wishes, however egregious and grotesque, on luckless victims and the world. While often differing greatly in ideology, they share a common essence of a world-view in which both the formal and informal structures and processes of governance, social order, the right to life and human rights overall are all subordinated to the “law of the jungle” in which only the most ruthless are fit enough and therefore entitled to survive. They and their cronies see themselves and their constituents as being supremely exceptional, invincible, entitled and justified by self-certified greatness or even by God in everything they believe and do, however appalling and depraved, in their relentless pursuit of domination of “lesser” beings.

The world has seen many harsh authoritarian regimes in modern times. The following table provides some prominent examples.

**State Regime Period Number of Years** Germany Nazi/Third Reich 1933–1945 12 Russia/Soviet Union. Russian Federation. Putin.1921–

19921992–present 2004–present 7233 so far 21 so far South Africa Apartheid 1948–1994 46 Iraq Saddam Hussein 1979–2003 24 Iran Islamic Republic 1980– present 45 so far Syria Hafez Al-Assad. Bashar Al- Assad. 1930–2000 2011–2024 70 13 North Korea Kim dynasty 1948–present 77 so far Cambodia Pol Pot1 975–19794 Israel Netanyahu’s Jewish supremacy policies. Netanyahu’s ultra-Zionist coalition and policies.2009–20212022–present123 so far

Since 2009, Netanyahu has gradually introduced more and more Zionist ideology and objectives into national policy and law, for example, the Jewish Nation State Law in 2018, which conferred full citizen and legal rights only on Jews and specifically (Article 7) warranted settler occupation of Palestinian land. However, only in 2022 did he provide an unequivocal opportunity for such far-right ultra-Zionist parties as Otzma Yehudit and others to gain national power by granting them coalition seats in his Cabinet.

As the table shows, in modern times, harsh regimes do not tend to enjoy longevity, certainly nothing like such past colonial empires as Roman, British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Venetian, Ottoman and Persian, which lasted for centuries, as did many dynasties in China. Even the notorious Nazi regime in Germany, which rampaged across Europe and was proclaimed by Hitler as the Thousand-Year Reich of the Aryan “master race”, only lasted a paltry 12 years. Are Netanyahu and his ultra-Zionist colleagues similarly aiming for a Thousand Year Eretz Yisrael based on ethno-religious supremacy and, if so, what are their chances of success?

Arguably, the US could also warrant inclusion in the table of authoritarian regimes, in respect of Trump’s current Make America Great Again (MAGA) second presidency and his flagrant

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abuses of the constitution and the law, including the Project 2025-based rapid deconstruction of US democratic institutions, civil rights and civil protections. Many believe that the Trump administration is already an elected dictatorship, turning the US into a pseudo-democracy and sliding inexorably towards a totalitarian dystopia.

The empirical evidence from history suggests that the chances of long-term success for regimes based on beliefs about the exceptional superiority of their populations, or their racial or religious supremacy, or their divine agency and right, are very low indeed. Darwinian theories of “survival of the fittest” that may fit well with biological and genetic characteristics are far less predictive when it comes to the longevity of nations.

The claims and assertions of their superiority and entitlement advanced by supremacists of all kinds are typically expressions of fantasies and delusions. They are not based on testable evidence but often on absurd beliefs and ideological certitudes, whether relating to religion, race, nationality or politics. No matter how elaborate their arguments or intricate their sophistry, or how loudly and aggressively they project them, supremacists cannot escape the laws of history or what is essentially a population ecology model of nation-states and interest groups, as proposed in 2015 by David Lowery and Virginia Gray. In this model, analogous to biological functionalism, all nations and groups grow, mature and eventually decline, albeit at differing rates. Just as no biological entity can live forever, so too must every nation anticipate that eventually it will decline, if not cease to exist.

This life-cycle model is similar to the four “turnings” of growth, maturation, decay and destruction posited by William Strauss and Neil Howe (1997) in their exploration of America’s history and its likely future into the 21st century. I discuss all this at length in chapter 6 on The Alt-

Right and US Foreign Policy during Trump’s first presidency, pages 169-205, in *The New Authoritarianism Vol 1* (2018).

The current ebullience of Trump’s White House administration and the MAGA movement in his second presidency is based specifically on a total denial that the laws of history or an eventual decline of US supremacy or its superpower dominance could possibly apply to the United States. They argue that the US will continue, uniquely, forever, to be the exception, as discussed at length by Professor Hilda Restad. While many other powers that have declined in modern times have maintained sovereign integrity, longevity and respectability via acceptance, adaptation and redevelopment, MAGA delusions and population brainwashing are likely to delay the inevitable transition in the US as the only viable alternative to catastrophe, possibly into the late 21st or early 22nd century — a sobering thought.

What about Eretz Yisrael? There are no signs that the Netanyahu regime would ever contemplate failure of their exceptionalist beliefs, or of asserted divine authority, or of ultra-Zionism, or of a Greater Israel expansion mission, or contemplate acceptance of a two-state solution for Israel-Palestine peace. The very idea that Israel could ever be subject to the laws of history or a life-cycle, or out of self-interest, should curtail its neo-imperialistic stance towards neighbors, is just not in the ultra-Zionist playbook. They expect other nations to capitulate, to adapt to Israel, its military might and its demands — or else. No likelihood of its zero-sum policy towards the Palestinians being ditched unless and until the Netanyahu regime falls and a more liberal governance emerges — another sobering thought.

### **The anti-Semite conundrum facing ultra-Zionists**

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One of the most well-recognized defense mechanisms of ultra-Zionists is to slap anyone who dares to criticize Israel or Zionist excesses, even mildly or constructively, with the slur of anti-Semitism. It is unclear whether they truly believe that there is only a completely “black” or “white” option of either 100% pro-Israel or 100% anti-Semitic, or whether it is simply a convenient and effective reflex to accuse any critic of the damning anti-Semitism slur that is difficult to disprove, however ludicrous it might be in particular cases. Professor Omer Bartov, the acclaimed Israeli analyst and author on the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict, provides penetrating commentary on this issue.

Perhaps even more absurd is their tendency to accuse of anti-Semitism all Palestinians and all Arabs, especially those who dare comment or complain about Israeli conduct. It is absurd owing to the little-known fact that Jews and Arabs (but especially Palestinians) share almost identical Semitic DNA, as revealed separately in 2000 by Professor Michael Hammer and colleagues, and Professor Almut Nebel and colleagues, based on extensive clinical testing programs. When ultra-Zionists scream racial abuse at Palestinians and Arabs in general (and vice-versa), they are screaming at their genetic kith-and-kin.

Intuitively, one might anticipate the Hammer and Nebel findings of shared biological ancestry to be true, given the fact that Palestinians and Jews have lived in close proximity in the same land and interbred for several thousand years (despite their distinctive cultures and the preposterous revisionist claims of ultra-Zionists that the land has always been Eretz Yisrael owned and occupied exclusively by Jews, with Palestinians being merely recent squatters). The relative proportions of Jews and Canaanite Levantines (Palestinians) have ebbed and flowed over the millennia, as have their geographical concentrations across the same land.

The Jewish tribal strongholds in the Roman province of Palaestina were in Judea and Samaria. Following the Arab invasion of the 7th century CE, the Jewish proportion of the population gradually declined, while the non-Jewish Levantine and Arab populations increased. This continued throughout the Ottoman period and, after the British Mandate, the 1922 census recorded the population to comprise 11% Jews and 78% Palestinian Muslims. The Jewish population began to increase again, but at the end of the British Mandate in 1948, census data still only showed 32% Jews as against 60% Palestinian Muslims.

With such historical data in mind, the ultra-Zionist insistence that the whole of Eretz Yisrael is, and must be, exclusively Jewish sounds very much like a “cuckoo in the nest” protesting that the other nestlings, its close genetic cousins, just have to accept that they will be ousted to guarantee the survival of the “cuckoo”. The seminal work by Rabbi Ya’akov Shapiro of the International Council of Middle East Studies exposes the degenerative journey of Zionism from Jewish identity crisis to Israeli identity theft and its mission to erase Palestinian identity.

### **The underpinning psychopathology**

Those who profess and exhibit evil ideologies and perpetrate monstrous acts of inhumanity are responsible for their own conduct. Hamas, an internationally designated terrorist organization that has dedicated itself to the destruction of Israel and Jews, is wholly responsible and accountable for its attack on October 7, 2023, the killing of 1,139, the wounding of some 3,400, and the taking of 251 hostages into Gaza.

Over the subsequent 23 months, as summarized above, Israel has conducted a relentless counteroffensive ostensibly against Hamas but in reality amounting to a mass collective punishment

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of the entire Palestinian Gaza civilian population of some 2.2 million by slaughter, wounding, mass starvation, forced evacuation, destruction of housing and medical facilities, and denial of means of life maintenance. Even at its height of power, Hamas's armed militant numbers never exceeded 30,000 or roughly 1.2% of the total Gaza population. Estimates put the current Hamas numbers at 12,000 with only small arms weaponry, set against the IDF armed personnel in excess of 600,000 plus jet fighters, helicopter gunships, sophisticated missiles, tanks, artillery and armored vehicles.

