

Fair Observer

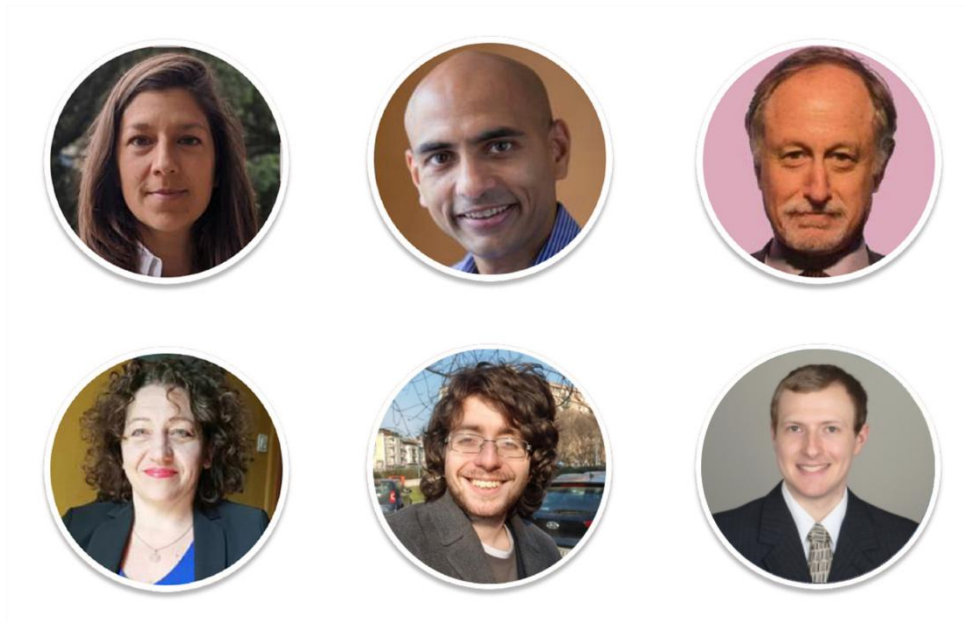
Monthly



June 2025

Fair Observer
Independence, Diversity, Debate

Fair Observer Monthly



June 2025

Fair Observer | 237 Hamilton Ave | Mountain View | CA 94043 | USA
www.fairobservers.com | info@fairobservers.com

The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect Fair Observer's editorial policy.

Copyright © 2025 Fair Observer

Photo Credit: Solar Studio / shutterstock.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or any other — except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

CONTENTS

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER	5
SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE	6
China Turns Tariff War Into Strategic Opportunity Against United States Jiahao Yuan	7
Making of a Dictator: What the PKK's Surrender Means for Turkey Tara Yarwais	9
Tremors of Change: Myanmar Quake Temporarily Unites Divided Nations Asanga Abeyagoonasekera	12
From Paramilitary to Powerbroker: The High Cost of Legalizing the PMF in Iraq Shermeen Yousif	14
America Misread China's History and Helped Build Its Global Power Alfredo Toro Hardy	16
"The Scars Are on My Body and Mind, Forever": Survivors Onboard Ocean Viking Share Their Stories Fellipe Lopes	18
Donald Trump Damages India-US Ties by Misjudging Pakistan's Terror Strategy Kanwal Sibal, Vikram Sood	20
The Last Hegelian? Former Uruguayan President José Mujica Passes Away Christopher Wylde	23
Germans in Romania: A Story of Survival and Remigration Andrea Geistanger	25
My Memories of the Emergency: The Darkest Period in Independent India's History Vikram K. Malkani	29
The Faces of American Oligarchy Usama Malik	35
Bridging the Divide: Inflation Expectations, Consumer Sentiment and the Fed's Challenge Masaaki Yoshimori	38

Karol Nawrocki Becomes President in a Divided Poland	42
Mikołaj Tomasz Słowański	
Tensions Break Out Across Syria As Promising Honeymoon Wanes	44
Fernando Carvajal	
Law and Order Has Utterly Collapsed in the UK	46
Amit Singh	
“Isms” Have Hijacked Economics. It Needs Fresh, Creative Thinking Now.	49
Atul Singh	

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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

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

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

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.

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Join our network of 2,500+ contributors to publish your perspective, share your story and shape the global conversation. Become a Fair Observer and help us make sense of the world.

Remember, we are a digital media platform and welcome content in all forms: articles, podcasts, video, vlogs, photo essays, infographics and interactive features. We work closely with our contributors, provide feedback and enable them to achieve their potential. Think of us as a community that believes in diversity and debate.

We have a reputation for being thoughtful and insightful. The US Library of Congress recognizes us as a journal with ISSN 2372-9112, and publishing with us puts you in a select circle.

For further information, please visit www.fairobservers.com/publish or contact us at submissions@fairobservers.com

China Turns Tariff War Into Strategic Opportunity Against United States

Jiahao Yuan
June 05, 2025

US President Donald Trump raised tariffs on Chinese goods to cut the US trade deficit and push firms to leave China. In response, China has shifted its imports, tightened control of key resources and deepened ties with other countries. Beijing now holds stronger cards in a world that is moving away from US-led supply chains.

As a Chinese economist, I generally do not comment on other countries' internal affairs, especially political ones. However, from an economic perspective, the tariff war initiated by US President Donald Trump is truly unbelievable. Although China and the US reached a preliminary agreement and reduced tariffs during negotiations in Switzerland in May, it is unrealistic to think that the tariff war will cease. The two sides have reduced tariffs on the surface, but the strategic goals of both remain unmet, especially for the US. In the medium to long term, disputes and conflicts in trade are likely to continue until the US midterm elections next year. Therefore, we must examine the logic of the tariff war and its impact on both countries.

One of the most ridiculous measures came from White House trade adviser Peter Navarro, who proposed taking the US trade deficit as the numerator, dividing it by the total bilateral trade volume, and using the result as the tariff rate. This

calculation ignores basic economic principles and appears in no reputable economics textbook.

China holds the bargaining chips

Objectively, Trump's shocking tariff rates made it rational and correct for Chinese President Xi Jinping not to call him. Xi knew exactly what such a call would produce.

First, China currently holds a little less than \$800 billion in US Treasury bonds. Trump could demand that China convert these into 100-year, interest-free bonds. He might also demand a sharp devaluation of the renminbi and ask China to adopt policies supporting the dollar's global dominance.

Both of these demands are unacceptable. In response, China began strategic preparations to counter the US tariff policy. For example, China cut oil imports from the US and turned to Canada. It began importing beef from Brazil, soybeans from Argentina and pork from Spain. In other words, it replaced US goods with those from other countries.

China's most powerful strategic tool may be its rare earth export controls. The global supply tension in rare earths arises not from scarcity but from refining technology. China possesses the most advanced rare earth refining technology and holds at least 90% of global patents. Other countries cannot build a complete rare earth supply chain quickly. It would take at least ten years and hundreds of billions of dollars to develop. Therefore, China's restrictions could inflict severe losses on major American industries. For example, each F-35 fighter jet requires at least 920 pounds of rare earths.

Columbia University economics professor Jeffrey Sachs argues that, as a real estate developer, Trump lacks an understanding of trade. After he announced the tariff war, global stock

markets lost \$10 trillion in value in just two days. If tariffs really benefited the US as Trump claimed, the stock market should have surged. Instead, in April, following the announcement, stock markets around the world fell sharply.

Trump fails to understand that trade must benefit both sides. His policy splits the world into two camps: the US and everyone else. His tariff policy puts the US at odds with the global economy.

Another negative result appeared in late April. Investors sold approximately \$200 billion in US Treasury bonds globally. Japan led with \$30 billion, followed by the UK with \$18 billion. Other countries accounted for the remainder. China likely sold bonds too, although it did not release data. If this trend continues, US asset prices will fall, and the US economy may slow significantly.

The largest holders of US Treasury bonds are not foreign governments but US financial institutions like securities firms, mutual funds and commercial banks. If their asset values collapse, US stock markets will fall further. This pressure led Trump to suspend new reciprocal tariffs for 90 days in late April. On May 25, he extended tariff negotiations with the EU until July 9, signaling a more passive stance.

Totalitarian systems respond differently to crises

Trump's tariff policy sparked protests across the US. Dozens of leading economists, including Nobel laureates, wrote to the government demanding an end to the policy. Some state governments, including California, sued the Trump administration. US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, adviser Elon Musk and many members of Congress criticized the tariffs. Trump faced growing internal and external pressure. If this continues, Republican losses in the midterm elections could be significant. Many party

members hope the Supreme Court will declare the policy illegal.

Unlike the US, China is not bound by democratic constraints. Xi does not face elections. China can afford to wait, but Trump cannot.

Trump also made undiplomatic remarks, saying, "I am telling you, these countries are calling us up, kissing my ass." This damaged the US's global reputation and pushed other countries closer to China, which now appears as the defender of global trade norms.

A Chinese proverb says, "It is easy to go from frugality to luxury, but hard to go from luxury to frugality." If bottled water rises from \$1 to \$2, Americans may protest. But if a Chinese worker's income drops from \$800 to \$400 per month, they are more likely to support the government. Chinese people have endured hardship for 70 years and are used to it. Americans, by contrast, depend on cheap Chinese goods. Sudden price hikes from switching to European products may prove unacceptable. China's political system can absorb more domestic hardship.

The tariff war benefits China in key ways

The US wants to decouple from China by rebuilding a global industrial system without it. China, which once occupied the low end of the global value chain, has moved up and challenged US dominance. Trump wants developing countries like Vietnam or India to replace China. Foreign companies such as Apple have begun moving production. But this process takes time.

Trump's sweeping tariffs triggered rapid decoupling. Other countries still depend on China's supply chain, so China gained leverage in negotiations. Meanwhile, the US risks hyperinflation as its supply chain suffers. Political

pressure on the Trump administration rises as a result.

For years, China exported goods to the US in exchange for dollars. But it could not use those dollars to buy what it needed, such as high-tech products. Now, China pays for oil in renminbi and settles trade with Russia in local currency. Holding large amounts of dollars no longer benefits China. The US external debt has reached \$36 trillion. Trump even proposed 100-year interest-free bonds. China no longer wants to buy US Treasury bonds.

Some argue that holding dollars allows China to trade globally. But China is internationalizing the renminbi through bilateral swap agreements. These often include fixed-value anchors like the price of oil. If a foreign currency depreciates, the agreement adjusts automatically to preserve purchasing power.

China also lends renminbi to other countries, especially in Africa, often in exchange for natural resource collateral. Those countries then use the renminbi to buy Chinese goods. For this system to work, the renminbi must remain stable. But China must not overexploit trading partners or provoke tariffs in return.

In this context, Trump's tariffs have promoted Chinese trade with other countries. Anti-American sentiment around the world helps China attract foreign investment. China also lowers its own market access barriers. For example, the Spanish prime minister recently visited China and signed a large pork export deal. At the same time, Chinese battery giant Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Limited (CATL) announced a major investment in a factory in Spain.

The tariff war also reduces China's fear of US sanctions if it takes military action against Taiwan. If China chooses to decouple fully, it has less to

lose from tariff penalties. From a geopolitical perspective, this gives Beijing more room to act.

The US has historically helped China's ruling Communist Party during times of crisis. President Harry Truman sanctioned the Kuomintang and indirectly aided Mao Zedong. President Jimmy Carter broke relations with Taiwan and welcomed Deng Xiaoping. President Barack Obama sent Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to China in 2012, facilitating Xi's rise.

Whether Trump, as a Republican, will once again help the Communist Party survive is worth watching.



Jiahao Yuan is a Chinese economist who has been engaged in China's foreign economic cooperation, the "Belt and Road" strategy and international affairs for 20 years. His research interests are mainly focused on macroeconomics and development economics. Jiahao has rich experience in international affairs, especially in China's foreign economic cooperation and development strategy. He has elected to write under a pseudonym.

Making of a Dictator: What the PKK's Surrender Means for Turkey

Tara Yarwais
June 08, 2025

On March 1, the insurgent Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) unilaterally announced that it was laying down arms against the Turkish government. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who hopes to capitalize on Kurdish votes in the May 2028 general elections, cynically welcomed the move.

On March 1, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) announced a ceasefire and laid down arms against the Turkish government. Given the long history of broken ceasefires and failed peace talks, this development feels familiar.

To understand today's situation, one must examine the historical context of the conflict. The PKK was founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan, who still leads the party from prison. Many consider the PKK a "militant Marxist-Leninist" terrorist group. However, a significant segment of the Kurdish population sees Öcalan as a morally gray figure and one of the few who has fought for the freedom of Kurdistan.

The PKK's roots in both Turkey and Syria

The PKK's struggle extends beyond Turkey. In 1962, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad stripped 120,000 Kurds of their citizenship, disenfranchising them and barring their participation in elections. The Syrian government implemented the Arab Belt policy, a program in the 1970s that resettled Arab populations into historically Kurdish regions along the Turkish border, displacing thousands of Kurds and undermining their regional influence.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the PKK launched a military campaign against the Turkish government and rival Kurdish groups like the

Village Guards. In 1985, Öcalan fled to Syria, where the PKK built military camps with Syrian support. The group's increasingly militant tactics led the US to designate it a terrorist organization in 1997. Turkey had already labeled the PKK a terrorist group, despite its domestic roots. In 1995, the US Congress withheld military aid to Turkey due to reports of human rights abuses, escalating tensions further.

In 1998, Turkey and Syria signed the Adana Protocol, ending Syrian support for the PKK and shutting down its camps. Following this, Öcalan fled.

Authorities first detained Öcalan in Italy for entering the country on a false passport and due to a German arrest warrant. Turkey tried to extradite him via Germany, but Italy refused. Germany declined to press the issue, fearing retaliation from PKK sympathizers after Italian Kurds protested in Rome. Öcalan stayed in Athens, against the wishes of the Greek government. He then sought asylum from multiple countries, the EU, the Hague, and the International Criminal Court, all unsuccessfully. Greece sent him to Nairobi, Kenya, where he stayed at the Greek Embassy. Fourteen days later, Turkish intelligence arrested him as he attempted to fly to the Netherlands.

Southeastern Turkey remained under emergency rule until 2002. In 2004, the election of pro-Kurdish democratic parties offered new hope. Öcalan attempted to negotiate a ceasefire during this period, but mistrust led to repeated failures. The PKK declared a ceasefire in 2004, only to break it in 2005. Subsequent peace attempts from 2009 to 2011 and 2012 to 2015 followed similar patterns.