There is no moral equivalence between the Hamas crimes against Israel on October 7 and Israel's subsequent crimes against Gaza. The leaders of Hamas and Israel are both evidently guilty of terrorism and war crimes against each other's civilian populations. Neither side can reasonably claim to be 100% paragons of virtue, rectitude and right — far from it. They differ greatly in ideology but not in the principles and methodology of terror or their ruthlessness.

The biggest difference lies in the gargantuan disparity in available resources to prosecute the Gaza War, as evidenced by the scale of the Israeli onslaught against Gaza and its civilian population. Here, Israel is only able to exercise such overkill because of ongoing financial, military and diplomatic support from its greatest ally, the US.

President Trump could, in an instant, if he so wishes, end Israel's Gaza War by threatening Netanyahu with withdrawal of support — rather like Don Corleone in *The Godfather*, making him “an offer he couldn't refuse.” However, this is wishful thinking, since Trump and his White House team are in total lockstep with Netanyahu and the ultra-Zionist agenda. Trump and Netanyahu also share a common view and business interest in all that multi-billion-dollar real estate ready for exploitation once the Palestinian

population is “cleansed” from Gaza, not to mention exploiting Gaza's littoral and offshore gas deposits with little or no benefit for Palestinians.

All authoritarian regimes are likely to exhibit harshness, even brutality, and a range of other unpleasant or obnoxious characteristics. The regimes of Hamas, Netanyahu and Trump are all examples in their own ways. Their weaknesses emanate from manifest character defects and apparent personality disorders of some of the key protagonists.

It is self-evident that any group or organization that would plan the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack on Israel (as Hamas did) was then, and remains, run by individuals who, to varying degrees, could be fairly described in common parlance as psychopaths. They continue to declare their implacable intent to erase Israel and its Jewish population from the map (despite their never being likely to possess the necessary resources).

The characteristics of psychopathy cover a range of traits that are likely to threaten harm to other people, but only a minority of clinically diagnosable psychopaths ever engage in or orchestrate physical violence. Instead, they are much more likely to cause harm by manipulation, coercion, mental cruelty, lying, confidence trickery, callousness, power abuses, spitefulness and so on. Psychopathic leaders typically do not personally engage in violence but do so vicariously via command, direction, incitement and manipulation of others.

Typically, clinically raised levels of psychopathy (including the closely related sociopathy) are detectable in society at around 3% of the population. However, as large-scale field studies by Katerina Fritzon et al (2016) and Nathan Brooks et al (2019) have shown, the prevalence of such disorders rises to 20% among CEOs and top

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teams. The power attractiveness of boardroom or ministerial jobs may explain why toxic personalities appear to have a disproportionate presence among corporate and political leaders.

Characteristically, those having psychopathic and sociopathic personalities are unable to feel empathy or, indeed, recognize or accept that their decisions or conduct cause harm to victims. They have no conscience, regrets, remorse or feelings of guilt but may nonetheless exude charm and feign concern. Typically, such personalities also exhibit one or more of the following negative traits: paranoid delusions, excessive narcissism, delusions of grandeur, megalomania and power abuse, persistent pathological lying, committing major fraud, fixated hatreds, barely suppressed persistent anger and explosive outbursts, excessively vengeful reactions and an end-justifies-the-means callousness.

Lengthy study of psychopaths in organizations by psychologists Professors Robert Hare and Paul Babiak led them to coin the phrase “snakes-in-suits”. Hare also developed a 20-point list of indicators designed for use by psychiatrists and other clinical professionals, but often referred to by criminologists, sociologists, lawyers and other professions. An interesting exercise is to apply the Hare test to the expressed language and known policies and conduct of Hamas leaders, Netanyahu and his present Cabinet, and Trump and his second presidency MAGA Cabinet. Expect few surprises!

Some relevant psychoanalytical studies of key protagonists have also been done. For example, the eminent psychiatrist and political psychologist Jerrold Post published a profile of Donald Trump in 2020 that was widely acclaimed. The forthcoming book by Itzhak Benyamini provides a psycho-political analysis of Netanyahu and Israeli society that may also prove revealing.

## **The propaganda war and its global fallout**

What emerges from the leadership of each of the main protagonists in the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Gaza War (Hamas on the one hand and Israel and the US on the other) is a toxic mix of endless perceptual defense, denial, lies and relentless attempted brainwashing of their populations and the wider world. Since 1948, the well-funded and resourced psychological warfare and propaganda output by Israel, aided by the US, has successfully limited in every respect the Palestinian cause of nationhood, land rights, justice and even basic humanity. The “might is right” principle and the old Goebbels propaganda heuristic, namely “Tell a lie once, and it remains a lie. Tell it a thousand times and it becomes the truth,” have served them well.

However, as 2024 progressed, the inescapable images and mounting factual evidence of Israeli IDF carnage and atrocities against the mass civilian population of Gaza began swamping the TV screens, news media, social media and Internet. The world’s horrified citizens began lobbying and pressuring their own governments to do something, anything, to stop what soon earned the tag “Israeli genocide in Gaza”.

Israel may never shake off its “Gaza genocide” tag. It is also uncertain, but highly unlikely, that Netanyahu will readily change course and draw back from his latest reoccupation campaign, despite the world’s opprobrium, increasing sanctions and yet more nations formally recognizing Palestinian statehood. The US position is pivotal, but Trump prefers to let Netanyahu have a free hand. Amoral calculation and “what can we get away with?” remain their order of the day. Meanwhile, states nominally in the Western/US orbit but disenchanted by Trump’s disrespectful attitude and policies on Israel-Gaza, the Middle East and trade tariffs are pivoting towards China and Russia.

The flagrant Israeli bombing of the Hamas diplomatic mission for Gaza negotiations in Doha, Qatar, on September 9, 2025, has not only derailed the fragile negotiations for a Gaza ceasefire and peace but also likely trashed five years of peaceful “tolerated difference” rapprochement brought by the Abraham Accords between Israel and a number of West-supporting Arab states. On the volatile “Arab street”, Trump and the US administration are now seen as willing and obedient servants of their “master”, Israeli PM Netanyahu and his ultra-Zionist cabinet. Or, as the caption to a widely circulating photo of Netanyahu in front of Trump cabinet members cynically puts it: “The worst President the US has ever had.”

Perhaps only hubris and an unforeseen wild card event could radically thwart the Israel-US joint hegemony. However, former Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Matthew Parris argues for foreign governments to apply far tougher sanctions against Israel, its leaders and its economy and to urge its population to oust the Netanyahu regime. External pressure and pariah status — including total trade boycotts, visa/travel embargos, denial of banking facilities, stopping international money transfers, blocking capital and real estate investments, enhanced anti-money laundering scrutiny, scrutiny of individuals’ IDF military service, scrutiny of individuals’ support for ultra-Zionist extremism, referral of suspected war criminals and genocide perpetrators to international criminal courts — all may now become inevitable.

Ultimately, who controls the Near and Middle East is at stake. What leadership qualities do Israelis, Palestinians and Americans — and also the rest of the world — want or prefer to be in charge of their respective destinies? Will authoritarians and psychopaths continue to dominate them?

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



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## Anatomy of the Mushroom Murders

Ellis Cashmore  
September 16, 2025

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**Australia’s “mushroom murders” have gripped the world. Erin Patterson is found guilty of poisoning her in-laws and a relative of her husband, and is imprisoned for life. This extraordinary case confounds criminologists and leaves psychologists speechless. Fair Observer attempts to make this grotesque crime understandable — and our own fascination comprehensible.**

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**I**t is a horror story without monsters or demons, though evil is certainly present. In the absence of an intelligible motive, Erin Patterson’s alleged triple-murder of her in-laws has elicited incredulity and the familiar fallback of “evil.” This old bromide stands in for a cogent explanation, but

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psychologists have remained silent, journalists are waiting for inspiration and even the lawyers prosecuting Patterson failed to explain her motives. I'll try. But first, let me describe what is, after all, an extraordinary sequence of events.

Erin Scutter worked for RSPCA Australia (an animal welfare organization) in Melbourne, Australia, when, in the early 2000s, she met Simon Patterson. They married and moved to Perth, a city on the west coast. Scutter had earlier inherited \$2 million Australian (\$1.32 million). She had a son by Patterson and enjoyed cordial relations with her in-laws, Gail and Don Patterson. She changed her surname after marrying. Later, the couple moved to the state of Victoria, ostensibly to be nearer his family. Erin gave birth to a second child but soon lost both her parents to cancer.

Around 2015, Erin and Simon separated amicably, sharing custody of their children. They remained on friendly terms, even vacationing together. But in 2022, Simon filed tax returns listing himself as single, which reduced Erin's government child support payments. He claimed it was an accounting error, but it is at least possible that Erin blamed him and bore a grudge.

Between November 2021 and September 2022, Simon was hospitalized three times with severe gastrointestinal issues. Physicians never identified the cause, though the symptoms appeared consistent with ingestion of rat poison. Erin maintained friendly relations with both Simon and his family.

In July 2023, Erin invited Simon's parents, Gail and Don and his aunt and uncle, Heather and Ian Wilkinson, to lunch at her home in Leongatha. Simon declined. Patterson, who reportedly told her guests she had ovarian cancer, served beef Wellington. Later, all four guests ended up being admitted to the hospital with gastro-like

symptoms. Gail and Heather later died, followed by Don. Only Ian survived.

Police searched Erin's home and questioned her. In November 2023, she was arrested and charged with three counts of murder and one of attempted murder. She pleaded not guilty, claiming the deaths were a tragic accident. But the jury found she had laced the food she served with *Amanita phalloides*, better known as death cap mushrooms, and found her guilty. The judge sentenced her to life imprisonment (though one imagines she won't be trusted with kitchen duty).

So far, no one has satisfactorily answered the question: Why would an apparently ordinary woman commit such an extraordinary act of familial homicide?

### **Why? Why not?**

Let me start by turning the question inside out: Why wouldn't Patterson, a supposedly ordinary woman, kill her relatives? She may have harbored resentment toward her estranged husband after what he called an accounting error reduced her income. Perhaps she didn't rage at him or his family openly, but silently held a simmering grievance. Rage can be expressed in different ways.

Criminologist Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory begins from an unusual premise: People commit crimes not because of irresistible urges, but because the restraints that usually check behavior have weakened. Bonds of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief ordinarily fasten us to society and restrain our behavior.

In Patterson's case, many of those bonds appear weakened. Her marriage had collapsed. Trust in the extended family was frayed. She'd allegedly engaged in deception, by which I mean fabricating a cancer diagnosis. These are signs of someone



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unmoored from the attachments and commitments that inhibit transgression. Social Control Theory doesn't reduce her actions to pathology: It suggests how crime becomes possible when the ordinary prohibitions of social life lose their hold.

It's conceivable Patterson may have suspected that Simon, though estranged and living independently, had met another woman. There is no evidence of this, but even the belief could have shaped her sense of entrapment — hemmed in by disappointment, estrangement or disrespect. The fantasy of removing obstructive relatives may have seemed like a reasonable solution to otherwise insoluble pressures. The lack of control can't explain the actual transgression, but it frames it as a distorted response to unbearable experiences.

### **Unnatural born killers**

Killers are not born with murderous intent. They acquire techniques, rationalizations and cues that normalize deviance. Crime is learned behavior. People adopt definitions favorable to lawbreaking through their interactions with others. For Patterson, these lessons may not have come from a criminal underworld, but from subtler sources, like television, books, even casual conversations. Poisoning with mushrooms requires familiarity: lethality, preparation, dosage. Anyone versed in Agatha Christie's novels knows how cues abound in popular literature. Knowledge, once acquired, makes the step into action conceivable.

Sociologist David Matza's theory of "drift" adds another layer. Matza argued that people don't set out to become criminals. (There are exceptions, as anyone familiar with the first line from filmmaker Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas* knows: "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster.") They drift into deviance, oscillating between conformity and transgression. At times of loosened social bonds or weakened supervision, opportunities for deviance open up

and individuals rationalize their acts as temporary departures from the norm.

The Patterson case fits this unsettling model. She may not have begun with a firm resolve to kill, but with smaller transgressions — deceptions, manipulations, fantasies. Over time, these slid toward a point where serving poisoned food no longer felt unthinkable but almost natural, even normal. Drift explains the gradual erosion of moral boundaries that can culminate in extraordinary violence.

None of these accounts alone captures Patterson's motivation. But together they suggest convergence: weakened social bonds, perceived strains, learned definitions of deviance and a slow slide into moral suspension. This does not yield a neat motive — revenge, resentment or liberation may all have played roles — but it situates the crime in broader social dynamics. What looks incomprehensible becomes, from a sociological perspective, an intelligible sequence of disintegrating bonds, blocked goals, deviant learning and drift toward transgression.

### **Enduring fascination**

If the causes of the crime lie in subterranean processes, the spectacle it created belongs to a different realm. The "mushroom murders," as they're colloquially called, were not just a local tragedy. They became global news, followed in real-time by podcasts, documentaries and soon a drama series. Why has this case captivated the world?

Since the 19th century, crime has been a staple of mass journalism. The Jack the Ripper murders of 1888 made East London the focus of global headlines and established a template: Lurid crimes, mysterious motives and a public insatiable appetite for detail. The mushroom murders fit into that lineage.

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They contained all the elements of narrative drama: family betrayal, exotic poison, survival and death, deception and courtroom revelation. A Sunday lunch, usually a picture of domestic normality, became the setting for spectacular horror. Journalists know instinctively that such juxtapositions of the banal and the grotesque guarantee readership. So do scriptwriters for the British drama *Midsomer Murders*, in which charming villages in rural Oxfordshire, England, become the scenes of macabre killings.

The 21st century has seen an explosion of true-crime culture. Streaming platforms, podcasts and documentaries have turned real cases into serialized entertainment. The mushroom murders, with their unusual method and compelling characters, were perfect raw material for this ecosystem. Millions followed the daily updates, not only in Australia, but worldwide, as though consuming a live drama. ABC's decision to dramatize the case in a television series, *Toxic*, is less an aberration than the logical next step in a global appetite for crime stories.

Why does crime, especially gruesome crime, hold such enduring fascination? Partly it reassures: By observing the extraordinary, we confirm our own normality. Partly it excites: Transgression, especially in the domestic sphere, exposes the fragility of everyday order. A family lunch is supposed to embody familiarity, friendship and safety. Turning it into an occasion of mass poisoning shatters those assumptions and forces us to ponder what we ordinarily suppress.

We are also drawn to questions of motive. When killers act from greed or desperation, their behavior is explicable, even if repellent. But when motives remain opaque, as in Patterson's case, curiosity intensifies. The absence of explanation makes the story more haunting. Media interest feeds on that vacuum, replaying details in the hope that a rationale might surface.

Finally, the globalization of media ensures crimes no longer stay local. Satellite news, digital platforms and social media amplify cases that once would have occupied only regional headlines. The mushroom murders became a global spectacle not only because they were sensational, but because the global infrastructure now exists to circulate them instantly. In that sense, the case reveals as much about us and our contemporary media ecology as it does about Patterson.

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

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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## Spain Imposes Arms Embargo on Israel as Pro-Palestine Protesters Disrupt Vuelta

Laura Pavon  
September 23, 2025

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**Pro-Palestine protesters disrupted the final stage of Spain's Vuelta cycling race, prompting international debate about politics in sports. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez backed the demonstrations and imposed an arms embargo on Israel, drawing sharp criticism at home and abroad. The protests highlight growing European divisions over sanctions, boycotts and Israel's global participation.**

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**O**n Sunday, September 14, in Madrid, protesters demanding an end to the genocide in Palestine disrupted the final stage of the 80th edition of the Vuelta a España, a major cycling race. Since the race began in August, demonstrators have called for the Israeli Premier-Tech team to be expelled from the competition. Despite intervention by riot police, protesters blocked several sections of the route, causing the race to end abruptly 56 kilometers before the finish line.

In response to the protests, Kiko García, the race's Technical Director, stated that the International Cycling Union (UCI) — cycling's governing body — “reaffirms its commitment to political neutrality, independence and autonomy in sports, in accordance with the Olympic Movement's founding principles.” According to the BBC, Sunday's events prompted the UCI to issue a statement calling “into question Spain's ability to host major international sporting events, ensuring that they take place in safe conditions and in accordance with the principles of the Olympic Charter.”

### **Sports as political battlegrounds**

In recent world history, major sporting events have become battlegrounds for foreign and domestic politics. A notable example of this is the 1968

Mexico City Olympics. A few days before the opening ceremony, the infamous Tlatelolco massacre occurred, killing hundreds of Mexican student protesters. At the same time, this was also the Olympics at which Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised the Black Power fist at the podium, a watershed image for the Civil Rights Movement in the US.

Nations that host major sporting events continue to make great efforts to suppress disruptive protests, using varying degrees of violence. Let us not forget the brutalization of Brazilian protesters by police before the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Just last year, the 2024 Paris Olympics were taken up as an opportunity for civil society to call attention to national demands for better working conditions through labor strikes, and increase the visibility of the pro-Palestine, anti-genocide movement. Stanislas Guerini, the French Minister of Public Services, had given several warnings about the upcoming strikes in an interview, calling for the Games to be “a moment of success for the nation.”

For the first time since 1978, when Basque separatists disrupted a stage of the tour in San Sebastián, the Vuelta a España has found itself again in the midst of political turmoil.

### **Sánchez backs protests and declares arms embargo**

In an unusual turn of events, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, also the head of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), endorsed the protests. He expressed his “deep admiration” for how “the Spanish people mobilize for just causes, such as Palestine,” and called on other countries, saying, “The debate that has opened up about what happened in Spain should grow and reach every corner of the world.”