The Turkish government inadvertently made Öcalan an even bigger Kurdish star by forcing him back into Turkey and charging him with treason and separatism. Additionally, according to the

European Court of Human Rights, Turkey did not allow him to have a fair trial. Öcalan has been in jail ever since, and some of that time has been in complete isolation.

Erdoğan hopes to capitalize on the PKK's unilateral ceasefire to gain Kurdish support

This brings us to the present day. Nearly fifty years into the conflict, with Öcalan still imprisoned and his influence enduring through various Kurdish political parties, the dynamics remain precarious. The current ceasefire is overshadowed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's authoritarian grasp on power. Since becoming president in 2014, following his tenure as prime minister beginning in 2002, Erdoğan has transformed Turkey's parliamentary system into an executive presidency, consolidating authority in ways that have raised concerns of dictatorial rule.

Now, as he faces the potential end of his political tenure, Erdoğan is pursuing constitutional changes that would allow him to remain in power. To succeed, he needs more parliamentary support than he currently commands—particularly from Kurdish constituencies. In this context, the PKK's decision to lay down arms may inadvertently bolster Erdoğan's efforts to secure the votes necessary for extending his rule. The ceasefire could therefore shift power dynamics in Erdoğan's favor, reinforcing rather than restraining his ongoing drive to consolidate authority.

This shift inadvertently strengthens Erdoğan's hand by creating a vacuum in Kurdish representation, possibly deepening his authoritarian control. By dissolving its armed struggle, the PKK risks relinquishing vital leverage against a regime that has shown little interest in genuine peace or democratic governance. If the PKK's transitional phase is perceived as a sign of weakness, it may embolden Erdoğan to distance himself further from meaningful dialogue, using

the dissolution as justification for oppressive measures against the Kurdish population.

PKK's surrender and what it means for Erdoğan

The PKK held its 12th Congress from May 5 to 7, 2025, in the Medya Defense Areas, a PKK stronghold located in the mountainous regions of northern Iraq. The leadership emphasized the congress's importance in response to Öcalan's "Call for Peace and Democratic Society." Delegates from various branches attended, with posters of Öcalan throughout the venue.

If Erdoğan succeeds in changing the constitution, this could pave the way for uncontrolled power dynamics comparable to Russia, where a singular dictator maintains dominance. The inherent instability of Erdoğan's regime, entrenched with an authoritarian desire to maintain control, renders any ceasefire fragile and susceptible to collapse.

Erdoğan is now down an obstacle, with no enemy that can make it complicated for him to dominate. Even if the ceasefire holds, he is under no obligation to reciprocate and may use the opportunity to implement constitutional changes that tighten his grip on power. If he fails to secure enough votes, his successor may not honor the agreement. The ceasefire could collapse at any moment. There are too many variables at play, none of which are guaranteed, and Erdoğan may still take repressive action, possibly leading Turkey in the same direction as Russia, with one person holding unchecked power.

Another variable: What happens if he doesn't win? Will his replacement honor the agreement, given it was done to keep Erdoğan in power? Turkey and the PKK may not see a successful ceasefire.

As the Kurdish struggle for rights and autonomy continues to confront insurmountable obstacles, the shift initiated by the PKK's 12th Congress could inadvertently enable Erdoğan to further solidify a dictatorial power. The ball remains in Turkey's court and there is no one else that can play.

[Claudia Finak-Fournier edited this piece.]



Tara Yarwais is a Kurdish American. Born in Baghdad, she immigrated to the US in 2007. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology at Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee, and a master's in terrorism, security, and far-right extremism at Richmond University, London, England. It was during her graduate studies that Tara discovered her love of writing. Tara is passionate about understanding radicalization. Studies reveal that radicalization is a process and can turn people to terrorism or manifest in other, less visible forms of radical sentiment. Tara believes that understanding radicalization is the most effective way to counter terrorism.

Tremors of Change: Myanmar Quake Temporarily Unites Divided Nations

Asanga Abeyagoonasekera
June 12, 2025

A 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck the city of Mandalay in northern Myanmar, while also claiming many lives and affecting China, Bangladesh and Thailand. Amid devastation, the international community paused geopolitical tensions to get aid to those in need, revealing shared responsibility. This disaster highlights the instability in nature and politics, as Myanmar endures ongoing turmoil and humanitarian crises.

The building trembled as if the earth had inhaled sharply, the air heavy with the anticipation of rupture. Cracks appeared on the walls, like the beginning of a terrible truth, yet the structure held, stubborn in the face of a 7.7 magnitude quake. Not panic filled the room, but a profound disorientation, a momentary dizziness, as though time had stopped, lingering between life and death. In seconds, the earth's indifferent embrace swallowed countless lives. The quake originated in the northern city of Mandalay. It showed no regard for borders. Its force moved through China, Bangladesh and Thailand, indifferent to the lives it claimed. It served as an eternal reminder of the instability that lies beneath the surface of all things.

My forthcoming book *Winds of Change* began at Mong Khet, Myanmar, at the heart of the “Valeriepieris circle”—the world’s most populous region. Lee Kuan Yew University professor Danny Quah once described it as an extraordinary encirclement of humanity, a dense cluster of 4.2 billion souls. First, there was COVID, starting from the same Valeriepieris circle, killing hundreds of thousands across Southeast Asia and around 7 million globally. Earthquakes and high geopolitics between India, China and the US shape the surrounding waters. Natural disasters merely turn a page in the ongoing upheavals — poverty,

hunger, malnutrition and political-economic crises. Myanmar itself is a continuous struggle for stability, its people enduring a brutal civil war that has ravaged the nation. According to the UN, 17.6 million people in Myanmar required humanitarian assistance, where 1.6 million were internally displaced, with over 55,000 civilian buildings and infrastructure destroyed since 2021. The international community, having long cut off Myanmar, now finds itself reaching out to assist in the ongoing natural disaster — a fragile, fleeting gesture of humanity amid isolation.

Mandalay's vulnerable foundations

The building shook for a few seconds, long enough to conjure mortality in the minds of those inside. People rushed out, some crying others silent in their fear. I joined them, moving with humanity's current toward the open space. I witnessed mothers carrying their children, their eyes shadowed by the fear of death. What struck me was not the panic but the order, no pushing, no trampling — just a somber acceptance of the chaos. A discipline, perhaps ingrained into the fabric of their culture, revealed itself in those fleeting moments.

To be honest, I was ready for death. Just a few days earlier, I had completed a final act — burying my mother's ashes. I had delayed it for nearly a year, postponed by my arrest during the previous government in Sri Lanka. The weight of that unfinished duty had hung over me, but now, with it done, I felt a strange calm amidst the turmoil.

I survived. Like many others, I was caught in the quake's fury, just as the earth continued to tremble beneath us. Mandalay, lying on the eastern end of the Alpide Belt — one of the world's most active seismic zones — has always been vulnerable. Yet vulnerability rarely prepares one for the shock. Thousands lay dead, more than 3,600 injured. The numbers, still uncertain, would only rise as rescue teams unearthed the buried

from their cement graves. As I watched the scene unfold, I couldn't help but see a reflection of the geopolitical tremors I had written about. The shifting alliances, the silent aggressions — fragile structures that seemed permanent until they suddenly weren't. The earthquake was more than just a natural disaster; it was a reminder that instability waits for a moment to break free beneath the surface, whether of the earth or nations. Today, the people of Myanmar lie buried beneath rubble, but perhaps we are all buried under the same rubble of our own making.

The under-construction headquarters for the Auditor General's office was the only building that collapsed among the many non-quake-resistant structures sitting on the soft soil of Bangkok. Another tremor of a similar magnitude would have taken down the apartment building I was staying in, where cracks had seeped through on every floor. Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar killed over a hundred thousand, floods and landslides continue to claim lives, and yet, disaster preparedness in the region lingers as an afterthought.

Transcending politics in times of crisis

Leaders of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) gathered in Thailand. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive, speaking of resilience, shared responsibility in the Bay of Bengal region, and BIMSTEC's vision for collaborative disaster management. Afterward, Modi continued to Sri Lanka, where the new Marxist president, Anura Kumara Disanayake, awaits. Politics will resume, but the earth has imposed its brutal order, disrupting human plans with indifferent force.

A Sri Lankan journalist I interviewed in Colombo shared a striking story. A Chinese fishing vessel, Lu Peng Yuan 028, capsized, resulting in the deaths of several fishermen. Sri Lankan naval

officers salvaged it using a U.S.-donated vessel and salvage and diving training from India. This episode highlights a crucial lesson: when human lives are at risk, we set aside geopolitical competition in favor of synergy — a collective human responsibility toward a greater cause.

As people lie buried under rubble from the devastating earthquake, nations have come together, putting aside internal geopolitical tensions, including the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, to assist and save lives. In times of catastrophe, humanity transcends politics — a rare but powerful reminder of our shared fragility.

[Liam Roman edited this piece.]



Asanga Abeyagoonasekera is an international security and geopolitics analyst and strategic advisor from Sri Lanka. He is the Executive Director of South Asia Foresight Network in Washington, DC. Asanga is the author of several books on Sri Lanka's geopolitical challenges, including *Sri Lanka at Crossroads* (2019), *Conundrum of an Island* (2021) and *Teardrop Diplomacy* (2023). With almost two decades of experience in the government sector in advisory positions and working at foreign policy and defence think tanks, Asanga was the former founding Director General of the Institute of National Security Studies in Sri Lanka.

From Paramilitary to Powerbroker: The High Cost of Legalizing the PMF in Iraq

Shermeen Yousif
June 15, 2025

The Iraqi government intends to integrate the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the national army, raising concerns about sovereignty. Influenced by Iran, this legislation risks establishing a parallel military that could obstruct reform, exacerbate sectarian divides, and complicate relationships with Western allies and Gulf states. Approval could legitimize a militia beyond state control, fundamentally changing Iraq's political landscape and threatening stability.

In a striking political development over the past two months, the Iraqi government has initiated steps to formally integrate the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the national army structure. This act raises urgent questions about state sovereignty, civil-military relations, and the future of Iraq's fragile institutions. On March 24, 2025, Iraq's parliament convened its initial session to deliberate the controversial legislation aimed at formally integrating the PMF into the state's official security apparatus, a perilous move. That same day, U.S. officials urged Baghdad to guarantee that PMF-affiliated groups operate under the direct authority of the Iraqi commander-in-chief, the prime minister, rather than maintaining allegiance to Iran.

The proposed legislation marks a pivotal moment in Iraq's post-ISIS political trajectory, one that raises serious questions about the country's

sovereignty and the future of its security institutions. Crafted under the shadow of Iranian influence, the bill seeks to cloak the PMF, a network of heavily armed militias, some designated as terrorist groups, with the full legal authority of the Iraqi state.

What does it mean for Iraq's fragile democracy when someone elevates a force operating with sectarian motives and external loyalties to the status of a national institution? How will this affect Iraq's already strained relations with Western allies and Gulf Arab partners, who view the PMF as an extension of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps?

If passed, the law could entrench a parallel chain of command within Iraq's armed forces, making future reform virtually impossible and deepening the sectarian divide. It signals a shift away from state-building toward factional entrenchment, one that may come at the cost of Iraq's long-term stability, international credibility, and independence. The real question, then, is not just how long Iraq will remain under Iran's shadow, but whether this bill will mark the point of no return.

The roots of a crisis: unpacking the real threat

The PMF, also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, constitutes a predominantly Iran-aligned Shi'a paramilitary conglomerate whose ambiguous legal and institutional status continues to pose a profound challenge to the coherence of the Iraqi state. Simultaneously portrayed as a national defense force and criticized as a proxy for foreign influence, the PMF occupies a liminal space between legitimacy and lawlessness, an entity some view as a terrorist organization due to its opaque operations, sectarian affiliations, and alleged human rights violations.

The PMF has consistently undermined Iraq's efforts to normalize relations with Western powers and Gulf Arab states, or to chart a course independent of Iranian hegemony. This obstructionism has manifested in repeated attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions and military personnel, as well as in the sabotage of Gulf-led investment initiatives in Iraq's central and southern provinces.

Over the past two years, the PMF has not only consolidated its political leverage, positioning itself as a dominant institutional force, but has also strengthened its economic networks, extending its influence across various sectors. This confluence of paramilitary capacity, economic reach and political ascendancy is transforming the PMF from a wartime auxiliary into a parallel state apparatus, one that increasingly blurs the line between national defense and factional hegemony.

PMF today: shifts in strategy and influence

Though formally recognized as part of the Iraqi state, the PMF has leveraged this official status not to serve national interests, but to tighten its grip on Iraq's political, economic and security architecture. Under the guise of legitimacy, the PMF has obstructed foreign investment, particularly from Gulf states and operated with near impunity across state institutions, cultivating deep patronage networks and influencing electoral outcomes.

Facing growing pressure from the United States and Israel, the PMF has quietly adjusted its strategy. Rather than provoking confrontation abroad, the group has turned inward, consolidating its domestic power base and recasting its public image. Today, it positions itself not as an Iranian proxy, but as the indispensable guardian of Iraq's Shi'a population against the specter of Sunni extremism. Yet this strategic rebranding raises troubling questions: Is the PMF moderating its

behavior, or merely entrenching itself more deeply, under a more palatable narrative?

What the PMF bill means for Iraq

By capitalizing on its formal status as a state-sanctioned entity, complete with government salaries and budgetary allocations, the PMF has steadily transformed into one of Iraq's most formidable politico-military actors. Far from being a neutral component of national defense, the PMF's various factions have weaponized their institutional legitimacy to block any political or economic initiative that might weaken Iran's influence, effectively casting themselves as the arbiters of Iraq's foreign policy direction and regional alignments.

The proposed Authority Law only deepens this trajectory. If passed, it would grant the PMF and its estimated 238,000 personnel the legal and structural authority to operate as a parallel military force, autonomous, deeply politicized, and loyal to its leadership rather than the state. It would enshrine within Iraq's security sector an entity reminiscent of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), not as a temporary emergency force created during the ISIS war, but as a permanent, quasi-ministerial institution shielded from reform and insulated from oversight. The implications are stark: this legislation could fundamentally alter the balance of power in Iraq, institutionalizing a force with regional ambitions and foreign loyalties at the very heart of the state.

If this legislation passes, Iraq won't just see the legitimization of a controversial militia; it will face the quiet dismantling of the state itself, brick by brick, from within.

Embedding an ideologically driven, Iran-aligned force into the very architecture of Iraq's security sector risks transforming the republic into a garrison state, where military loyalty is no longer

to the people or the constitution, but to foreign-aligned commanders and opaque political agendas. This is not simply a policy misstep; it is a historic gamble with Iraq's sovereignty, one that could ignite future civil strife, paralyze reform, and permanently fracture the state's already tenuous legitimacy. Suppose this is the new definition of national unity. In that case, Iraq may soon wake to find its republic replaced by a shadow state, militarized, sectarian and beholden to powers beyond its borders.