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On September 8, Sánchez had announced a decree to impose a total arms embargo on Israel, publicly using the word “genocide” for the first time when speaking of Israel’s war on Gaza, a legal and discursive shift. Sánchez, the leader of a traditionally socialist but establishment party, governs in coalition with Sumar (SMR), a left-wing formation formed from the recent collapse of Spain’s two-party system that had dominated for decades. SMR figures, such as Vice President Yolanda Díaz, have been vocal about the use of the term “genocide,” accusing Pedro Sánchez of political ambivalence in the face of increasing Palestinian suffering.

Israel’s reaction to the embargo decree was immediate. The country’s foreign minister, Gideon Saar, accused the Spanish government of being “anti-Semitic” and “corrupt” and noted Spain’s expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Israel also retaliated by banning the government’s vice president, Yolanda Díaz, from entering the country.

Not all social sectors or media outlets have welcomed the president’s support for the Palestinian cause. For example, *El Mundo* emphasized in their coverage the president’s role as an instigator of the failed race, writing, “Police charged pro-Palestinian protesters after Sanchez encouraged protests during the Vuelta cycling race.” This comes at a time when Sanchez’s public image has been under particular scrutiny due to the corruption scandal that affected his entire party in June.

### **Conservatives and media react with fury**

Following Sunday’s events, representatives of the long-standing conservative Popular Party (PP) — including leader of the opposition Alberto Núñez Feijóo and president of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who posed with the Israeli team before the competition — made strong statements blaming the president for the riots.

Feijoo called the president “an irresponsible leader who encourages violence among compatriots,” and Ayuso went so far as to compare downtown Madrid to “Sarajevo at war.”

Some reports claimed that protesters threw objects and made barricades with fences, creating a state of “total violence,” while others emphasized the excessive police violence as a response to peaceful protest. The *Malas Lenguas* news program on Public TV interviewed a demonstrator who showed her bruises and referred to the police reaction as “completely disproportionate.”

Even though the race didn’t come to a finish as expected, the points were calculated, and Jonas Vingegaard was named the 2025 winner of the *Vuelta a España*. Instead of celebrating on the stage set up by the organizers at the Cibeles fountain in downtown Madrid, the Danish champion celebrated on a makeshift podium.

After the tense race finale and the cancellation of the arms agreement with Israel the previous week, Spain announced that it would not participate in the 2026 Eurovision Song Contest if Israel did. Spain joined the Netherlands, Ireland and Iceland in this decision. Similar tensions regarding Israel’s participation in Eurovision arose earlier this year, both between European countries with differing opinions on the need to make a statement about it, and within Spain when its public television network played images from Gaza during Israel’s performance.

Boycotts, BDS and the future of international solidarity

The debate over Israel’s participation in competitions raises the broader question of the necessity of vetoes, sanctions and boycotts. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which draws inspiration from the cultural and economic isolation of South Africa

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during apartheid, fights for ending international support of Israel.

Fandom communities around sports and the entertainment industry, even if limited, are part of a broader strategy toward this goal. Take, as another recent example, the popular Spanish musician Rosalía's brief cancellation on social media for not making a public statement supporting the Palestinian cause.

On September 16, two days after the race, the United Nations released a new report, which Chair of the UN Commission, Navi Pillay, summarized in the following way: "The commission finds that Israel is responsible for genocide in Gaza." Now with legal grounding in the UN, the question remains: How will Spain's announced permanent arms embargo materialize, and will it set a precedent for other countries?

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



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## NATO and European Defense in the Face of Russian Resurgence and America First

Peter Hoskins  
September 24, 2025

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**The Russo-Ukrainian War and the trend for US disengagement from Europe, particularly under the Trump administration, have brought the inadequacy of European defense to the forefront of political debate. Europe must reduce its dependence on the US and improve its capacity for defense. The critical question is, how will this be achieved?**

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**L**ord Hastings Ismay, before he took up office as NATO's first Secretary General, said that the purpose of the alliance was, "to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." These words, spoken in the immediate aftermath of World War II, reflected the distrust of Germany after two terribly destructive wars within 30 years, the belief that the Soviet Union posed a threat to post-war Europe and the appreciation that Europe was in no position to defend itself without US support.

The fear of a resurgent Germany has long since fallen away, but the war in Ukraine has brought into stark relief the perception of a renewed threat to Europe from Russia. This, coupled with the US strategic focus turning towards China and the Indo-Pacific region, accentuated by the America First policy of the Trump administration, raises three interlinked questions for Europe. How do the Europeans ensure that they can keep Russia out? How do they keep the US engaged, at least in the

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mid-term? What architecture best suits European defense in the future, with or without the US?

### **Keeping the Russians out — political will**

Keeping the Russians out requires credible European defense, which relies on both political will and military capability. If we take it as given that the principal aim of defense policy for Europe is to deter aggression, then the Russian perception of the strength of political will on the part of NATO and the EU is critical. At the institutional level, the political support of the EU and NATO for Ukraine has been unwavering, but this papers over very divergent positions taken by member states.

The various contributions in military aid are revealing. As of June 30, 2025, the US was the most important contributor of military aid at €64.62 billion (\$75.60 billion). However, aid from NATO members and other European states has exceeded that of the US, contrary to what one may believe from statements by US President Donald Trump, totaling €79.14 billion (\$92.58 billion). Germany (€16.51 billion [\$19.31 billion]), the UK (€13.77 billion [\$16.11 billion]) and, perhaps surprisingly, Denmark (€9.16 billion [\$10.72 billion]) were the three most important suppliers after the US, with France (€5.96 billion [\$6.97 billion]) sixth of European contributors.

Indicative of the different perspectives within the European allies, Hungary has not contributed any military aid. If we look at financial, humanitarian and military aid in total, the principal contributors remain the same in a similar ranking, with the exception that the EU institutions come into the picture with €63.2 billion (\$73.93 billion) of financial and humanitarian aid. Hungary has contributed only a very modest €0.05 billion (\$0.06 billion) of humanitarian aid.

Another political aspect has been the unexpected adherence of both Sweden and Finland to NATO — unthinkable before the Russian invasion in 2022. A complex and contradictory picture confronts the Russians: some strong signals but some weaknesses to exploit. Whether these weaknesses would be there if there were a direct threat to a NATO member is, of course, an imponderable.

Equally, despite the ambiguities surrounding the Trump administration's support for Ukraine and its desire to avoid foreign entanglements, it would be dangerous for the Russians to assume that the US would not come to the aid of a NATO ally in the event of direct aggression.

### **Keeping the Russians out — military capabilities**

Assuming that there is the political will to keep the Russians at bay, how does military capability within Europe shape up? The picture is mixed. The two most capable armed forces, in terms of quality and breadth of capabilities, are those of the UK and France.

However, over recent years, both nations have focused much of their effort on low-intensity counter terrorist operations and global reach at the expense of preparing for a major European conflict. It seems that the lesson of Ukraine has been learnt, but it will take time to switch emphasis.

On the positive side, there is an independent nuclear capacity held by France and the UK. On the conventional, non-nuclear level, there is a patchwork of capabilities, readiness and combat experience within European armed forces. In this context, after many years of neglect, the recent renewed commitment by Germany to defense is very important.

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Perhaps the most significant problem for the non-US NATO members is that they rely heavily on the US for target acquisition and reconnaissance, suppression and destruction of enemy air defenses, command and control functions, electronic warfare and resupply of munitions and other consumables in any major conflict.

In this context, a major European war cannot be viewed in isolation. If the US were to be involved in a major operation elsewhere, such as a Chinese blockade or invasion of Taiwan, these capabilities for use in Europe and resupply of munitions would likely be compromised. Non-US NATO nations must prioritize acquiring these capabilities where they are lacking and enhancing them where they are present but at insufficient levels.

They must also improve the capacity of the European armaments industries for the manufacture of equipment and replenishment of consumables. However, there are supply chain issues outside of Europe that also need to be addressed. As an example, Europe relies on China for more than 70% of its requirements for cotton linters, used to manufacture nitrocellulose for artillery shells and other explosives.

Another dimension to keeping the Russians out is “where would the blow fall?” The least likely scenario is a direct thrust through Poland, but it is probably the threat for which NATO is best prepared. Perhaps the most likely threat is against the Baltic states, all of which have a common land border with either Belarus or Russia.

The challenge for NATO is that the only route for overland access to the Baltic states is the short, roughly 50-mile-long border between Poland and Lithuania, sandwiched between the Russian Kaliningrad enclave and Belarus. All other deployment or resupply would need to come by sea or air, requiring control of both over and in the

Baltic Sea. Fortunately, air and maritime power are strong European capabilities.

### **Keeping the Americans in**

President Trump has long been critical of NATO, particularly his perception that the US bears a disproportionate burden for European defense, and he has threatened to withhold support if nations do not pull their weight. On June 24, 2025, en route to the NATO summit in the Netherlands, he commented on Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty to journalists, “Depends on your definition. There are numerous definitions of Article 5. You know that, right? But I’m committed to being their friends.”

It is worth a look at the wording of Article 5: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them ... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith ... such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force ...” The military commitment of the US has long been taken for granted, and the widely held view has been that Article 5 implies the commitment of military force.

In essence, President Trump is correct, but his statement raises the specter of US support short of military engagement, perhaps limited to diplomatic or logistic support. Currently, the greatest guarantee of US military engagement is the deployment of 84,000 US armed forces personnel in Europe, spread widely but with the greatest deployments in the UK, Germany, Italy and Poland. This is a significant contribution, but well below the troop ceiling of 326,414 set by Congress in 1985 during the Cold War.

Non-US NATO forces have more than 3,000,000 active personnel, but the importance of

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the US contribution is not simply the numbers stationed in Europe but also the quality of the capabilities deployed and the overall strength of US forces worldwide. There is speculation that the US is reviewing its force levels in Europe with an announcement due in the fall of 2025. If this were to result in a drawdown, then the concern for Europe must be at what number do US force levels in Europe fall below a critical mass, which may lead Russia to conclude that US engagement has been fatally weakened.

The best means for the NATO European nations to convince the US that it is serious about its own defense, and hence keep the US engaged, is by increasing their defense spending. On June 25, 2025, a NATO summit agreed that members “would commit to investing 5% of GDP in defense – including 3.5% of GDP on core defense requirements and 1.5% on defense and security-related investments like infrastructure and industry. This marks a major uplift from the previous benchmark of 2% of GDP.”

It remains to be seen how this translates into defense budgets. In February 2025, the UK announced an increase in UK defense spending from 2.3% GDP to 2.5% by April 2027, with an “ambition” of reaching 3% within the next parliament (in effect by 2034), short of the 3.5% target. France’s President Macron has pledged to increase the country’s defense budget from a little over 2.0% in 2024 to 3.5% by 2030.

However, both the UK and France face serious overall budget challenges, with the added dimension of an unstable political situation in France and a presidential election due in 2027. Germany has increased its defense budget for 2025 to 2.4% and plans to reach the 3.5% NATO target by 2029.

The other nations’ budgets for 2024 ranged from around 1.5% for Spain to more than 4% for

Poland. How all this will pan out, particularly with the scope for creative accounting with the formula for 1.5% for “defense and security-related” expenditure, is anybody’s guess. An unanswerable question is, will the foot come off the accelerator if a peace accord is found in Ukraine?

In the short term, the NATO agreement on defense budgets seems to have satisfied President Trump, but it would be unwise to assume that the US will remain engaged in the long term. What future defense architecture best suits Europe in the future, with or without the US? First of all, how did we get where we are now?

### **The evolution of post-war defense in Europe**

How Europe should best defend itself has been on the political agenda since shortly after the end of World War II, periodically coming to the fore and then slipping into the background as the perception of the threat has varied.

In 1947, France and the UK signed the Dunkirk mutual assistance pact — not to counter any perceived Soviet threat but to forestall, however unlikely that may seem now, any resurgent threat from Germany. Within a year, the growing threat from the Soviet Union resulted in the expansion of the Dunkirk pact into the Western Union (WU), incorporating Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

The WU, established by the Brussels Treaty in March 1948, provided for military, economic, social and cultural cooperation. However, a succession of other institutions (the Organization for European Economic Cooperation [April 1948], NATO [April 1949], the Council of Europe [May 1949] and the European Coal and Steel Community [April 1951]) effectively stripped the WU of many of its functions.



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The creation of NATO, which brought together nine European nations, Iceland, Canada and the US in a treaty for collective defense, was the most significant post-war development. Faced with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the maintenance of large Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, and with the French and the British heavily committed in Indochina and Malaya respectively, NATO members recognized that the forces available in Europe were inadequate to counter Soviet forces.

There was growing pressure, particularly from the US, to allow Western Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany, [FRG]) to rearm and contribute to European defense, but there was opposition from France and Belgium to the reestablishment of independent German armed forces.

The French formulated a counterproposal in 1950 for the creation of a European Defense Community (EDC) and a European army, which would include German forces integrated in a supranational structure, sidestepping the issue of independent German forces. This culminated in the Treaty of Paris signed by France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy and the FRG at the end of May 1952.

This ambitious project envisaged an integrated army of 40 divisions assigned to NATO supreme command with a common budget, common arms and centralized procurement. The project eventually floundered when France got cold feet over the loss of sovereignty and suspended treaty ratification in August 1954. Italy had been waiting to see which way France would jump, and it also suspended ratification. As an aside, in April 2025, an Italian member of parliament introduced a bill to reconsider ratification. However, it is most unlikely that a resurrected EDC will be the instrument for enhancing European defense in the future.

In the wake of the collapse of the EDC, events moved quickly. In October 1954, the WU transitioned into the Western European Union (WEU). Italy and the FRG joined the five members of the WU, the allied occupation of the FRG was ended and the FRG was authorized to rearm.

In May 1955, the FRG joined NATO. In response, the Soviet Union created the Warsaw Pact (WP) for the Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe. Greece and Turkey had also joined NATO in 1952, and Spain joined in 1982, ending the Cold War expansion of NATO. A further development in European defense integration during this period was the creation of a joint Franco-German Brigade, around 6,000 strong, in 1989.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the WP in 1991, there was an expansion of both the EU and NATO, and in 1992, France and the newly reunified Germany founded the Eurocorps. The Eurocorps has steadily expanded with the addition of Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg and Poland as framework nations with Austria, Greece, Italy, Romania and Turkey as associate nations.

However, Eurocorps has no standing forces; it is a corps headquarters that can take under command European Battle Groups. The corps is assigned to both NATO and the EU. The WEU had been largely dormant during the Cold War; there were periodic attempts to revive it until it was finally dissolved in 2011, with its functions absorbed into the EU under the auspices of the European Security and Defense Identity.

### **The future of European defense**

There has been much talk over the years, often driven by the French, of the need for enhanced European defense and indeed a European army. A major stumbling block has been the opposition, by

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the US and the UK in particular, to the creation of parallel structures to those of NATO, seen as wasteful and divisive, and also a potential risk to continuing US commitment to the defense of the European continent.

A recent paper published by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies raises the issue again of a European army, proposing a supranational common EU force, an EU unified command headquarters integrated into the NATO command structure, development of integrated forces for such tasks as air-to-air refueling, air transport, intelligence and targeting, command and control, and an EU defense intelligence service. Overall control would be vested in the EU Council of Ministers.

The long-standing concerns over duplication of effort remain, and there are practical issues with many of the proposals. More importantly, there is a fundamental problem with all proposals for supranational armed forces — the elephant in the room, which effectively left the EDC still borne, the issue of national sovereignty. Within NATO, all nations delegate operational command but retain full command of their armed forces.

In other words, they keep the ultimate power concerning their commitment or not. No NATO or other multinational force commander will have full command over other national forces. This simply reflects the reality that nations will not cede sovereignty of their armed forces. This, in turn, is because armed forces are an instrument of foreign policy; foreign policy leads defense policy, and not the inverse. To paraphrase Karl von Clausewitz in *On War*, “War is the continuation of politics by other means.”

Although the EU has a foreign minister, or more correctly a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, foreign policy is not supranational and is subject to

decisions of the Council of Ministers. A general, all-embracing supranational foreign policy is difficult to envisage short of the creation of a federal European state — for example, France has worldwide interests with its overseas territories and legacy involvement in Africa, while its EU partners have diverse and narrower foreign policy interests.

Nevertheless, interest in a European army has ebbed and flowed with the perceived threat. When the Soviet threat disappeared and Russia seemed a potential partner, then one could abstractly talk of a European army.

France has been, and remains, a strong proponent of enhanced European defense, but it is not always clear what this means. Does this mean it should be centered on the EU or a broader view of Europe? EU-based defense has attractions for those committed to the evolution of the European project, but it has inherent problems — setting aside the US, it excludes three European NATO members, Norway, the UK and Turkey, and two peripheral members, Canada and Iceland. Excluding the UK would be foolhardy, and its integration in an EU structure impracticable post-Brexit.

Iceland, although it does not have armed forces, would be strategically important in the event of a major European war with its air base at Keflavik, vital for maritime air anti-submarine operations to counter Russian submarines penetrating the Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap to threaten trans-Atlantic maritime lines of communication.

Similarly, Norway and Turkey are in critical strategic positions on the European flanks — the latter controlling the Bosphorus and access to the Black Sea. Also, the presence of Austria, Malta and Ireland as neutral states within the EU does not sit easily with the development of an EU-wide military alliance.

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With the appreciation that a resurgent Russia poses a threat to Europe, reality has returned and NATO is once again, at least implicitly, seen as the vehicle for enhancing European defense. Nevertheless, the French position remains ambivalent. President Macron, in an interview with *The Economist* in 2019, said that “What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO,” with it having “lost its strategic focus.”

In March 2022 he said that “The war launched by President Putin brings a clarification, and creates at our borders and on our European soil an unusual threat which gives a strategic clarification to NATO ... Yet, I continue to think that we need to rebuild a new European order of security, that the war today in Ukraine makes it even more indispensable.” By March 2025 this had evolved to a statement that France was a “loyal and faithful” NATO ally.

It is possible that Macron would still prefer an alliance based on the EU, but to move in this direction would not only create expensive and unnecessary duplication but also fail to make use of many years of experience with NATO: command structures, joint operating procedures, standardisation, co-ordinated long-term defense planning, interoperability and command and control.