[Liam Roman edited this piece.]



Shermeen Yousif is an assistant professor at Florida Atlantic University. As a female academic who witnessed women's rights issues in the civil unrest of post-war

Iraq, she escaped to the United States where she earned her doctorate. Yousif is an activist and writer who focuses on social and political change in Iraq and the Middle East, as well as feminism and increasing awareness of women's rights in the region.

America Misread China's History and Helped Build Its Global Power

Alfredo Toro Hardy
June 18, 2025

The US has sought to shape China in its own image since the 19th century, seeing itself as a mentor to a rising power. China took the help but rejected the vision, building its own path to strength. That long misjudgment now fuels

confrontation, and the US must reckon with the consequences.

According to a well-known anecdote, when former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1971 to prepare for the Richard Nixon–Mao Zedong summit, Kissinger asked Zhou for his opinion on the French Revolution. Zhou responded that the event was too recent to fully grasp its significance. While some argue Zhou thought Kissinger was referring to the 1968 French student riots, the answer has come to symbolize the distinct sense of historical time in a civilization that spans millennia.

Civilization-state

Kissinger wrote that China’s sense of time beats differently than America’s. When asked about a historical event, an American thinks in terms of calendar years. A Chinese person, by contrast, places events within dynasties — and ten of China’s fourteen imperial dynasties lasted longer than the entire history of the United States.

British author Martin Jacques has described China as a state-civilization, meaning its civilizational identity precedes its statehood. This view extends beyond China being just another member of the international community. Remarkably, the Chinese state was already fully structured by 221 BC.

Several references convey the scale of that historical depth. Nearly a century before Christopher Columbus set out from Spain, China had already mastered the seas with a fleet of 1,681 ships — 250 of them measuring 145 meters long by 54 meters wide, each with nine masts. In 1776, as thirteen rural colonies in eastern North America declared independence, Scottish economist Adam

Smith wrote that China was wealthier than all of Europe combined. Under the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735–1796), China’s economy accounted for 40% of global GDP. Chinese innovations have included paper money, iron plows, porcelain, silk, matches, umbrellas, toilet paper, inoculation against smallpox, the decimal system, suspension bridges, the seismograph, the compass, gunpowder, printing, and papermaking.

The US as a mentor

Despite China’s deep historical legacy, the US has long sought to remake China in its own image. Before its first centennial, the US was already eyeing China for transformation. In 1845, when Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan to open to the outside world, US policymakers were already projecting their ambitions onto China. That country was marked as the first major nation-building experiment in America’s long-term engagement with the Far East.

As Australian strategic analyst Hugh White explains, US motives were not purely commercial. Christian missionaries had spent decades in China and had shaped the view that the Chinese people were eager to embrace American ideas — not just religious, but also political and economic. From this came the conviction that the US had a unique mission to guide China into modernity. In China, the US could act as a “civilized” nation bringing progress to a “backward” society.

This sense of mentorship endured until Mao Zedong’s 1949 revolution closed China to the West. But when Deng Xiaoping reopened the country in the late 1970s through economic reforms and international engagement, Washington revived its old vision. US policymakers believed China’s liberalization would inevitably produce a society shaped by American values. Based on that belief, the US supported China’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and

facilitated major investment and technology transfers into China.

Betrayal or naivety?

But China had its own vision. The “China Dream,” put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping, describes a nation that becomes economically, militarily, and technologically strong, poised for global leadership. Zhongnanhai designates 2049 — the centennial of the People’s Republic of China — as the target year for recovering China’s historical greatness. This vision entails reclaiming the preeminent role China held through much of human history.

To the US, this ambition represents a direct challenge to its global leadership. Washington sees it as betrayal. Xi’s confrontational approach and dismissive attitude toward China’s neighbors depart from the political subtlety traditionally linked to Chinese civilization.

Yet what stands out most is America’s profound misunderstanding of Chinese history. The US failed to grasp how deeply China’s historical self-conception informs its modern trajectory. This was not just naïve — it was historically unprecedented. Never before has a leading power so thoroughly underestimated a potential rival.



Alfredo Toro Hardy, PhD, is a retired Venezuelan career diplomat, scholar and author. He is a former Ambassador to the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, Brazil, Ireland, Chile and Singapore. He has directed the Diplomatic Academy of the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other academic institutions. He is a former Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Professor at

Princeton and Brasília Universities. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations, a member of the Academic Advisory Committee of Westminster University and two-time Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center Resident Scholar. He is also a member of the Review Panel of the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center. He has authored or co-authored 36 books on international affairs.

“The Scars Are on My Body and Mind, Forever”: Survivors Onboard Ocean Viking Share Their Stories

Fellipe Lopes
June 19, 2025

The rescue ship Ocean Viking picked up 234 migrants in the Central Mediterranean and heard their stories. These survivors described torture, slavery and extortion in Libyan detention centers. The abuse will continue as long as Europe backs the Libyan Coast Guard and blocks safe ways out.

While onboard the humanitarian rescue ship Ocean Viking, Fellipe Lopes, Communications Coordinator for SOS Méditerranée, documented testimonies from migrants who suffered brutal abuse in Libya.

I joined Ocean Viking in mid-April. In the following weeks, we conducted four rescue operations, saving a total of 234 people. Survivors

shared harrowing accounts of torture, forced labor, and sexual abuse in Libya.

Talking to survivors onboard, it became clear that an inhumane and profitable system operates with protection in many parts of Libya. Extortion and torture are common elements in the process of obtaining freedom. Many survivors reported being forced to work long hours without pay. A masked man entered their rooms daily and forced them to call their families to demand money. The message was simple: no money, no freedom.

For years, Libya has served as a key transit point for people seeking safety in Europe. Many begin their journey in other countries, misled by the promise that a boat from Libya will take them directly to Italy. That promise is false.

Once in Libya, migrants are frequently captured by militias or organized groups. These groups extort, torture, and enslave them. Survivors described widespread rape, arbitrary detention, sexual slavery, and murder. Both militias and state-affiliated groups participate in these abuses.

Since 2014, more than 31,000 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. It remains the deadliest migration route in the world. In the Central Mediterranean, where state-led rescue operations are largely absent, civilian ships conduct most rescues. Instead of support, many face criminal charges for their efforts.

A man who asked to be called “Lamunn” said he had applied for visas in Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy several times, but never received a response. Armed men in Libya forced him to witness sexual assaults and subjected him to repeated rape. After going three days without water, he asked for some — but because he didn’t speak the local language, the guards beat him. “Trauma is the only word,” he said. “I would rather die at sea than spend another day in Libya.”

Rebecca, Medical Team Leader for SOS Méditerranée, said, “Part of my role onboard is not only to provide medical care but to support people psychologically. Sometimes it’s through basic psychological first aid. Sometimes we connect them to organizations on land that can give them the long-term support they need. To see people withdraw into themselves and disassociate from the world — because that is their only refuge — is devastating. We do what we can while they are with us, if only to show that there is still kindness and a gentle touch.”

Rebecca added, “In four years of work onboard, I have seen many survivors of the brutal conditions in Libya. The scars are not only on the body — unhealed wounds, burns, broken bones — but also in the mind.”

The United Nations report *Abuse Behind Bars: Arbitrary and unlawful detention in Libya*, published in April 2018, concluded that thousands of people are held in unlawful detention by armed groups, including state-affiliated groups. These people are routinely tortured, raped, and enslaved.

Libya’s detention system is designed to profit from human suffering. Its network reaches across borders. In Libya, authorities allow this system to persist. The EU funds and supports the Libyan government’s efforts to curb migration. At sea, the EU provides funding and training for the Libyan Coast Guard. This group has been accused of violently intercepting rescue operations and forcing migrants back to Libya, where they reenter the cycle of abuse.

[SOS Méditerranée is a humanitarian maritime organization founded in May 2015 in response to the rising death toll in the Central Mediterranean and the failure of the EU to act. It operates through a European network based in Germany, France, Italy, and Switzerland. From February 2016 to October 2018, SOS Méditerranée operated the

rescue ship Aquarius. Today, it continues its mission with the ship Ocean Viking. Since 2016, SOS Méditerranée has rescued 42,052 people at sea.]



Felliipe Lopes, 37 years old, is a migrant from Brazil based in Ireland for over 11 years. He is a photojournalist and a human rights activist. His work focuses on human rights, environmental issues and migration. Felliipe has produced video documentaries and photo essays for the international media and international organizations in several locations, including Brazil, Ireland, Greece, Bosnia, Kenya and the central Mediterranean off Italy.

Donald Trump Damages India–US Ties by Misjudging Pakistan’s Terror Strategy

Kanwal Sibal, Vikram Sood
June 21, 2025

Trump responded to a Pakistan-backed terrorist attack in India by avoiding any mention of Pakistan’s role. He then claimed credit for a ceasefire that India had already planned on its own terms. The incident embarrassed India and raised doubts about how it should deal with an American president who acts on impulse.

US President Donald Trump often launches diplomatic initiatives without fully considering the consequences. He is quick to claim credit for successes, whether or not that is timely or deserved. Though not necessarily acting out of malice, he tends to exaggerate his peace overtures and frequently reverses course without concern for credibility or long-term political fallout.

As the head of the world’s most powerful country, Trump inevitably commands global attention. Foreign governments often feel compelled to accommodate his unpredictability, particularly because he acts on ego and impulse, making snap decisions in an attempt to demonstrate his influence. He calls this behavior his version of the "art of the deal."

Trump blindsided India with his response to the military standoff with Pakistan in April 2025, which was triggered by a deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on April 22. The attack, carried out by terrorists linked to Pakistan-based groups, occurred during US Vice President J.D. Vance’s official visit to New Delhi. Islamabad has repeatedly timed such attacks to coincide with high-profile US diplomatic visits, a tactic aimed at internationalizing the Kashmir issue. Pakistani officials know that Washington has historically tolerated these provocations — even when they endanger US personnel or broader strategic interests.

Given Trump’s prior hardline rhetoric against Islamic extremism — and similar positions held by Vance and Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard — his refusal to explicitly call out Pakistan after the Pahalgam attack appeared inconsistent. Although the US, along with several other countries, condemned the violence, none named Pakistan as the perpetrator. From India’s perspective, these generalized condemnations

lacked sincerity and failed to address the underlying state sponsorship of terrorism.

The international community avoided direct confrontation with Pakistan

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where Pakistan held a rotating seat in early 2025, also avoided naming Pakistan in its official statement. Instead, the Council urged member states to hold "perpetrators, organizers, financiers, and sponsors" of terrorism accountable and to cooperate with relevant national authorities — language that implicitly referred to Pakistan but allowed it plausible deniability.

The Group of Seven (G7) statement added to India's frustration. Several G7 countries, including the US, Japan, and Australia, are part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), while India maintains close strategic partnerships with others, such as France. However, the G7 statement grouped India and Pakistan together, calling on both sides to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, and engage in dialogue. The US reportedly pushed for language emphasizing de-escalation while sidestepping the core issue of cross-border terrorism. The UK — historically protective of Pakistan in multilateral forums — likely influenced this wording. Though the G7 condemned the Pahalgam attack, its failure to assign responsibility angered Indian officials.

From India's standpoint, such calls for dialogue are misplaced. Kashmir is a part of India. Yet New Delhi has pursued bilateral diplomacy with Islamabad in the past to achieve peace, most notably through the composite dialogue process that collapsed after the Pakistan-backed 2008 Mumbai Islamist terror attacks. While India has periodically resumed talks — such as in 2011 and briefly in 2015 — further terror strikes have consistently derailed engagement. Meanwhile, the US and its G7 partners have often responded to

terrorism in the Middle East and Africa with military force, raising questions about their moral consistency when urging restraint in South Asia.

Trump's premature actions damaged trust and exposed asymmetries in the India-US relationship

The US reaction to the April 2025 India-Pakistan crisis left Indian policymakers puzzled and concerned about the reliability of their strategic partner. After the February 2019 Pulwama attack, Trump affirmed India's right to self-defense. This time, however, his administration initially stayed on the sidelines. In remarks to reporters in April, Vance said, "We're not going to get involved in the middle of a war that's fundamentally none of our business," adding that the US would support de-escalation but had no authority to dictate terms.

India retaliated massively but responsibly to Pakistan's terror attack. From May 7 to May 10, India followed a policy of calculated and graded escalation. The Government of India agreed to a ceasefire in response to a request from the Pakistani Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) after achieving its key aims. By this time, the Indian Armed Forces had destroyed 11 Pakistani military facilities and valuable hardware. India had sent the message to Pakistan that terror no longer pays.

Trump has repeatedly claimed credit for the May 10 ceasefire, embarrassing Indian officials unnecessarily. India already had a plan for phased de-escalation after achieving its military goals. In the first strike, India deliberately limited its retaliatory strikes to terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan-administered territory, avoiding military installations to give Islamabad a face-saving off-ramp. Only when Pakistan responded with drone, missile and air strikes on Indian military as well as civilian targets did India hit Pakistani military targets. Even while hitting these targets, India

constantly signalled it was willing to de-escalate. India's message to Pakistan was clear: the Indian Armed Forces would henceforth respond to terrorism by striking terrorist assets in Pakistani territory and escalate if necessary regardless of Pakistan's nuclear sabre-rattling.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior Indian officials publicly rejected Trump's narrative that the US had brokered peace. Modi reiterated that the ceasefire had been requested by Pakistan through its DGMO, and not orchestrated by any third party. Nevertheless, Trump continued to portray himself as the peacemaker. He equated both countries' actions, offered to mediate the Kashmir dispute — contradicting the bilateral framework of the 1972 Simla Agreement — and claimed he threatened both sides with trade penalties, while promising enhanced trade incentives if they complied with the ceasefire.

Trump's trade threat was ill-conceived. In 2024, US-Pakistan trade totaled just \$7.3 billion, compared to \$129.2 billion with India. This disparity rendered any trade ultimatum aimed at Islamabad largely symbolic and ineffective. Trump was really targeting New Delhi. Indian officials took note — if Trump could casually weaponize trade, could he just as easily use defense cooperation or intelligence-sharing as leverage in future disagreements?

Further irritation followed during Trump's May 13 visit to Riyadh, where he made offhand remarks about preventing a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan, invoked the specter of millions of deaths, and praised Secretary of State Marco Rubio for supposedly brokering the ceasefire. He even joked about getting both sides to sit down for dinner — a tone that many in India found dismissive and condescending.