US predominance in command positions need not stand in the way of a greater European role in NATO, or indeed a NATO minus the US. If the US were to withdraw from NATO or not participate in a given operation in response to a crisis, the NATO command structure is sufficiently flexible to operate without US commanders — those commanders who are American all have non-US deputies and/or chiefs of staff.

Providing credible European defense with reduced reliance on the US requires commitment of adequate resources by European nations, and

their development and enhancement of those capabilities which are currently exclusively or predominantly provided by the US. European defense, in the broad sense, can best be served by the existing NATO framework.

[Casey Herrmann edited this piece]

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## **India Offers an Informative Lesson in How Not to Govern**

Amitabh Khanna  
September 24, 2025

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**India's economy was initially built on agriculture and industry, but after 1990, services became its main driver of growth. Government policies, unreliable data and weak**

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**institutions have weakened agriculture and industry, making services reliant on external demand. This imbalance leaves India at risk until governance and productivity improve.**

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**T**he economy of any country is calculated by measuring its GDP, which is broken down into agriculture, industry and service sectors. All over the world, especially in developed countries, there has been a natural progression of growing the economy by agriculture, then progressing onto industry and finally onto services. India also followed a similar trend until 1990, after which services became the backbone of the Indian economy, simultaneously leading to a sharp decline in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

When analyzing the data to determine the GDP, it is necessary to remember that the data provided by the government is unreliable due to the lack of third-party verification. Given its history, data is often fudged and manipulated to suit the government's purposes. The collection of data is based on outdated ideas, and the method of collection is also questionable. It is not forward-looking in its projections of trends.

A relevant example in today's economic discussions is the collection of taxes, which serves as a key indicator of an economy's health and strength. Taxes are essential for funding public services and infrastructure, and they reflect the contributions that businesses and individuals make to their government's revenue.

However, it's essential to consider the broader picture: if taxes were reduced, how would that affect economic growth? Understanding the relationship between tax rates and economic performance can provide valuable insights into whether such reductions might stimulate or hinder

overall economic growth. Such an approach is proactive and forward-looking compared to the parochial approach of looking backwards.

In terms of India's GDP figures, they present an illusion of steady growth, but they also conceal the decline of agriculture and industry alongside the distortions created by poor governance. The service sector has expanded, yet it remains reliant on fragile external factors rather than robust domestic foundations.

Without institutional reform and credible policymaking, India's economy will remain unbalanced, unequal and vulnerable to shocks. As it exists now, the Government of India serves as a lesson to the rest of the world on how not to run a country.

### **Agriculture: the struggling backbone**

The agricultural sector is the largest provider of employment, but its growth rate is the lowest and the smallest component in the Indian economy. The combination of low productivity rates and small farm sizes renders this sector unviable, making it also prone to heavy subsidization in input supply to farmers.

The use of high-yielding seed varieties often necessitates the application of pesticides and fertilizers. However, suppose crop failures occur due to poor monsoon conditions. In that case, this can lead to devastating consequences for farmers, including the tragic phenomenon of farmers' suicides, as they struggle to meet their financial obligations.

Additionally, the distribution of agricultural commodities through regulated markets tends to concentrate power within the distribution channels, rather than empowering the farmers themselves. Compounding these challenges are inadequate storage facilities in government godowns, which

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result in significant spoilage and wastage of valuable produce.

### **Industry: Decline, uncompetitiveness and regulation**

The industrial sector, on the other hand, is the largest contributor to the government's revenue. However, its contribution to India's GDP has fallen from 27.3% in 2000 to just over 12.5% in 2024. Some sectors, such as calcium carbide, have closed down entirely due to cheaper imports, and many industries, such as soda ash, have been outsourced overseas. This is due to very low import duties, as foreign companies tend to export rather than “Make in India,” which has led large Indian companies to expand overseas instead of within India.

For example, the significant overseas expansion of Indian conglomerates, such as the Tata Group and the Aditya Birla Group, in the early 2000s lends credence to the notion that the industrial climate overseas is better than in India. This has led to the outsourcing of manufacturing overseas, resulting in job losses in India and, consequently, a lack of growth in other allied sectors due to the multiplier effect (the proportional change in income that results from a change in spending).

Indian industry has also become uncompetitive due to high costs of inputs such as power, furnace oil, interest and transportation, which government companies supply. Moreover, the excessive taxation, much of which can't be set off under the Goods and Services Tax (GST), adds to the costs of production.

Even when exports are involved, prices of products are pushed up by extortionate taxes, making them even more uncompetitive in global markets. In the fiscal year 2024–25, India's trade manufacturing deficit reached a staggering \$190 billion, marking a record increase year-over-year.

Notably, the deficit with China alone exceeded \$100 billion.

Additionally, the industrial sector is heavily regulated through various acts such as the Factory Act (1948), Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act (1981) and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020), which were intended to encourage industry to adopt good practices. Instead, they have led to an overconcentration of power in the hands of government bodies. A more cost-effective approach would be for international bodies to assume the roles currently held by various state and central government organizations.

The export promotion scheme is developed in isolation from exporters, resulting in no impact on exports. The indiscriminate signing of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) has also led to increased imports into India, as import duties are significantly below those set by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Very few of these manufacturing companies are competitive internationally, despite having a high valuation in the Indian stock market, which reflects the difficulty in manufacturing rather than being internationally competitive.

### **Services: growth without support**

The services sector has experienced sharp growth since the 1990s, thanks to India's low labor costs and limited government interference. The openness of foreign countries and companies to outsourcing services to India has led to a significant economic boom in the country. This is due to external reasons — such as natural arbitrage, like water flows from a higher level to a lower level — and not government encouragement.

However, other services, such as tourism, are still very insignificant. The lack of tourists is attributed to poor infrastructure and high hotel and

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facility costs, resulting in significantly less tourism compared to similar countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The data given by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) only reflects the data provided by the government of India, which is suspect. Hence, the full report prepared by the international bodies does not reflect the reality in India. The poverty in India is largely a result of poor governance rather than a lack of resources.

Indians who go overseas tend to do very well, as the environment provides them with opportunities to flourish and develop their talents, creating a win-win situation for both the individual and the host country. In India, the economy is a complete mess, with politicians and bureaucrats working at cross-purposes. Laws and regulations may appear good on paper, but are counterproductive in reality. It is an open secret that red tape has been killing the economy right since independence in 1947.

### **Governance, policies and institutional weakness**

It is no wonder that joblessness and poverty compel Indians to seek employment overseas and also lead to corruption from the bottom up. It appears as if there is a constant tussle between the state and its citizens, resembling an unwritten civil war within the country.

Finance budgets are essentially taxation budgets designed to extract taxes from the public rather than stimulate economic growth. Moreover, the various policies framed, such as the National Manufacturing Policy (2011) and the National Education Policy (2020), are general documents that lack actionable points and are never implemented. Even the Union Budget and export-import policy (EXIM), the two major documents announced by the Government of India, apply to

only a small percentage of citizens and are more bureaucratic, yielding no meaningful results.

Some of the policies framed by the government appear to exist only on paper, with little resemblance to reality. For example, the National Manufacturing Policy was overly general and lacked specifics, resulting in no tangible outcomes. The aviation policy clearly states that if the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) lacks the expertise to assess an aircraft's worthiness, it will request that the Indian airline company pay for an overseas inspection. Upon return, the DGCA will certify the aircraft. The DGCA's potential inability to assess its own aircrafts — to the point that it must be implemented into policy — shows that it lacks the necessary expertise and funds from collected taxes to develop and train its employees.

The New Education Policy states that children must study in their mother tongue up to the fifth standard. This means that if a school has students from ten different states, it should have teachers qualified in ten different mother tongues to support the students, which would imply that there could be only one student per class. This would make working for schools impractical.

The best policy document I have seen was published by Niti Aayog in September 2018, outlining actions to be taken across all sectors. It is an excellent document titled Strategy for New India @ 75. However, it has remained on the shelf gathering dust.

Another failed policy is the Electricity Act of 2003, which allowed private users to trade electricity. Despite the good intention of this policy, it has failed miserably as the high charges levied by State Electricity Boards for using their infrastructure have made the sale of electricity by private generators unviable. Moreover, the exchange of electricity is not practical and is very

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short-term in nature, with an emphasis on regulation rather than encouraging the sale and purchase of electricity.

Other examples include legal cases that remain unresolved for 30 years and the difficulty in registering a First Information Report (FIR) at the police station. This illustrates how not only ordinary people but also influential individuals are unable to exercise their rights under the Constitution.

### **Governance as the key to progress**

Our colonial counterparts — the British — have moved on and developed great institutions in their country, functioning as a real democracy. In contrast, in former colonized countries, including India, we continue to follow their old habits, leading to the feeling that the colonizers never left.

India is its own worst enemy and will remain so until there is a change in the productivity of the twin engines of the economy, i.e., agriculture and industry, which currently remain at abysmally low levels. Even after 75 years of independence, the attitude remains unchanged. Our great philosophy, which preaches values and abundance, has not had any impact.