On June 18, Trump met Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir for a closed-door lunch. After

the short conflict, Munir had become a field marshal which made him the de facto ruler of Pakistan. Geopolitical analysts believe that Trump is creating an axis against Shia Iran by wooing nuclear-armed Sunni Pakistan, the world's only Islamic nuclear power. It is now clear that Trump is ignoring Indian concerns about Pakistan using terror as an instrument of state policy. For now, Trump seems to have little use for India.

The time has come for Indian policymakers to recalibrate their approach to managing relations with the US. Some degree of visible pushback — rather than quiet compliance — is the need of the hour.



Kanwal Sibal has over 40 years of diplomatic experience. He has served as India's foreign secretary, as ambassador to Turkey, Egypt, France and Russia, and as deputy chief of mission in Washington, DC. From 2008, he sat on India's National Security Advisory Board. Sibal is currently a board member of the New York-based East-West Institute, an executive council member of the Vivekanand International Foundation, and is also an adviser to the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum. He has written more than 500 articles for major Indian and foreign publications. Sibal is a grand officer of France's Ordre National du Merite and has received the Padam Shree award (India) and the Contributions to International Cooperation award (Russia).



Vikram Sood is a former career intelligence officer who served in the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external

intelligence agency, till his retirement in 2003 after heading the organization. He is currently an adviser at the Observer Research Foundation, an independent public policy think tank based in New Delhi. He regularly writes on intelligence, terrorism, security, foreign relations and strategic issues for journals and newspapers. He has contributed chapters related to security, intelligence, terrorism and South Asia for various books over the last few years. Sood is the author of “The Unending Game: A Former R&AW Chief’s Insights into Espionage,” published by Penguin Random House in 2018. His second book, “The Ultimate Goal: A Former R&AW Chief Deconstructs How Nations Construct Narratives,” is scheduled to be released by HarperCollins India in October 2020.

The Last Hegelian? Former Uruguayan President José Mujica Passes Away

Christopher Wylde
June 22, 2025

Former Uruguayan President José Mujica died on May 13 at age 89. His life reminds people that modesty, democracy and integrity can still shape politics in an age of spectacle and cynicism. His example offers a benchmark for leaders who want to build fairer, more honest societies through patience and principle.

A fashionable dinner party game in middle-class households in the UK is to name a living politician that everyone can admire. After nearly fifteen years of Tory rule in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, COVID-19 and the insipidness of Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government during its first year in office, domestic examples are in seriously short supply. In fact, they are non-existent. Internationally, examples are difficult to spot as well. The wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, rising violence in Libya and Syria and the rise of the populist right across Europe and the US — all against the backdrop of a collapsing postwar international liberal economic order — have led to a dearth of candidates who might be called admirable.

My usual answer was José "El Pepe" Mujica. Alas, no more — he died on May 13 at age 89. There was much to admire in this son of a florist and smallholder.

First, his frugal authenticity. He lived his principles. As Uruguay's president from 2010 to 2015, he rejected the presidential residence and remained on his farm in a three-room farmhouse, where he had lived most of his life. He refused the presidential limousine, continued to drive an old VW Beetle, lunched in everyday bars in Montevideo and gave away most of his salary.

This was refreshing in an era of MP expenses scandals, fishy mega-PPE contracts during COVID, dodgy crypto launches attached to presidents, lavish gifts such as private jets and lucrative post-office speaking circuits.

Second, his commitment to democracy. He viewed the trappings of high office as anathema to democracy, which he defined above all as egalitarian. As a republican (note the small "r") from the UK, I find this accurate. Though he had a revolutionary past, he was a pragmatist. Politically,

this meant a commitment to liberal democracy. In policy terms, it meant charting a middle path between a growth-only agenda that concentrates capital and a "distribute quickly" agenda that stifles investment and growth in the medium and long term. During his administration, Uruguay saw reduced poverty and indigence and increased employment. He strengthened economic and social rights and expanded civil and political rights. He legalized cannabis, abortion and gay marriage. When Uruguayan courts declared some of his other reforms unlawful, he accepted their rulings without criticism.

This stands in contrast to many of today's politicians, who aim to destroy institutions, rewrite rules, or even re-found their country. Consider UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's proroguing of Parliament, US President Donald Trump's contempt for the Constitution, or Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's "illiberal democracy."

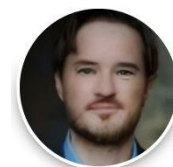
Third, Mujica had a modest yet inspiring vision. He saw politics as a fight — no doubt connected to his past as a Tupamaros guerrilla. After spending fourteen years in prison, ten of them in solitary confinement (two at the bottom of a well), he shifted that fight toward democracy. Its greatest advantage, he believed, was that "it doesn't believe itself to be finished or perfect." At the end of his term he said, "... if I look at the current picture of my society, I cannot be happy, there is still more to be done." He mistrusted extreme positions. He saw them as offering overly simplistic answers to difficult problems. Lasting egalitarian change required changing cultural attitudes. This was slow and difficult. But he believed that the democratic process — open, transparent, respectful, wary of extremes — was essential to creating the cultural values needed to build a more egalitarian society.

Again, compare this with the visions of other politicians today. From "American Carnage" to the so-called "migrant invasion" of the UK,

apocalyptic language justifies bypassing institutions in favor of majoritarian rule. Others have no vision at all; after a year in office, the shape and form of Starmerism remain unclear.

Fourth, his foreign relations. On foreign investment, he welcomed capital into Uruguay. This was politically difficult in Latin America, given the region's colonial past with Spain and semi-colonial relationship with the US. But Mujica saw the need to change Uruguayans' cultural attitudes toward historical grievances about foreign capital. Doing so would support the long-term growth needed to fund redistribution and deliver real egalitarian gains. In foreign policy he was discreet, incremental and conciliatory. He even served as an unofficial intermediary between Cuban President Raul Castro and US President Barack Obama during their rapprochement.

A modest, self-deprecating democrat who lived the values he espoused. Perhaps there was nothing remarkable about Mujica — I'm sure he would agree. But in the world of 2025, this unassuming parliamentarian, who welcomed disagreement as essential to progress, was someone truly worthy of admiration. Perhaps now all those who can truly understand — and practice — Hegel have actually died.



Dr. Christopher Wylde is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at St Mary's University, London. He is the author of many scholarly articles on Argentinean (international) political economy as well as two research monographs: *Latin America after Neoliberalism* and *Emerging Markets and the State*. The latter was shortlisted for the BISA Annual Book Prize. Christopher's work seeks to understand the contemporary form of states in the context of rapid

catch-up industrialisation and how state capacities and autonomies interact to generate different kinds of developmental outcomes.

Germans in Romania: A Story of Survival and Remigration

Andrea Geistanger
June 22, 2025

German minority groups such as the Transylvanian Saxons and the Banat Swabians have a long, rich history in Romania. However, political strife as well as benefits elsewhere drove German cultural groups out of the country. While Germany benefited from this remigration, Romania's diverse culture suffered. Europe must encourage the protection of minority groups if it wishes to enrich communities.

“For a kingdom with only one language and one custom is weak and fragile.” This sentence, written around 1030 by King Stephen I of Hungary, can be regarded as a cornerstone in the argument for preserving the diverse population in Southeastern Europe and Romania. It is not widely known that German settlement groups were also part of this population diversity for many centuries. Around 1930, approximately 700,000 Germans lived in the area of present-day Romania in various groups that were historically, culturally and regionally distinct from one another. The two largest groups were the Transylvanian Saxons in central Romania, and the Banat Swabians who settled in western Romania.

Starting in the 1970s, a remigration movement of Germans led to an almost complete eradication of their culture, history and specific dialects. Romania suffered the most from this exodus, but generally speaking, all of Europe is now poorer in cultural diversity, mutual understanding among peoples, and openness. Cultural diversity must be encouraged and protected, as it benefits Europe at large.

German ethnicities in Romania

In the 1200s, a large group of German settlers migrated under King Géza of Hungary into the “land beyond the forests” (terra ultrasilvana), likely to protect the southern border of the Hungarian kingdom. These “Saxones” were first mentioned in 1224 in a charter by Hungarian King Andrew II, granting them extensive autonomy in legal, economic, political and ecclesiastical matters. Over the following centuries, this group became known as the “Transylvanian Saxons” and represented one of three estates in the Hungarian Diet, the country's national assembly. They were granted extensive rights in electing kings and enjoyed significant autonomy within the Principality of Transylvania under Ottoman rule. In the 16th century, they were even able to convert to Protestantism — a key factor shaping their identity. Their extensive autonomy was lost only in the 19th century due to the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, which created the dual monarchy between Austria and Hungary.

Alongside the Transylvanian Saxons, the Banat Swabians have played a key role in shaping Romania's history. The origins of this group are well-documented due to the Austrian-Habsburg administration. German migrants first arrived in the Banat around 1725 as part of an organized settlement by the Habsburg monarchy, and increasingly flocked to the area under Hungarian queen Maria Theresa in the 1760s. The recruited settlers came from various areas in southern and

central Germany. This Habsburg settlement policy was not a new idea. To consolidate their newly acquired kingdom, Hungarian kings would recruit settlers from German principalities in order to give strength to the territory.

Although considered “state-supporting” minorities within the Kingdom of Hungary, German minorities suffered from assimilation pressures imposed by Budapest’s government. In 1876, their self-governance was dissolved, and school laws sought to erode their culture. This is known as Magyarization, or the assimilation into Hungarian culture and language. Habsburg’s tolerance of this Magyarization policy was perceived by these minorities as betrayal of their loyalty to the ruling house. This led to a reorientation toward Germany after its formation in 1871, thus making German-nationalist sentiments increasingly prominent.

Romania’s foundation sowed discontent among German minority groups

Despite the alienation that Magyarization brought, men from German minorities still fought for Austria-Hungary during World War I. However, the end of World War I and Austria-Hungary’s collapse into multiple nation-states left German minorities in Banat and Transylvania caught between competing interests. Romania acted swiftly: on December 1, 1918, the Romanian National Assembly in Alba Iulia resolved to unite Transylvania, Banat, and other parts of Hungary with Romania. The 1920 Treaty of Trianon – the treaty that concluded World War I – confirmed these territorial changes.

The Alba Iulia resolution envisioned a democratic Romanian state with extensive minority rights. In return, these groups were expected to support Romania’s accession declaration, endorse international recognition efforts and prove themselves loyal citizens of the

new state. Initially optimistic due to Alba Iulia’s resolutions and Romania’s minority protection treaty with Allied powers, Germany saw favorable conditions for trade and industry emerge. However, these hopes soon faded: politically agreed minority rights were barely implemented as Bucharest’s government transformed Romania into a centralized state modeled after France — contrary to the federalist preferences among minorities’ representatives.

Several laws from Romania’s new centralized state had severe consequences for German minorities. For example, a 1921 land reform law led to expropriation of communal lands and over half of church-owned property. Since Lutheran-Protestant churches in Transylvania as well as Catholic churches in Banat played key roles in education systems and cultural institutions, the German minorities were disproportionately affected. Romania’s government gradually lost support among German communities. Due to this growing disenchantment, German minorities soon became susceptible to manipulation by Nazi Germany during World War II. Younger politicians increasingly adopted Nazi rhetoric, aligning themselves directly with Hitler’s Germany.

Minority groups align with Germany during World War II

By late 1930s tensions increased between Romanian authorities and nationalist factions within German minorities. However, both Romania and Hungary became pawns of the Axis powers. In 1940, Romania was forced to cede parts of Transylvania under the Second Vienna Award orchestrated by Nazi Germany and Italy. This decision satisfied neither Hungary nor Romania and resulted in Transylvania being divided for the first time in its history. The Transylvanian Saxons found themselves as minorities in two states, as opposed to just one.

The status of German minorities in Romania became further complicated following authoritarian Marshal Ion Antonescu's rise to power with his "Iron Guard." Both Hungary and Romania had to comply with the German Nazi government's directives regarding their German minorities. In November 1940, Antonescu enacted a law declaring the German ethnic group a Nazi organization within the Romanian state, effectively creating a "state within a state." Berlin appointed a leader for the ethnic group who acted solely in the interests of Nazi Germany, aligning the minority populations with German and Saxon institutions and organizations. This policy did not serve the German minority but instead tied their fate inextricably to Nazi Germany's expansionist ambitions, which ultimately ended in disaster.

A tragic peak was reached with another German-Romanian agreement in 1943, requiring future generations to serve in the Waffen-SS – the military branch of the Nazi party – instead of the Romanian army. Many German youths from Romania were deployed in the Waffen-SS, exacerbating post-war accusations against Germans in Romania as Nazis.

When Romania declared war on the German Reich, the leadership of the ethnic groups fled. The German minorities in Romania were held collectively responsible and punished for Nazi crimes. In January 1945, nearly 70,000 able-bodied men and women were deported to work in rebuilding efforts in the coal mines of Donetsk, Ukraine. Almost 15% perished during this labor, and many were not released back to their hometowns. Instead, many ended up in areas of East Germany, where some managed to make their way to West Germany or Austria. This marked the beginning of family separations, with vastly different opportunities for development in West Germany compared to the East.

German Romanians emigrate to escape discrimination and political turmoil

In Romania itself, a gradual takeover by Moscow-controlled communists began in 1945, culminating in the proclamation of the "Romanian People's Republic" in 1947. Since all members of the German minorities were considered former members of a Nazi organization due to the ethnic group decree of 1940, they were completely excluded from any political participation. In spring 1945, all land was expropriated without compensation, and by 1949 all farms were converted into collective economies.

Although discriminatory measures against German ethnic groups began to ease after 1950 and cultural life gradually started to flourish again, all residents of Romania were now subjected to terror and arbitrariness under the communist regime. In the 1950s, around 40,000 Banat Swabians were deported to the Bărăgan Steppe under the pretext of "cleansing" border areas. By the 1970s, push factors such as deteriorating economic living conditions combined with pull factors from family members already living in West Germany became so strong that more and more Germans decided to emigrate to West Germany (FRG). In addition, emigration was supported by FRG politicians through financial payments for each emigrant.

In 1991, after the fall of the communist dictatorship and border openings, emigration reached its peak. That year alone, 110,000 Germans left Romania. Distrust toward the Romanian state was too great, the future too uncertain and promises in West Germany too enticing. With their strong work ethic, those who emigrated quickly integrated into Germany. Since they were well-educated and spoke German fluently, there were few barriers to starting anew. Germany has benefited immensely from the influx of Germans from Romania in terms of economic performance, tax revenues and loyal voters. Even a

Nobel Prize for Literature can now be attributed to Germany: In 2009, Herta Müller — a Banat Swabian — received the award for her book *The Hunger Angel*, which describes the deportation of Romanian Germans to the Soviet Union.