This is India, an unmitigated anarchy, that serves as a lesson on how not to run a country by illustrating the consequences of poor governance. Other countries should take lessons from India. They will learn how to properly run their government by knowing what not to do first.

Adam Smith's theory of comparative advantage has given way to good governance being the key criterion for a country's progress. Japan and South Korea are outstanding examples of progress because of good governance. India and Indonesia

have considerable natural resources but remain poor because of bad governance.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



**Amitabh Khanna** is an economist who chooses to use a pen name in a country where the nail that sticks out gets hammered down. He loves manufacturing, business and economic policy. Amitabh also has a love for old Hindi music and good food. He hopes that India will one day be a better place to do business. In the meantime, Amitabh shines the light on issues that matter nationally and globally.

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## **Resilient Liberalism: Reimagining Freedom in an Age of Disruption**

Maciej Bazela  
September 25, 2025

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**The liberal international order faces decline amid authoritarianism, ecological crisis and social fragmentation. Resilient liberalism advocates adaptable continuity, emphasizing individual freedoms, minimal state interference and humility about past errors. It must embrace resilience, adaptability and ethical self-government to endure and thrive amid global uncertainty.**

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**T**he world stands at a historic crossroads. The 2020s have accelerated the decline of the liberal international order and challenged the Enlightenment ideals that shaped modern democratic capitalism. Across the political spectrum, from left-wing neo-Marxists to right-wing neofascists, procedural democracy is exploited to entrench authoritarian regimes. The scale of ecological breakdown demands radical solutions that go beyond conventional business logic centered on individual preferences and traditional public policies based on taxation and regulation.

Technological advances threaten economic concentration and social fragmentation, while demographic decline and rising nationalism expose weaknesses in liberal ideas about family, identity and cultural cohesion. Geopolitical tensions reveal the limits of relying solely on economic interdependence to secure peace. In short, liberalism appears exhausted and ineffective.

Nonetheless, this deep crisis, including outright rejection of liberalism, calls for reinvention rather than nostalgia or abandonment. What is needed is resilient liberalism: a form of liberalism that learns from disruption without forsaking its core principles. It is a call to reaffirm the essence of liberalism, the primacy of the individual over the state, prepolitical personal freedoms, inherent human dignity, minimal state coercion and interference and social pluralism.

### **Diagnosing the disruption**

Liberal democracies now operate under conditions similar to those before the establishment of the post-World War II order. The resurgence of great-power rivalry has undermined the liberal ideals of economic convergence and political consensus. International law and organizations tasked with enforcing it have lost their legitimacy and effectiveness. Many states either disregard them or

abandon international treaties to pursue undemocratic and violent actions.

On the domestic level, citizens, residents and migrants face Kafkaesque bureaucratic machines and invasive systems of control and surveillance. In many countries, the public sector has evolved into a rent-seeking Leviathan that demands citizens' compliance, even when the state fails to fulfil its basic functions, let alone provide any meaningful value to its citizens and residents. Moreover, states do not hesitate to employ extrajudicial methods against their citizens and foreigners to further their interests.

The private sector persists in using legal opacity, procedural absurdities, aggressive lobbying, questionable psychological tactics and even outright lies to pursue short-term profits and unsustainable consumption patterns.

In the increasingly dysfunctional world of disruption, individuals and families have become pawns of extractive states and powerful corporations. These trends are not temporary shocks; they are structural changes in a world that is regressing towards an antiliberal and antiindividual reality rooted in the "might-make-right" principle, regardless of how irrational or exploitative it is. In this context, liberalism must either adapt or become a historical footnote.

### **Resilient liberalism: a new framework**

Resilient liberalism is a theory of adaptable continuity. It explores how liberal values can be maintained within current, nonliberal conditions through new forms of leadership, governance and personal behavior. Resilient liberalism proposes five types of normative resilience as essential to defending human freedom in a world of disruption, that each person possesses inherent dignity and pre-political freedoms.



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That freedom is about being able to live a life one wants without undue interference from the state and society. The exercise of freedom requires strong personal ethics and civic virtues that allow for responsible self-government. The ability to live a life of your own with minimal external interference implies social pluralism.

The principal function of the government is to protect the prepolitical natural freedoms of citizens, assuming the role of a “night watchman” rather than a tyrannical overlord. That power must be constrained and decentralized to favor individual freedom and self-government in politics, the economy and social life.

Liberalism should not be seen only as a set of procedures within modern political life. Instead, it starts by recognizing that liberty exists before politics and is based on natural law and the inherent worth of each person. Liberalism supports personal freedom and self-governance even during difficult times like authoritarian rule, political surveillance or ecological challenges to the economy. It also benefits from being humble about its own limits, history and mistakes. This openness can help liberalism adapt and stay strong in a fast-changing world. For example, by admitting past problems such as too much focus on individualism, uncontrolled consumption and blind trust in markets, liberalism can find ways to renew itself.

— Political resilience requires a change in how we design political institutions and educate citizens. Governance systems must recognize their limited capacity and therefore curb technocratic overreach. Liberalism releases the government from the utopian dreams of all-encompassing surveillance, regulation and management. It advocates for more modest solutions based on subsidiarity, decentralization and responsible exercise of ordered liberty. These principles enable governments to act ethically and adaptively at

scale. Building on the epistemic humility of liberalism, political institutions become more resilient because they are open to ongoing reform, innovation and self-correction, while remaining limited in their size and scope.

— A new cultural liberalism must accompany new political liberalism. Cultural liberal resilience involves revitalising the liberal imagination, not as consumer individualism, but as a shared civic ethos capable of resisting both nihilism and technocratic inertia. Liberalism is not a dogma, but an open-ended tradition rooted in the primacy of the individual over the state, ordered liberty and civic responsibility.

— Geopolitically, it champions international cooperation as essential to addressing global shocks without descending into authoritarian nationalism. As demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, and other domestic and international conflicts, the less international cooperation there is, the more fragile the global system becomes.

### **A new page**

Disruption is no passing storm but a defining chapter, challenging public and private life’s assumptions. Liberalism will endure only if reimagined through resilience, embracing imperfection while resisting authoritarian allure or despair’s paralysis. We must recommit to freedom grounded in humility, adaptability and ethical self-government: a resilient liberalism capable of thriving amid uncertainty rather than fading into history’s footnotes.

[Tara Yarwais edited this piece.]

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## Threats Against Christian Communities Grow as Conflict Deepens

Fernando Carvajal  
September 28, 2025

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**Despite losing power six years ago, Former Sudan President Omar al-Bashir's Islamist leanings influence the ongoing religious persecution of Christians and other faith minorities. While General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan swears to endorse such freedom, the evidence remains unclear. There is no easy solution for this conflict; those affected can only pray for peace to come as soon as possible.**

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**I**slamist dictator Omar al-Bashir, who became President of Sudan six years into his country's second civil war, has long been attributed to what religious persecution ideologies prevailed

among the Sudanese people before and since he was overthrown in 2019. General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), who also serves as Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council President, likewise seemed to hold increasing support for Islamist-leaning policies, as Bashir did when he became the de facto head of state in 2021.

Although Sharia law, an Islamic religious doctrine that outlines divinely ordained ethics for practicing Muslims, advocates for circumstantial Christian rights, some extremist groups understand it as justifying continued mistreatment. Therefore, while the SAF's present conflict with Commander Mohamed "Hemedti" Hamdan Dagalo and his Rapid Support Forces (RSF) cannot be entirely blamed for the evident abuses of religious minorities, Al-Burhan's ignorance around why over 150 churches have been attacked following the start of Sudan's third civil war in April 2023 does warrant skepticism. Considering their nation has a population of around 50 million people, 5% of which identify as Christian, implies this violent pattern may be more than coincidental.

### Escalating violence and the erosion of religious freedom

The July 8 attack on the Pentecostal church in Khartoum's El-Haj Yousif district illustrated how vulnerable Christians have become. Witnesses reported vehicles belonging to SAF and police were present, allowing extremists to act with impunity. Since 2023, churches have been bombed in Khartoum and Bahri, airstrikes have killed worshippers in Wad Madani and mobs have harassed communities in Shamaliya. Clerics warn that Christians are increasingly forced into secret gatherings, as the collapse of constitutional protections has reversed progress in religious freedom achieved after Bashir's removal.

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The deterioration of religious rights is inseparable from the strengthening of Islamist militias allied with the SAF. Groups such as the Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade and the Sudan Shield Forces (SSF) openly reject peace efforts and embrace jihadist rhetoric. The Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade, now estimated at 20,000 fighters, has integrated itself within SAF ranks while carrying out attacks on civilians, churches and even an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) convoy.

Its leaders — many tied to the dissolved National Congress Party and Muslim Brotherhood networks — embody the return of Bashir-era Islamists under Burhan's watch. Across contested areas like the Nuba Mountains, reports describe girls being raped, boys abducted to be trained as fighters and villages terrorized for their Christian identity.

International organizations have warned that these attacks not only threaten Sudanese minorities but also obstruct peace negotiations. Both ACT Alliance and Caritas Internationalis stress that global aid cuts and unchecked impunity are pushing Sudan further from reconciliation. The bishops of Sudan and South Sudan have likewise called for the primacy of human life, restraint and dialogue, though their pleas remain unanswered.