However, emotionally settling into Germany has proven harder for many. Many emigrants had a strong agricultural background, so relying solely on supermarkets in Germany remains difficult for some. Additionally, many Germans from Romania felt disappointed by the complete lack of knowledge among native Germans about their history. The realization that Germany might be a different country than they had imagined proved intensely jarring.

Today, German diversity in Romania is nearly nonexistent

Today, approximately 20,000 people in Romania still identify as Germans. This group strives to preserve and advance their diverse culture in Romania through close exchanges with relatives, friends and the Associations of the Banat Swabians and Transylvanian Saxons in Germany. Cities like Sibiu (Hermannstadt) and Timișoara (Temeswar) have been revitalized, and they attract many tourists as European Capitals of Culture (2007 and 2023, respectively). Klaus Werner Johannis, a Transylvanian Saxon from Hermannstadt, served as Romanian president since 2014.

However, many of these places within Transylvania are not places that continue to grow and change through German culture. A visit to these fortified churches is comparable to a trip to the Roman Forum in Rome – a place of history, not of future change. Dialects such as Transylvanian Saxon — which preserved archaic forms of medieval speech due to long isolation — are rarely spoken today and are no longer living languages. Their old, handmade traditional

costumes, which used to be part of village life on festive days, are hardly worn anymore.

History cannot be reversed; the era of large German populations in Eastern Europe is over. Romania has certainly not benefited from the remigration of Germans to West Germany. The history of the various German ethnic groups in Romania clearly demonstrates that as long as a government and country care about their minorities, these minorities will remain loyal and supportive citizens. However, if another country presents enticing promises from outside, push-and-pull factors can trigger emigration movements until diverse populations are almost completely dissolved. Countries must encourage the existence of cultural, economic and political diversity first and foremost.

[Cheyenne Torres edited this piece.]



Andrea Geistanger is a dedicated leader in data science, currently serving at a Swiss-owned diagnostic company. She studied Mathematics and Economics at the University of Ulm and earned her PhD in Statistics from the University of Dortmund. Andrea is passionate about advancing novel medical diagnostic technologies and enjoys delving into history, combining her analytical mindset with a curiosity about the past. Born in Romania as part of the German minority, Andrea emigrated to Germany as a child, an experience that shaped her enduring interest in migration. She explores questions about what drives individuals, families and communities to leave their homeland and what makes them feel settled again.

My Memories of the Emergency: The Darkest Period in Independent India's History

Vikram K. Malkani
June 25, 2025

India's 1975–1977 Emergency saw Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government suppressing free speech and arresting dissenters. My father was one victim, taken from my family for writing against the regime. This is the story of my childhood experience living through that authoritarian period, finding small joys and suffering painful hardships.

As years tick on in our lives, some memories, good or otherwise, stay on top of all others. Being the son of a journalist who was also closely associated with Indian politics for over 50 years, my most vivid memories are of developments in India's political landscape over the decades. I remember the outcome of each Lok Sabha — the lower house of Indian Parliament — election, starting from 1977. And then there are memories of the 1990s being overcrowded with Lok Sabha elections, of coalition governments that did and didn't last, of nuclear tests conducted in 1998 and many others. But my oldest and most unforgettable memories are of the Emergency declared in India from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977.

Although there was growing resentment towards the Indira Gandhi-led Congress government in the mid-1970s, this infamous event's immediate trigger was the Allahabad High Court verdict. It declared her election to the Lok

Sabha invalid. The court also disqualified her from holding public office for six years.

Instead of resigning as prime minister, she chose to declare a state of emergency and establish her absolute authority over the country. Citizens' fundamental rights, which included freedom of speech, stood suspended. Newspapers and magazines could only publish what the government approved. The public broadcasting organization Doordarshan and radio station All India Radio, both already run by the government, became propaganda instruments of Indira's regime. Over 100,000 people, including my father, K.R. Malkani, were arrested under the draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Under this act, anyone who even spoke out against the government could be arrested and held indefinitely without trial, on the pretext of maintaining national security.

Indira declared the Emergency during our school summer holidays. I was eight years old then. As young children, my ten-year-old sister and I knew that my father would fearlessly write against Indira. The following are all the stories I have recollected and documented from that period.

The night of June 25, 1975

On the night of June 25, our family was sleeping in the courtyard at the front of our house, as we often did during Delhi's scorching summer. My sister and I slept through the night, unaware that we had had visitors at an unearthly hour.

The next morning, my mother, Sundari Malkani, told us that the police had visited us soon after midnight. They did not enter the courtyard but called out my father's name from the gate. My parents woke up and learned that the police wanted my father to accompany them to the nearby station. When my mother asked them why, their response was that my father knew the reason. For

some support, my mother woke up my older brother, who was 17 then. She wanted to request a neighbor to accompany my father to the station. As she opened the back door to walk to his house, she realized that the police had our home surrounded.

I also learned from my father's book, *The Midnight Knock*, that before leaving home, he turned and looked at us children, thinking that perhaps this might be the last time he would see us.

I don't recall my sister or myself crying upon hearing the news. We probably didn't understand what it meant for our family. I didn't know the meaning of the word arrest until my mother explained it to me.

My mother's incredible bravery

I learned, also from *The Midnight Knock*, that my father had left a modest balance in his bank account. Meanwhile, on that dark night, my mother was left with two frightening worries. The first was my father's safety; under MISA, officers would not convey why a person was being arrested, where they were being taken and for how long. The second was our family's financial uncertainty. Our sole breadwinner was now gone, but we still had to be fed and educated. Throughout that dark period, she was very brave. Despite our family having almost no money at hand, the swim classes my sister and I started that summer continued unabated.

All three of us studied in Modern School, New Delhi's then-most expensive school, which was also considered one of the best in the country. It wasn't easy for my parents to afford the fees but they cut other household and personal expenses to give us a good education. Thankfully, my brother had finished his schooling by 1975. Moving my sister and me to a government-run school would have reduced monthly expenses but it would have

also compromised the quality of our education and exposure. For our futures' sake, we stayed at our school. I learned several years later that my mother's Delhi-based brother was financially supporting her, as were at least two family friends, one in Mumbai and another outside India.

The family car was provided by my father's office. It could not be sold off to get money to run the house, nor could it be left unused month after month. During this time of uncertainty, my strong mother learned how to drive and took up the additional responsibility of driving the family around. Unlike the summer of 1975, when we used to take a bus to National Stadium for swim classes, the following summer she would drive us and a few other kids from the neighborhood to swim lessons.

Despite the financial hardship, my mother managed to give us little pleasures of childhood as best she could. One of those was when right after swimming, she would occasionally take us for a movie instead of immediately heading home. I recall after one swim practice, we headed to the modest Stadium Cinema nearby, which was playing the Hindi movie, *Kalicharan*. None of us fancied watching it! *Sholay* was the most famous Hindi movie running during that period. Although we had much time on our hands during the summer holidays, not to mention the luxury of a car to drive us places, she didn't take us to watch it — possibly because of its violence and abusive dialogue.

Another time, when I asked for a bicycle, my mother tried to get me a second-hand one. When I saw the poor state it was in, I became very sad. So she bought me a new one, although a cheaper brand than the standard Atlas or Hero bike. I can't imagine what other expenses she would have compromised on to buy me a new, high-end one.

Visiting various jails

But going swimming and watching the occasional movie were among the sweeter memories from those 21 months. We also visited the jail regularly to spend time with my father. I don't know how and when my mother learned his whereabouts. He was first sent to a jail in Rohtak, Haryana, about 40 miles from Delhi. My uncle had two cars. Each time we went to visit my father, my uncle would lend us his personal driver and one of his cars, while he would drive himself to his office in his other car.

In the Rohtak jail, all the MISA detainees and their visitors met in a large hall. I did not know anyone else there. In the same crowded venue, my father had pointed out architect and politician Piloo Mody once, whose wife would visit him.

The next "home" for my father was the jail in Hissar, also in Haryana. It was about 100 miles from Delhi. Our first trip there took us a long time. We returned home at about 10 PM.

In Hissar, the rules were more stringent for visitors. We met my father in a small room in the presence of a few jail officers (or perhaps officers sent by the government) whose job was seemingly to listen to everything we said to each other. The seating was limited; during one visit, we were short one chair. Being the youngest visitor there, I sat on my father's lap. I was quiet and shy by nature, so when I wanted to say something to him, I started talking softly to him. One of the officers objected to this. My mother responded to him saying that "children are innocent" ("bachchay to masoom hotay hain"). But he still wasn't okay with me saying something he couldn't hear. I don't think I completed my sentence at all after that.

The third jail my father occupied was Delhi's Tihar Jail. I don't remember much of it at all. On either side of the huge door of the jail were the words, "Hate the sin, not the sinner." I think it was here that as we waited to enter the jail one day, a

large group of prisoners were being taken away in a bus. They were chanting in unison in Urdu, "Shanti Van say aayee aavaz, aaja beti mere paas" ("A voice is calling from Shanti Van — former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's cremation ground — come to me, my daughter"). My mother found it amusing.

For the jail visits, my mother would prepare a meal that all of us would eat together. This gave my father a break from jail food.

The jails allowed only two adult visitors at a time. My brother was 17, but the authorities still counted him as an adult. So, when any other adult relative wanted to visit my father along with us, my brother would have to stay home.

Balancing school and jail visits

Jail meetings were held late in the afternoon. To arrive on time, my sister and I had to leave during school hours. Initially, we both were in junior school — which encompasses elementary/primary and middle school — at Humayun Road. But after fifth standard (or fifth grade), she moved to senior school at Barakhambha Road. My uncle's driver would first come to my school to fetch me, then to my sister's school and then to our place for my mother and any other family member.

Up until fifth standard, we were not allowed to wear watches in school. So I had no idea what time it was or when I was supposed to wait outside school for my ride. The driver would reach my school and go hunting for me on campus. He would find me only by luck, because I was never looking for him! My sister, by contrast, was responsible and would be waiting outside the school when the driver and I arrived.

Once during a parent-teacher meeting, my sister's teacher said she was taken aback when my sister sought permission to visit our jailed father.

She said she had initially wondered what crime he had committed! But upon hearing the situation, the staff began showing thoughtfulness toward us and respect for my father.

Only one experience during this period was different. My Hindi teacher, Mrs. Sahai, a well-known terror, once asked the class to write an essay on Indira as our homework. When my mother saw the assignment, she was furious and asked me not to write it. The next day, I received a white card from the teacher — a severe punishment in my school, and the only time I ever received one. I started crying in class but she still wanted me to write the essay. Pressured, I managed to write a page, which is far shorter than a conventional essay.

I narrated the happenings to my mother. As I left the room, her neighborhood friend dropped in to meet her. My mother explained what happened, crying. It was also the only time I saw her cry during those 21 months.

We will never know if the topic of the essay was the teacher's choice or mandated by the government. It may not have been the latter, given that my sister did not get the same assignment. If this was the teacher's own choice, I can't imagine what purpose it served for anyone, including her.

Given how my family was impacted by Indira's Emergency, it was ridiculous of Sahai to punish me for not completing that assignment. A few days later, she tried to do damage control by telling me that a teacher is the children's mother in school. That made me think: Should the "mother in school" do something that makes the real mother cry? Of course, I didn't dare ask her that.

My father, a well-read prisoner

My father was an avid reader and used to spend most of his waking hours at home, reading. His

favorite book was *Choose Life: A Dialogue* (Echoes and Reflections), a dialogue between scholars Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda. A few times during my childhood, he had cited the saying, "A fool lends a book, and a bigger fool returns it!"

Being locked in jail had a silver lining: It enabled him to spend his time as he pleased. I imagine he spent a lot of the time in open discussions about the government, something Indira could do nothing to stop, given that the "offenders" were already in jail. He would also play badminton — we had given him one of the racquets from home — and read a lot.

One of my Pune-based cousins owned a bookshop called Modern Book Stall. My father used to give my mother names of books he wanted to read, which she would send to my cousin. Whenever he sent us the books, we would take them to my father.

During one of our visits, he had finished reading all the books he had in jail, and we had no new one to give him. I generously offered him my *The Adventures of Tintin* comic book, which I'd brought to read in the car. He accepted the offer. He had the habit of marking interesting sections in the margins of books he read. I don't remember if he found anything in *Prisoners of the Sun* worth marking, but he wrote down a few words on the last page, which he wanted to explain to me the meanings of. The first among those was "Inca."

I don't know how much of the story he understood, given that he hadn't read the preceding comic, *The Seven Crystal Balls*. But then again, neither had I.

The bored spy in our neighborhood

My mother was sure our phone was being tapped. She also spotted someone standing some distance from our house and watching our place all day.

Presumably, the government hired this person to keep surveillance on our visitors. Every journalist with a spine was already in jail, as were Opposition — political parties not supporting the ruling cabinet — leaders and tens of thousands of Opposition workers. So, this person clearly wouldn't have anything interesting to report.

Possibly bored with the lack of action, he once asked a neighbor's domestic worker — informal workers in India who perform household tasks for clients — to keep an eye on our place while he took a break. The domestic worker then informed the lady of the house of this conversation. The good neighbor promptly came and told my mother about it, confirming her suspicion.

A meeting with Indira that didn't happen

One person who used to visit our house during the Emergency was a man named Bhikshu (ordained Buddhist monk) Chaman Lal. I have no recollection of who he was or what he looked like. Some years after the Emergency, my father narrated one incident related to him.

On one of his visits to our home, he told my mother that he was going to meet Indira and tried to convince her to accompany him, saying that she did not need to say anything during the meeting. My mother wasn't sure if this was right. At that same time, her brother happened to drop in at our place. He heard this suspicious-sounding invitation and advised my mother to decline it.

While narrating this story, my father said it was a very wise move. The visit could have been projected by the media as a meeting in which my mother apologized for my father's stand against Indira — something he would never have done.

My mother, an active rally-goer

One Sunday evening, a large rally was organized, possibly by some Opposition leaders who were released from jail early. My mother drove to the rally and took a few interested people with her. She said it was a very well-attended one. While the rally was on, a helicopter hovered over the venue, possibly to assess how big the anti-government/Emergency movement was. They organized a second rally for the following Sunday.

Through the '70s, Doordarshan was a drab affair — we'd rarely switch the TV on. But every TV-owning household would watch the movie that aired on Sunday evenings, however boring it may have been that week. But the station announced unexpectedly that it would broadcast the relatively new movie, Bobby, on the evening of the second rally, instead of a much older movie, which I remember being Waqt. It seemed a desperate attempt by the government to prevent people from attending the rally. But it worked! My mother mentioned at home that the crowd this time was much smaller than in the first.

India's growing resentment

As the oppression continued, the populace's resentment of Indira grew. While people did not dare speak against her outside of private conversations with trusted people, I remember an incident that demonstrated the popular acrimony. Along the road leading to Minto Bridge in Delhi, a very long billboard had been put up. It had Indira painted in the center, with a vast number of small, faceless figures behind her, implying she was leading the country's masses. I used to see it every day as my school bus passed from the nearby outer circle of Connaught Place, New Delhi's business hub.

One day, my mother learned that someone had smeared tar on Indira's face on that billboard. I saw the spectacle on my busride the next day. Before long, the tar was scraped off and her face

painted back on the billboard. Whoever the “tartist” was, it was incredibly brave of them to do so, knowing any person could well have spotted them and got them arrested.

And then there was this joke I heard in school. I shared it with my mother, who had a good laugh over it. It went like this: Rajiv Gandhi (Indira’s older son, who was a pilot then) is flying Indira and Sanjay Gandhi (Indira’s younger son) in a plane. As they fly over a village, they look down at it. Indira says, “If I throw ten rupees down from here, that will make the villagers very happy!” Sanjay betters her proposal and says, “If I throw 100 rupees down from here, that will make the villagers happier!” Rajiv betters both their proposals and says, “If I throw both of you down from here, that will make the villagers the happiest!”

As time passed, some prominent Opposition members were released. Shri L.K. Advani and Shri A.B. Vajpayee were among them. After his release, one Opposition leader went to meet Indira. He asked her about Nana Deshmukh’s and my father’s release. She said my father would be released soon, but did not commit to Deshmukh’s release. However, from what I recall, he was released soon after, while my father continued to wait in jail. We will never know for sure why my father was among the last to see release, given the hardship we — his family — were enduring. One can only assume it was driven by personal hatred.

Election day: March 16–17, 1977

Ultimately, elections were announced. My mother was very active on election day. She drove several elderly people in the neighborhood to the polling booth and back. As the day progressed, she also went to some neighbors’ homes reminding them to go and vote. She had a very close friend two houses away from ours whose husband was an unwavering Congress voter. As my mother was

visiting other houses in the neighborhood, she asked my sister and me to go and remind her friend to vote. Innocent of the reason for her not going there herself (I suppose she was hurt at them not committing to vote for the Janata Party), we both went to their place. The friend’s husband looked slightly surprised on hearing our message, possibly thinking it was nice of my mother to remind them despite his political preference.

My father’s release

The election results were announced over a few days. For us kids, it was a novel and delightful experience that Hindi movies were being broadcast for a few days in a row. The unfolding election results — what little we understood of them — would have added to the delight.

From what I recall, my father was released only after the government’s defeat was announced. My mother and a few neighbors went to Rohtak to bring him home. I think my uncle’s car and driver were unavailable that evening, and one neighbor had volunteered to drive our car. A huge number of people visited us that night to meet him.

The next morning, I told the other kids at my school bus stop that my father had been released. At last, it had happened!

A quarter-century after the Emergency was lifted, when my father lived in the city of Pondicherry, a close friend of the Nehru-Gandhi family visited him. During their chat, my father asked him what had made Indira finally lift the Emergency. His insight was that major democracies in the world had strongly objected to the imposition of the Emergency in India. He also mentioned that the jailing of Gayatri Devi, the Rajmata (“Queen Mother”) of the royal family of Jaipur had particularly offended the British royal family. Indira eventually succumbed to international pressure.

The Emergency can't be forgotten

The majority of India's population today was born after the Emergency. They know little, if anything, about that period. However, as the famous saying goes, those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

While one can safely assume that no political party today will impose the kind and extent of oppression the Emergency did. But since the Emergency, and indeed, even in the decades preceding it, the Indian government has imposed or attempted to impose curbs on its people's freedoms. A particularly perverse attempt was the Defamation Bill of 1988, introduced by the same party that imposed the Emergency. The decade of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance wasn't particularly supportive of free speech. On the other hand, similar accusations have been hurled by the Congress against the Union Government led by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Fortunately, the present government has ensured greater visibility of this period by declaring today, June 25, as Samvidhan Hatya Divas ("Day of murder of the constitution," or Constitution Murder Day). Additionally, over the decades, several books — from the late '70s to a few years ago — have been written on the Emergency. Notable among these are B.N. Tandon's PMO-1 Prelude to the Emergency, Coomi Kapoor's The Emergency: A Personal History, A. Surya Prakash's The Emergency: Indian Democracy's Darkest Hour, my father's The Midnight Knock, Janardan Thakur's All the Prime Minister's Men and Advani's My Country, My Life. Interestingly, aside from the last (which has a chapter on the Emergency), each of these was published when Congress was not in power in New Delhi.

A deeper understanding of the Emergency will give us context to understand the present better. That dark chapter of history must be discussed and documented extensively for the benefit of future generations.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



Vikram Malkani has been the associate director at Indian Century Roundtable, an India-focused think tank. He has over three decades of experience across a variety of roles in India's Information Technology industry and has spent nearly 20 years working for one of Australia's largest banks. Vikram has also been a freelance writer for several years. He is passionate about gathering data from diverse sources and analyzing it to gain insights into India's socioeconomic development. His articles and research based on his analyses have been published in India and internationally. Vikram earned his Bachelor of Engineering degree at the University of Mumbai.

The Faces of American Oligarchy

Usama Malik
June 27, 2025

A plutocratic elite seeks to reshape American society for its own gain. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), an organization ostensibly meant to streamline the government, serves as a vehicle to privatize public functions and dismantle democratic safeguards. We must act now to reform our institutions and preserve our democracy.

[U]sama Malik wrote this article shortly after the 2024 US presidential election. Although it does not reflect post-inauguration events, Fair Observer believes the analysis remains insightful and relevant.]

America stands at a perilous crossroads, caught between the calcification of its democratic institutions and the ascendance of a plutocratic elite intent on remaking society in their image. This moment encapsulates the nation's existential struggle: whether to renew its foundational commitment to democracy and accountability or to yield to the unchecked power of oligarchs cloaking their ambitions in the language of freedom and progress. Figures like Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, David Sacks, Marc Andreessen, Vivek Ramaswamy and the like are not merely "entrepreneurs" or "investors" — they are the architects of an opportunistic agenda that threatens to dismantle democracy while exacerbating inequality and societal division.

At the core of this crisis is the erosion of the democratic institutions that once served as a bulwark against authoritarianism and economic monopolization. For decades, the executive branch and its sprawling bureaucracy have become increasingly ineffective, weighed down by redundancy, opacity and political polarization. The result is a government that struggles to adapt to modern challenges, fueling public frustration and a growing sense of alienation. This institutional stagnation has created fertile ground for those who claim that the system is beyond repair — often the same actors who have most benefited from its failures.

The privatization of power

The need for reform is real. Bureaucracies must be restructured to serve the public, with a renewed focus on transparency and accountability. Yet those now leading the charge for "efficiency" are

anything but reformers. Plutocrats like Musk and Ramaswamy exploit public discontent, offering false solutions that prioritize privatization and corporate capture over genuine progress. Musk and Ramaswamy's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE — a non-governmental, undemocratic, unaccountable organization) is emblematic of this strategy. Under the guise of streamlining government, it seeks to shift public functions into private hands, funneling resources to corporations while eroding the public's ability to hold them accountable.

This approach reflects a broader oligarchic playbook. Wealthy elites position themselves as champions of freedom and innovation, while lobbying to weaken the regulatory frameworks that safeguard democracy. Musk, whose businesses have relied heavily on government subsidies and contracts, now rails against the very state that enabled his success. Thiel openly dismisses democracy as incompatible with capitalism's purest forms, advocating instead for a society where decision-making is concentrated in the hands of the competent few — a thinly veiled justification for oligarchic rule.

These actors weaponize societal divisions to advance their agendas. Musk's acquisition of the social media platform, Twitter (now X), illustrates this strategy, transforming a platform for public dialogue into a megaphone for conspiracy theories and divisive rhetoric. By amplifying grievances and stoking distrust in institutions, they cultivate a base of disillusioned followers who view them as truth-tellers and saviors. Yet their populist rhetoric masks a darker reality: Their ultimate goal is to dismantle the structures of oversight that stand in the way of their consolidation of power.

The capture of public discourse is matched by a parallel assault on regulatory and judicial systems. The Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision unleashed a flood of corporate money into politics,

allowing billionaires to exert disproportionate influence over policy and governance. Figures like Thiel and Andreessen leverage this dynamic to shape legislation and public policy, ensuring that the rules bend to their advantage. Their investments in political campaigns, such as Musk's \$277 million contribution to US President-elect Donald Trump's 2024 campaign, are not acts of civic engagement but strategic moves to entrench their dominance.

The rhetoric of these oligarchs is steeped in the language of classical liberalism and free-market economics, but their actions betray a profound misunderstanding — or deliberate distortion — of these philosophies. Thinkers like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman championed free markets, but they also acknowledged the necessity of institutional guardrails to prevent monopolies and ensure fairness. In the hands of today's plutocrats, these ideas have been twisted into an anarcho-capitalist fantasy, where government exists solely to protect property rights and privilege, not to serve the collective good.

This feedback loop between institutional erosion and plutocratic capture is deeply pernicious. As democratic systems falter, they become less capable of addressing legitimate grievances, fueling further disillusionment and creating openings for oligarchic exploitation. Musk's obsession with Mars colonization and Thiel's investments in doomsday bunkers reveal their ultimate outlook: a society where escape and survival are privileges reserved for the elite, leaving the rest of humanity to grapple with the consequences of their unchecked extraction.

The warning is clear: These figures have no interest in preserving democracy, equality or collective progress. Their vision is one of opportunistic disruption, where the mechanisms of accountability are dismantled under the pretense of efficiency and innovation. Regulatory agencies,

courts and public oversight, imperfect as they may be, are the only barriers preventing the concentration of power into a few hands. Their dismantling would leave society vulnerable to exploitation on an unprecedented scale.

Reform to save democracy

And yet, while resisting this encroaching oligarchy, we cannot ignore the urgent need for institutional reform. America's bureaucracies must evolve to meet the demands of the 21st century. This requires not just efficiency but transparency, equity and a renewed commitment to serving the public. Reform must aim to modernize outdated processes, empower regulatory agencies to oversee complex industries and rebuild public trust in government. Crucially, it must prioritize the public good over corporate and oligarchic interests, ensuring that democracy serves all Americans, not just the privileged few.

The American experiment is at a tipping point. The promise of democracy — a government of, by, and for the people — is under siege by those who would replace it with a system where power is synonymous with wealth. The stakes are nothing less than the soul of the nation. If we fail to confront this threat, we risk surrendering our future to the ambitions of a few, abandoning the ideals of equality, freedom and shared prosperity that define the American dream.

This is not merely a battle for governance; it is a battle for the essence of who we are as a society. The time for complacency is over. To safeguard democracy, we must demand reform that serves the people and reject the hollow promises of those who seek to exploit our divisions. America's future depends on our ability to see through the rhetoric of freedom and efficiency and to recognize these oligarchs for what they are: opportunists intent on consolidating power at the expense of the nation. The choice is ours, and the time to act is now.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



Usama Malik is a global business leader whose perspective has been shaped by living and working across Africa, Asia, the US and Europe.

Beyond his executive roles — where he has transformed healthcare companies and raised billions in capital — Usama has spent three decades advancing healthcare equity, women’s and children’s rights, disaster recovery and arts access in underserved communities. He has written broadly on a wide range of topics, including religious dogmatism in Pakistan, Palestinian rights, capitalism’s limitations and the rise of authoritarianism. Usama advocates for business models that transcend traditional profit motives to address humanity’s pressing challenges. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maryland and completed his MBA at INSEAD.

Bridging the Divide: Inflation Expectations, Consumer Sentiment and the Fed’s Challenge

Masaaki Yoshimori
June 27, 2025

Despite slowing inflation rates, consumers remain concerned about high prices due to cumulative cost increases since the Covid-19 pandemic. This disconnect between consumer sentiment and market-based inflation expectations challenges the Federal Reserve, as

inflation expectations influence real economic behavior and policy effectiveness. Rebuilding public trust in monetary policy demands transparent communication, narrative clarity and acknowledgment of the lived experience of inflation.

The Federal Reserve (Fed) has painted a picture of a US economy in which businesses are increasingly concerned about rising input costs and are planning to pass those costs on to consumers. As of June 2025, households seem to be bracing for a return to higher prices. All three major consumer surveys — University of Michigan, New York Fed and Conference Board — put expected inflation over the next year at more than 3%, with two even higher. According to the University of Michigan, these inflation fears are widespread across age and income groups. These shifts in sentiment underscore a core challenge for the Fed: how to manage inflation expectations amid lingering public unease.

The Fed’s tightrope

It is tempting to dismiss consumer expectations as noisy or unreliable. Fed Governor Christopher Waller recently remarked, “I tend to discount survey-based measures of inflation ... since investors have more skin in the game than survey respondents,” highlighting his preference for market-based signals like breakeven inflation rates, which he views as more grounded in economic incentives and real-time information.

Historically, consumers tend to overestimate inflation, but this doesn’t negate the economic importance of their views. Consumer and business expectations shape wage bargaining, consumption

patterns and price-setting behavior. In that sense, they can become self-fulfilling.

Anchored long-term inflation expectations, which remain stable in the face of temporary shocks to inflation, are a cornerstone of the Fed's credibility and its ability to effectively manage monetary policy. In March, Fed Governor Adriana Kugler expressed concern over the recent rise in five-year inflation expectations, which reached 3.9% according to the University of Michigan's survey. She highlighted that such elevated expectations could complicate the Fed's efforts to maintain price stability and underscored the importance of preventing inflation expectations from becoming unanchored.

Similarly, Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari reinforced this view by stating that anchoring inflation expectations is "paramount" for the success of monetary policy. Both officials emphasized that stable, well-anchored expectations allow the Fed to respond flexibly to economic changes without fueling further inflation or triggering unnecessary market volatility.

Historical context

Historically, consumers have expected more inflation than has actually materialized. Market-based measures like Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities (TIPS) breakevens or the Survey of Professional Forecasters tend to offer more accurate inflation predictions. But during the 2021–2022 inflation shock, consumers were surprisingly prescient. While central bankers and markets underestimated the magnitude and persistence of price increases, consumer expectations were more aligned with the actual inflation trajectory.