In fact, the Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade, known for similar terrorist activity since the third Sudanese civil war began, is rumored to contain former members from now-dissolved al-Bashir loyalist organizations like the Popular Defence Forces and National Congress Party, respectively. Should these articulation politics go on appeased, so too will rage a slow battle for Sudan's religious freedom. These issues have no simple solution; all we can do is pray for peace to find all parties as soon as possible. Hopefully, someone will hear our cry.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]

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**Fernando Carvajal** served on the UN Security Council Panel of Experts on Yemen from April 2017 to March 2019 as a regions and armed groups expert. He has nearly 20 years of experience conducting fieldwork in Yemen and is a specialist in Yemeni politics and tribal relations.

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## China and Its Mentor, Singapore

Alfredo Toro Hardy  
September 29, 2025

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**China's rapid transformation owes much to former leader Deng Xiaoping's reforms, which were deeply inspired by Singapore's model of state-led development under Lee Kuan Yew. By blending strategic planning, foreign investment and Confucian cultural values, China replicated Singapore's success on a massive scale. The result is a global economic powerhouse which has been described as a "giant Singapore."**

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**M**uch has been written about China's current economic hurdles and rigidities. However, the big picture must always be kept in mind. This means remembering that in just a few decades, the country passed from being an "iron rice bowl" economy (a metaphor for the State guaranteeing its citizens a modest but protected life from cradle to grave), to becoming a highly dynamic one.

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Indeed, China has rapidly transformed from being a stagnant and backward economy to becoming the second-largest economy in the world, lifting around 700 million people out of poverty in the process.

### **From an iron rice bowl economy to the anteroom of economic supremacy**

Actually, since 2014, China has overtaken the United States' GDP measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). This year, it reached 19.68% of the global GDP by PPP share versus the US' 14.75%. Moreover, by 2036, China could surpass the US' GDP in absolute terms, thus becoming the world's largest economy.

China's southern city of Shenzhen exemplifies well the magnitude of the changes brought over in these last few decades: A small city of 20,000 inhabitants in 1979, it is now a booming metropolis with more than 18 million people.

As American economist Joseph Stiglitz wrote in relation to China's economic path: "A decade of unparalleled American influence over the global economy was also a decade in which one economic crisis seemed to follow another ... Meanwhile, China, following its own course, showed there was an alternative path of transition [away from closed economies] which could succeed both in bringing the growth that the market promised and markedly reducing poverty".

Deng Xiaoping was the father of China's alternative path. He served as the country's paramount leader between 1978 and 1989, leading it through a process of economic reform and opening up. This process was not only gradual but also strategically planned to promote specific sectors and activities through selective policies. Paradoxically, this gradualness was accompanied by an incredible velocity.

After retirement, Deng retained substantial shadow powers, temporarily reemerging from the penumbra in his iconic 1992 Southern Tour, where he defended and saved economic reforms from their domestic critics.

### **Lee Kuan Yew: the godfather of China's economic miracle**

What is less well known, however, is that Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, was the godfather of China's economic reform and opening-up process. Singapore's own success, indeed, preceded and inspired the Chinese model.

As part of his response to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, Deng visited Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore at the end of that year. His trip to Singapore, however, was a very special one as it turned out to be an eye-opener on what fellow Chinese were able to attain.

Upon Deng's return to China, he called on his government to learn from the Singaporean experience: "Singapore enjoys good social order and is well managed ... We should tap their experience and learn how to make things better than we do."

Indeed, they drew on the Singaporean experience. Numerous Chinese delegations visited the city-state to learn how things were done there. Moreover, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, was invited to serve as economic advisor on China's coastal development.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park was established in Suzhou, China. It aimed to develop a modern industrial township that followed Singapore's management methods and which could serve as a teaching ground for Chinese authorities. The

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China-Singapore Industrial Park was followed by another one in Wixi in 1995.

According to American sociologist of East Asia Ezra Vogel, a “special relationship” took shape between Deng and Lee, two “straightforward realists” with similar strategic minds, who met on several occasions. Deng became an admirer of Lee’s capacity to grasp long-term trends and deal with practical issues in an extraordinarily successful manner. Following Lee’s example, Deng’s dream became none other than to “plant a thousand Singapores in China”.

### **What was Singapore’s recipe?**

What was Singapore’s recipe that Deng wanted to copy? In Henri Ghesquiere’s terms: “In Singapore, the State and not the private sector, has been the driver of development. The invisible hand that serves the common good through self-interest is guided by the strong visible arm of the government”. In other words, the State not only assumed a direct entrepreneurial role through public enterprises, but acted as the agenda-setter for the private sector.

While being highly open to foreign investments, a meritocratic State directed these investments according to strategic and carefully planned industrial policies. Foreign capital not only served to develop and finance strategically defined objectives, but also to locally provide a know-how spill-over. The State planned sets of quantifiable targets to be reached at future points in time, carefully monitoring its results to ascertain whether public policies were on track or if tactical modifications were needed.

Moreover, a continuous process of reinvention took place amid the periodic renewal of strategic aims. From oil refining to petrochemicals, from ports to financial services, from offshore drilling equipment manufacturing to biotechnology and

from research and development (R&D) to high-end services, Singapore’s independent history can be traced through its stages of periodical reinvention. The result was higher-value-added activities, densely clustered in a network of world-class hubs.

Following a long-term perspective and a pragmatic problem-solving attitude, Singapore attained the world’s third-largest GDP per capita on a PPP basis in 2012: \$59,711. It is worth adding that in 2024, Singapore attained the number one global position in GDP per capita in PPP terms with \$132,570, while its GDP per capita in absolute terms reached \$90,674.

### **Small is beautiful**

Singapore’s success bears few comparisons. At the height of globalization, it was argued that small was beautiful, as small countries could enjoy the speed of movement, flexibility of maneuver and incentives to look for outside markets. Not surprisingly, of the world’s ten richest countries in GDP per capita terms in 2003, only two had populations that surpassed 5 million inhabitants: the United States and Switzerland.

Under that logic, it was perfectly understandable that an island country with a land area of approximately 283 square miles, which in 2003 had an estimated population of 4,253,000, could be so successful.

But then, what about China? A country of 1.3 billion inhabitants and a continental size comparable to that of the US, whose GDP was just 9% of America’s at the inception of its reform and opening-up process, did not fit at all under such reasoning.

China, however, was able to demonstrate a speed and flexibility that seemed inconceivable for a country of its size. If size is tantamount to

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heaviness, how then can we explain China's lightness of movement?

### **The answer to an apparent contradiction**

The fact is, however, that Deng's dream to "plant a thousand Singapores" in China's soil was fully accomplished. Perhaps the answer to this apparent contradiction could be found in a combination of the economic model applied and the cultural traits of the population involved. A model that China copied from Singapore, and a Han population that both countries share.

The economic model in itself is key. Not only was former Chinese leader Mao Zedong's economic experience chaotic, but China's economic results during the so-called "Century of Humiliation", which preceded the emergence of the People's Republic, were horrific. Since Deng Xiaoping, everything has changed dramatically.

The process that Deng put in motion followed the Singapore model, but on a gigantic scale. It was not only gradual, but strategically planned to successively promote specific regions, industries and activities. A first step in industrial policies was taken in relation to the Town and Villages Enterprises (market-oriented public enterprises managed by local governments in townships and villages in China), which received access to low-interest credits, tax holidays and special allocation in the budget.

In the early 1990s, priority was given to investments in energy, basic materials and related infrastructure. In the mid-1990s, policy was focused on capital-intensive/economy-of-scale "pillar industries", such as machines, electronics and petrochemicals. In the mid-2000s, software, integrated circuits and autos became the priority. And so on, and so forward.

Within clearly defined strategic goals, the model allowed for a pragmatic tactical room of maneuver, leaving space to correct undesirable effects or react to changing circumstances. It was a process of progressive stages and periodic adjustments, in which transitional policies acted as bridges from one stage to the next.

However, in addition to the nature of the model itself, both China and Singapore share a predominantly Han Chinese population. They represent 92% of the People's Republic of China's total population, and 76% of Singapore's. Hence, both countries share the same prevailing cultural trait: Confucianism.

Referring to it, world-famous futurist Herman Kahn predicted in 1979 that "the Confucian ethic — the creation of dedicated, motivated, responsible, and educated individuals and the enhanced sense of commitment, organizational identity, and loyalty to various institutions — will result in all the neo-Confucian societies having potentially higher growth rates than other cultures".

In 1980, world-famous Harvard's China expert Roderick MacFarquhar said: "That ideology [Confucianism] is as important to the rise of the East Asian hyper-growth economies as the conjunction of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism in the West".

Hence, the nature of the economic model put in motion by Deng Xiaoping following Lee Kuan Yew's steps, and the country's Confucian cultural traits, seem to explain China's extraordinary economic success. Not gratuitously, hence, Niall Ferguson has called China "a giant Singapore".

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece.]



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