This rare alignment between consumer expectations and realized inflation has had significant psychological and policy consequences.

After a decade of subdued inflation, the rapid price increases during this episode left a lasting mark on household sentiment. For many consumers, the experience of visibly higher prices for essentials like food, gasoline and rent reinforced a belief that inflation was persistent.

Even as inflation metrics have cooled, these expectations have remained elevated. The episode re-anchored inflation perceptions at a higher level, demonstrating that consumer expectations, while often dismissed, can be shaped by salient price shocks and may carry enduring influence in the broader inflation narrative.

This insight brings us to another source of confusion and tension: how inflation is measured, and why that often diverges from how it is felt.

Headline inflation vs. technical inflation

Despite grocery prices rising less than 2% over the past year and price increases slowing since mid-2022, consumers in 2025 still cite groceries as their top economic concern. This disconnect is clearer when noting that grocery prices have increased over 27% in the past five years. While inflation measures the rate of price change over time, consumers often feel the cumulative burden of higher prices without focusing on specific periods. Unlike economists who differentiate between inflation rates and price levels, consumers perceive persistently higher price levels as ongoing economic pressure.

This distinction between headline inflation and consumer experience is more than a technical nuance — it shapes how the public perceives inflation and forms expectations. Consumers focus on the prices of everyday essentials, even though these items may have relatively small weights in core inflation metrics that exclude volatile components. For instance, the recent spike in egg prices caused by avian flu garnered widespread

attention, despite eggs accounting for less than 0.2% of the typical consumer basket. Such noticeable price jumps can heavily influence consumer inflation perceptions, even when headline inflation remains stable or low.

Meanwhile, inflation measures favored by policymakers are often complex and less transparent to the general public. These include core inflation, which tracks how prices are rising while excluding the unpredictable food and energy; trimmed-mean consumer price index (CPI), a measure of core inflation that excludes components with the most extreme price changes in a given period; and the personal consumption expenditure (PCE) deflator, a measure of inflation that reflects the price changes of goods and services purchased by buyers in the United States. These measures smooth out fluctuations by excluding volatile categories to highlight underlying inflation trends. However, this approach can create a disconnect between what economists consider “transitory” price changes and the persistently higher price levels consumers feel daily. This gap complicates communication efforts and poses a challenge for the Fed, as it must bridge the divide between technical inflation data and public perceptions to effectively shape inflation expectations.

The inflation perception gap

While year-over-year inflation rates have moderated, the cumulative increase in prices since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic remains substantial — creating a persistent gap between technical measures of disinflation and the public’s lived experience. For instance, grocery prices may have risen only 2% over the past year, but they are still over 27% higher than five years ago. For households, this cumulative burden shapes perceptions of inflation more powerfully than monthly data releases or core inflation indices. This helps explain why consumer inflation

expectations remain elevated, even as headline inflation decelerates.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York’s May 2025 Survey of Consumer Expectations reflects tentative progress: Median inflation expectations declined across the one-, three- and five-year horizons — to 3.2%, 3% and 2.6%, respectively — and the range of disagreement among respondents also narrowed. These developments suggest early signs of re-anchoring.

However, they should be interpreted with caution. Statistical improvement in expectations may not fully capture the enduring psychological impact of accumulated price increases. In this sense, inflation expectations are not only backward-looking or forward-looking — they are experience-based. Until the cumulative effects of high prices are addressed or better communicated, the disconnect between macroeconomic data and consumer sentiment will likely continue, complicating the Fed’s efforts to stabilize expectations through traditional policy channels.

Recognizing this gap is only the first step. Addressing it requires recalibration of not just tools, but also the Fed’s messaging and its understanding of public inflation psychology.

How can the Fed influence inflation expectations?

The Fed influences inflation expectations through a combination of traditional policy tools and forward-looking communication strategies, with the ultimate goal of maintaining price stability. One conventional method is adjusting short-term interest rates to help bring inflation closer to the Fed’s long-run target of 2%. However, when interest rates are near zero — as they were following the Global Financial Crisis and again during the Covid-19 pandemic — the Fed increasingly turns to forward guidance. This

involves clearly communicating the likely future course of monetary policy to shape public beliefs and economic decisions today. Over time, this approach has become a crucial component of the Fed's policy toolkit.

The focus on managing expectations is grounded in decades of economic theory. In the late 1960s, economists Milton Friedman and Edmund Phelps argued that inflation expectations were central to the inflation-unemployment tradeoff. Their insights laid the groundwork for what would become the rational expectations revolution, further advanced by Lucas and Sargent in 1972 and 1973, respectively. These economists showed that when economic agents anticipate future policy actions, unanticipated monetary moves lose effectiveness, shifting emphasis to policy credibility and transparency. In this view, influencing expectations is not just a communication task but a core mechanism of how modern monetary policy affects real outcomes like wages, prices and employment.

Reflecting this understanding, the Fed adopted a new policy framework in August 2020 called Flexible Average Inflation Targeting (FAIT). While keeping its 2% inflation target intact, the Fed announced that it would allow inflation to temporarily overshoot 2% following periods of underperformance, to make up for earlier shortfalls. Under the previous regime, the Fed simply tried to return inflation to target without compensating for missed periods. FAIT, by contrast, aimed to re-anchor inflation expectations by committing to a more symmetrical and flexible response: encouraging inflation above 2% when necessary but not forcing it below 2% to counteract overshoots. This shift signaled a stronger commitment to long-term price stability and acknowledged the real-world limitations of past frameworks, especially in an era of persistently low inflation.

Policy implications

The widening gap between consumer and market-based inflation expectations reveals a deeper structural tension in today's macroeconomic landscape, one that sits at the intersection of lived economic experience and technocratic abstraction. For households, inflation is not a number — it is a felt reality shaped by rising grocery bills, rent increases and medical expenses. These cumulative costs are embedded in memory and daily life. By contrast, markets and professional forecasters focus on marginal changes, statistical smoothing and forward-looking indicators that may fail to capture the emotional and social imprint of past inflation shocks.

This disconnect is not merely academic. It has direct consequences for monetary policy transmission. Inflation expectations — especially those held by consumers and businesses — are foundational to wage bargaining, pricing behavior and consumption decisions. When these expectations become unanchored or diverge from the Fed's target, they can either erode the effectiveness of rate hikes or delay the benefits of easing.

Importantly, expectations are not static predictions — they are shaped by narratives, trust and communication. The Fed has long understood this, using forward guidance, transparency initiatives and public messaging policy as tools. Yet today's landscape demands more than precision in data or elegance in models. It requires the Fed to build and maintain a shared understanding with the public — economic storytelling that can bridge the expectations gap.

To succeed, the Fed must walk a narrow path. It must reaffirm its inflation-fighting credibility without triggering public panic or undermining economic recovery. It must explain the difference between inflation levels and rates, between core

and headline measures and between technical volatility and structural risk. And crucially, it must do so while recognizing the legitimacy of consumer concerns rather than dismissing them as noise.

If the Fed can anchor expectations across both Main Street and Wall Street — tempering fears, reinforcing trust and providing policy clarity — it will reestablish control over inflation dynamics and restore confidence in the broader framework of monetary governance. That outcome is not just a technical success. It is a prerequisite for economic resilience in a world of rising uncertainty.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



Masaaki Yoshimori is an economist. He was born in Ashiya and grew up in Kuwana, Japan. He belongs to the McCourt School of Public Policy, a constituent school of Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He previously served as a fellow in International Economics at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Yoshimori's research spans a broad spectrum of critical issues in global economics, including monetary policy, exchange rate policy, financial regulation, macroeconomics and the intersections of climate change with economic systems. Additionally, his work delves into the political economy, exploring the impacts of globalization on the monetary system and the evolving challenges faced by global financial institutions.

Karol Nawrocki Becomes President in a Divided Poland

Mikołaj Tomasz Słowański
June 28, 2025

Karol Nawrocki narrowly won Poland's 2025 presidential election after voters turned against Prime Minister Donald Tusk's government for failing to deliver on key promises. Nawrocki enters office with backing from the opposition and has positioned himself as a rival to the ruling coalition. The presidency is now a potential center of resistance that could slow legislation, shift public debate and challenge Poland's position in the European Union.

Karol Nawrocki's narrow victory in Poland's 2025 presidential election reveals the enduring relevance of the country's head of state. Although the Polish presidency does not carry executive authority, the office occupies a unique position between the constitutional framework and political reality. The president cannot direct the government or control the national budget, but in moments of crisis or division, he can disrupt legislation, influence public debate and shape the country's external image. Nawrocki's election highlights the presidency's potential to be a counterbalance and catalyst in Polish politics.

The role of the president

In Poland, the strength of the presidency depends less on provisions and more on political circumstances, particularly the balance of power in parliament, public sentiment and, above all, the individual president's political skill. While the

president typically lacks a formal party affiliation, they rarely govern in ideological isolation. Their ability to cooperate with or confront the government depends on their political background and the moment in which they hold office.

Poland's constitution assigns the presidency a flexible, often ambiguous role. The president does not lead the government, draft the budget or manage daily administration. However, the office provides tools that can become powerful under the right conditions. A president whose political allies control parliament often adopts a supportive posture. In such cases, they approve legislation, attend official functions and stay within the boundaries of consensus. The presidency then fades from public focus and loses direct influence over policy.

That dynamic changes when political divisions sharpen. A president aligned with a party in opposition to the parliamentary majority often adopts a combative stance, assuming the role of the "last bastion" of their constituents. They can wield the veto, delay reforms and use public platforms to dispute the government's direction. These actions give the presidency weight, not through domination, but through resistance. The office becomes a vehicle for political friction, especially when the ruling coalition lacks a strong majority or public confidence begins to erode.

Nawrocki's election as a voice of opposition

Karol Nawrocki's election to the Polish presidency reflected more than a narrow electoral margin. Though he won by only one percentage point, his victory sent a clear message. Polish voters rejected the ruling coalition's candidate, a seasoned political figure aligned with Prime Minister Donald Tusk, and instead backed a candidate linked to Law and Justice (PiS), the party voters had recently removed from power in parliament.

This outcome signaled a protest vote, not in favor of the previous government but against the current one. Tusk's Civic Coalition (Platforma Obywatelska, or PO) took power after the 2023 election but quickly lost momentum. Despite promises of moderation and reform, the government struggled to deliver results or maintain public trust. Instead of galvanizing national support, it fueled disappointment. At the same time, the ruling camp's presidential candidate, politically experienced but embedded in the scheme of things, failed to convince voters that his election would correct the parliamentary course.

Nawrocki, though formally independent, campaigned with open support from Law and Justice. While campaigning, he offered a conservative, nationalist message that rejected political elites and resonated with voters tired of the PO-PiS rivalry yet skeptical of Tusk's leadership. For many voters, it was not a choice "for PiS" but rather "against Platform." The public, clearly polarized, opted for a candidate who represented a more decisive worldview, while avoiding party labels and party responsibility.

This victory shows the importance of the presidency in moments of political deadlock. Nawrocki entered office not as a collaborator with the government, but as its institutional counterweight. His election reaffirms that a president can command more authority than the dry text of the Constitution would assume, particularly when voters perceive gridlock or drift in the rest of the political system.

More than representation

Although Poland's government leads foreign policy, the president holds constitutionally mandated responsibilities with global implications. He appoints ambassadors, signs international treaties and serves as the country's public face abroad. During moments of crisis or geopolitical

uncertainty, the President's symbolic leadership can become politically consequential.

Karol Nawrocki, who built his public identity through the Institute of National Remembrance (a state institution focused on Poland's history under totalitarian rule), brings a historically rooted worldview. He promotes conservative values, prioritizes national sovereignty and remains skeptical of deeper European integration. During his campaign, he emphasized the need for "Poland's subjective voice" in the European Union, a phrase that signals opposition to automatic alignment with EU-wide policies.

As president, Nawrocki may attempt to slow or block government-supported initiatives tied to EU law, climate transformation and judicial cooperation. His election raises concerns in Brussels and other European capitals, where leaders had expected Poland under Tusk to return to the pro-European mainstream. Some governments now see Nawrocki's victory as a sign of political instability or diminished consensus on European policy. At the same time, his presidency may strengthen ties with the conservative leaders in Hungary, Slovakia, Italy and parts of France.

Nawrocki's symbolic influence could also reshape Poland's role in NATO and its regional diplomacy. As the country's representative at transatlantic summits and in relations with Ukraine and the Baltic states, he may emphasize sovereignty and historical continuity. This rhetoric appeals to leaders wary of supranationalism but could create friction with Western partners expecting clarity, predictability, and strategic alignment from Warsaw.

Foreign policy under Nawrocki will likely reflect quiet divergence rather than open conflict. Differences between the president and the government may emerge through tone, timing and diplomatic emphasis. In principle, moderation

would reduce friction. Yet in a world marked by war and instability, many Poles may welcome a president who privileges national identity and symbolic clarity over ideological conformity.

Whatever path Nawrocki chooses, his presidency carries more weight than the constitution alone might suggest. In times of fragmentation and doubt, Poland's head of state has the opportunity — and perhaps the obligation — to move from the margins to the center of political life.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



Mikołaj Słowański is a Polish writer and analyst based in Poland. He trained at the Doctrine and Training Centre of the Polish Armed Forces in the city of Bydgoszcz. He began his writing journey during his studies. Mikołaj has published in the Polish newspaper *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*. He spent four years writing professional briefs on the war in Ukraine and China's influence in Africa for professors at Nicolaus Copernicus University. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Politics and Diplomacy at Nicolaus Copernicus University in the city of Toruń. He dedicates his free time to learning military technology news, cooking and the fictional *Warhammer 40k* universe.

Tensions Break Out Across Syria As Promising Honeymoon Wanes

Fernando Carvajal
June 28, 2025

The HTS government in Syria struggles to maintain its influence. Sectarian and ethnic conflict has erupted across the country as jihadist military forces target ethnic and religious minorities, threatening HTS leader al-Jawlani's hope to lift sanctions. The chaos has revealed the cracks in al-Jawlani's sham charm offensive and challenges Syria's efforts to stabilize the region.

On December 8, 2024, Syrian opposition forces overthrew the Bashar al-Assad government. The group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formed a new government with its leader, Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani, at the helm. However, the hope for a stable Syria has not lasted. Instability deepens as Damascus fails to fill the power vacuum across multiple fronts.

Weak control over security forces and the re-emergence of Islamic State (IS) fighters are chipping away at al-Jawlani's six-month-old charm offensive. Widespread sectarian conflict has predictably erupted as HTS attempts to consolidate power. In addition, the US has withdrawn its military presence in the region. This will undoubtedly derail al-Jawlani's expectations for stability, and also challenge his grip on jihadist militants within government ranks.

Jihadist militants target minority ethnic groups

Ethnic and sectarian conflict has now engulfed the whole of Syria. The US withdrawal from a base near the Koniko gas field in the Deir ez-Zor and Al-Tanf areas has undoubtedly opened the door for IS and other jihadists to mobilize and engage hostilities against minority groups such as Alawites, Druze, Orthodox Christians and Kurds.

The massacre of Alawites in Latakia at the hands of HTS security forces and jihadist militants was the initial sign of the chaos to come. As recent as last month, HTS and jihadist elements targeted minority communities across Damascus outskirts and eastern regions. Their primary goal is to expand territorial control and repress any dissent against the HTS government. Damascus deflects media attention by claiming pro-Assad elements are behind the chaos, but evidence clearly points to extremist HTS groups inciting conflict.

Fighting between al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS militants and Druze and Kurdish militias has returned to old areas of contention such as Manbij, north of Aleppo, but has also been present across the rest of Syria. Clashes in the Jaramana, Sahnaya and Mezzeh districts of Damascus specifically target Druze. In the town of Ashrafiyah, Druze civilians were attacked by armed elements that included men wearing IS patches on unmarked military uniforms. Jihadist militants continue to threaten civilians in Latakia and Aleppo.

In addition, concern has grown among Kurds following the appointment of Hatem Ihsan Fayyad al-Hayes, also known as Abu Hatem Shaqra, to the position of commander of the 86th Division, responsible for Raqqa, Deir ez Zor and Hasakah. Previously, Abu Hatem Shaqra served as the leader of Ahrar al-Sharqiya, a Turkish-backed militant group. Ahrar al-Sharqiya is responsible for the killing of Hevrin Khalaf, a Syrian-Kurdish politician. As such, Abu Hatem Shaqra is sanctioned by the US. He has also been accused of several extrajudicial killings.

Abu Hatem Shaqra is not an isolated case. Across Syria, unidentified armed groups are conducting extrajudicial executions of known Assad regime affiliates as well as Druze militias. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS elements have targeted students across Suweida, and other jihadist militants continue to threaten civilians in

Latakia and Aleppo. HTS gunmen even orchestrated a raid on the Layli Al-Sharq restaurant in Damascus. While HTS has denied involvement, the capital's residents are concerned over the heavy-handed approach employed by government forces.

Similar incidents across the country further expose al-Jawlani's sham charm offensive. HTS continues to cover up the crimes of extremist militants within the government ranks. Clearly, al-Jawlani's HTS forces have failed to fill a security vacuum, and Damascus has no grip over its own forces.

Foreign interests and militants also pose a problem

Further, clashes in the east and northeast represent major threats beyond Syria's borders. Foreign jihadist militants have re-emerged across Ashrafiyat, Deir ez Zor, Hasakah and Raqqa, possibly threatening the route of natural gas from Qatar through Jordan. This could bring devastating effects to the Syrian civilians who rely on Qatar's resources. In addition, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a US-backed Kurdish force, remain concerned over the future of jihadist elements detained at the al-Hol and Roj camps. Over 8,000 foreign fighters from 60 countries remain at these camps, raising alarms over potential threats of foreign fighters targeting the camps in efforts to break out detainees.

The resurgence in foreign IS activity in Syria has not gone unnoticed by the global powers. Despite their withdrawal from military bases in Syria, the US continues to carry out counter-terrorism operations along eastern regions. The US administration has demanded accountability from the HTS government, particularly from "foreign terrorist fighters [in] any official roles." The US also remains hesitant regarding sanctions on al-Jawlani, al-Qaeda affiliates and institutions.

In contrast, European governments choose to closely engage the HTS government. While Türkiye leads the way in lobbying western capitals to lift sanctions on al-Jawlani and others, Qatar aims to support the HTS government with aid and natural gas. Both governments have come under increasing criticism for their "Islamist-friendly" approach across the region. However, widespread chaos in Syria restricts aid as well as al-Jawlani's efforts to gain sanctions relief. Al-Jawlani remains under the global microscope, and his proposed visit to Paris will further increase the scrutiny on his government's ability to prosecute human rights violations and protect minorities.

[Cheyenne Torres edited this piece.]



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.

Law and Order Has Utterly Collapsed in the UK

Amit Singh
June 29, 2025

British citizens have shown growing concern over public safety in London, which was once touted as a place of law and order. Now, crime — from shoplifting to assault — takes precedence as the police refuse to act. If the

government fails to act, then the UK will decline further into chaos.

I arrived in the UK in the autumn of 1996 to study law at Oxford. I came without knowing practically anyone in the country — a distant family friend who had met me just once before was kind enough to pick me up and drop me off at the university. I loved my time in the UK, the ease with which things got done and the general internationalism and intellectual and cultural avenues the country offered. The typically British values of fair play and rule of law influenced and impressed me greatly. Indeed, they inspired my decision to naturalize as a British citizen.

In the years since, I have lived in Hong Kong and Singapore as part of a London-based law firm. I visit London regularly, but each stay becomes more distressing. The standards of law and order have rapidly declined in the city. For decades, London's preeminent reputation as both a financial center and a wonderful place to live was a direct result of the rule of law. This is no longer the case. Crime is rising fast. The decline in rule of law is only exacerbated by the successive governments that continue to ignore this issue.

From upstanding law to rampant crime

During my two years at Oxford, I was struck by the open and inquisitive mode of education in England, a welcome change from the generally regimented way of teaching I experienced in India. Unlike the chaos in which I grew up, I found myself in a law-abiding country where systems worked. This was in stark contrast to India, where connections were essential to get even the most basic things done. Even registering a First Information Report (FIR) at any police station required either a bribe or a connection.

I found law enforcement in the UK to be drastically different. For instance, when I got mugged walking down the street near Kilburn, London, the police arrived within minutes. They even drove me around the neighbourhood in an attempt to identify the suspects. Back then, the police demonstrated a sense of concern for residents, and citizens had faith in the system of governance.

I no longer have the same faith that I did two decades ago. Recently, I went through a harrowing experience of a criminal squatting in my flat and the arduous legal process of recovering my flat from him. This criminal had forged his identity documents and references to rent my flat. When my property manager, Hamptons, wanted to ask why the flat's locks had been changed in violation of the rental agreement, the tenant made threats of "breaking the face" of the agent if he dared visit the flat.

Hamptons requested police assistance, but the police refused to help. They not only washed their hands off the event by claiming that physical assault was a civil matter, but also proceeded to say they were fearful for the safety of their officers. If the police are so afraid for their safety, then what message does it send to Londoners and British citizens?

Shortly after the incident, I told my old college friends what had happened. They mentioned another friend who had gone through the same harrowing experience. We exchanged stories and discovered that many others in our circle had gone through the same experience. Clearly, this sort of criminal behaviour is now rife in the UK and the police take no action against it. Crime now takes precedence over law and order.

Many stores in London hire private security to prevent shoplifting because the police consistently fail to intervene. Their inaction continues despite

the fact that there are currently over 500,000 thefts a year in the country. The British Retail Consortium's Crime Survey estimated that theft cost the retail sector \$1.2 billion (£953 million) in losses in 2023. The Crime Survey also reveals that retail incidents, including racial and sexual abuse, physical assault and threats with weapons, rose from the pre-Covid high of over 450 incidents per day in 2019-2020 to over 850 per day in 2021-2022.

Not only has shoplifting been “effectively decriminalized,” but it seems even more heinous crimes such as rape are on the rise. In her 2020 report, the former victims' commissioner Dame Vera Baird states that only 3% of rape reports resulted in the suspect being charged. In the following year's report, Baird commented that the decline in prosecutions since 2016 can be attributed to a lack of agency in the justice system.

The government's refusal to take charge deepens the issue

There are numerous articles claiming that there is no better time to be a criminal in the UK than now. Even if the criminals are unlucky enough to be convicted, the good news for them is that there probably isn't even enough space to send them to prison. It's a big deal for any government to lose its grip on law and order to this extent. The country is increasingly ungovernable. Citizens and businesses are having to hire their own private police forces, law enforcement does not take charge and victims of crime are refused justice. A friend remarks that living in the UK is like turning the Romans into Italians. I see the collapse of the rule of law as a sign of the UK regressing from a “developed” country into a “developing” one.

Sadly, ministers and politicians do not want to address the matter. I sent many emails about my flat saga to the authorities, including Prime Minister Keir Starmer and my local Member of

Parliament (MP), Matthew Pennycook. My MP was unable to help. Pennycook offered me his sympathies but told me that the police's powers are limited.

This is a shocking admission by a Labour MP about the collapse of the rule of law and the ineffectiveness of his own government. Once, Starmer was a prosecutor, and I expect his government to do better. Sadly, the Labour government Starmer is leading is presiding over an utter collapse of law and order.

[Cheyenne Torres edited this piece.]



Amit Singh is a partner at a top-tier international law firm and is based in Singapore. He has advised on high-profile capital markets transactions, both debt and equity, in jurisdictions as varied as the US, the EU, the UK, Turkey, South Africa, Iceland, Qatar, India and various countries in Southeast Asia. Apart from Singapore, Amit has practiced law in London, New York, Hong Kong and New Delhi. He is admitted as a lawyer in New York, England & Wales and Hong Kong. He has also qualified as an advocate in India. Amit studied English literature at St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, and law at Balliol College, University of Oxford, as a Radhakrishnan British Chevening Scholar. He also did an LLM at the New York University School of Law. In his student days, Amit was an avid debater. He has a great love for literature and still likes reciting poetry to his friends and his two daughters.

“Isms” Have Hijacked Economics. It Needs Fresh, Creative Thinking Now.

Atul Singh
June 30, 2025

Economists come up with policies based on rigid ideologies that dominate universities. These isms — capitalism, socialism, Keynesianism, monetarism — lead to stale thinking that fails to address the needs of society. Bold new thinking is the need of the hour.

Of late, economics has lost credibility. So much so that Yale University Press published *What’s Wrong with Economics?*, a book by Lord Robert Skidelsky. This noted and colorful British economic historian found that “a narrowing of vision and a convergence on an orthodoxy that is unhealthy” has led to disastrous consequences for societies who have followed flawed economic models.

Thanks to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, we know that communism does not work. The Russian Revolution of 1917 promised an equal society with no private property but created an economy run by apparatchiks where people had to queue up for bread. This is not to mention Joseph Stalin’s forced collectivization that caused the death of millions. Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward was an even greater disaster.

If communism has proven to be inefficient, autocratic and bloody, capitalism has also proved to be problematic. The first joint-stock company in the world was the Dutch East India Company,

which began in 1602. The most successful company of all time remains the British East India Company, which conquered most of the Indian subcontinent, colonized parts of Southeast Asia, and took over Hong Kong. At its peak, this company employed 260,000 soldiers, twice as much as the British Army.

Today, no country follows a pure capitalism or communism. Capitalist USA has social security and communist China has unicorn-running billionaires. Questions about governments and markets remain tricky. Should the government play a role in the market? If so, what should that be? Is business all about profit maximization for the owners, as Milton Friedman believed, or do firms have a social responsibility?

What do we mean by development, an oft used word? What policies and institutions stimulate it, and how does development differ from country to country? What is the role of foreign trade and foreign investment? When does it create relationships of dependency and exploitation? When does it create jobs and boost growth? How should power be distributed between private actors, the nation-state, and international institutions? How do we make the tradeoff between efficiency and equity? Does the environment matter? Do labor rights matter? If so, how do we balance them with economic growth? Do we need to start questioning the dogma of growth itself?

The Great Recession of 2007-08 and post-COVID developments demonstrate the limitations of the American model. San Francisco might be home to Twitter and Uber but it is also a real-life Gotham City with the homeless camping in tents and needles littering its streets. The Ronald Reagan revolution liberated markets and led to the booming 1980. However, since 1980, the Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, has been rising even in countries like Sweden as much of

the world adopted Milton Friedman's economic policies.

If the US is imperfect, so is Europe. The sovereign debt crisis of southern Europe is a ticking time bomb. Government spending has been more than tax revenues for far too long, leading to mountains of debt. With the Russia-Ukraine War unleashing inflation in the global economy and triggering the rise in interest rates, the aging economies of Southern Europe will come under greater pressure. The EU's euro experiment will also face its toughest test. Even big economies such as Germany and France will come under strain.

In some ways, France represents Europe best. The French economy is not quite like the Dutch, German or Swiss economies but it is a market leader in aviation, nuclear power and luxury products. France has persisted with the ideas of the British economist John Maynard Keynes even as the UK has adopted the Austrian Friedrich von Hayek as its patron saint. As per the OECD, public expenditures comprised 55.6% of the French GDP in 2019. Yet unemployment has stubbornly remained more than 10% since 1980.

The time has come to examine economics with a fresh eye. For millennia, the East was more prosperous than the West. In India, sustainability was woven into the warp and woof of its philosophical and religious traditions. Drawing upon an Upanishadic tradition, the Buddha spoke of the Middle Path. Today, that path is relevant again. We know that privately run coffee shops do better than those run by a faceless bureaucracy. Yet we also know that Starbucks running all coffee shops might not be a jolly good idea.

Entrepreneurship is the bedrock of a dynamic society. Small businesses form the backbone of a resilient economy as Germany's Mittelstand have demonstrated time and again. In 1973, Ernst

Friedrich Schumacher's 1973 classic *Small is Beautiful* matters now more than ever. Human-scale, decentralized and appropriate technologies advocated by Schumacher are most relevant at a time of climate crisis as are his ideas about Buddhist economics. This British-German economist was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and JC Kumarappa. He is not alone in holding the view that we cannot recklessly exploit our finite natural capital and deprive future generations of its benefits. Future generations have a right to the Amazon, the polar ice caps and Himalayan glaciers. Perhaps the vision for the future is a new middle path: **an entrepreneurial society with a sense of community.**



Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He has taught political economy at the University of California, Berkeley

and been a visiting professor of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. Atul studied philosophy, politics and economics at the University of Oxford on the Radhakrishnan Scholarship and did an MBA with a triple major in finance, strategy and entrepreneurship at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He worked as a corporate lawyer in London and served as an officer in India's volatile border areas where he had a few near-death experiences. Atul has also been a poet, playwright, sportsman, mountaineer and a founder of many organizations. His knowledge is eclectic, and his friends often joke that it comes in handy when access to Google is limited.

Fair Observer^o

Independence, Diversity, Debate