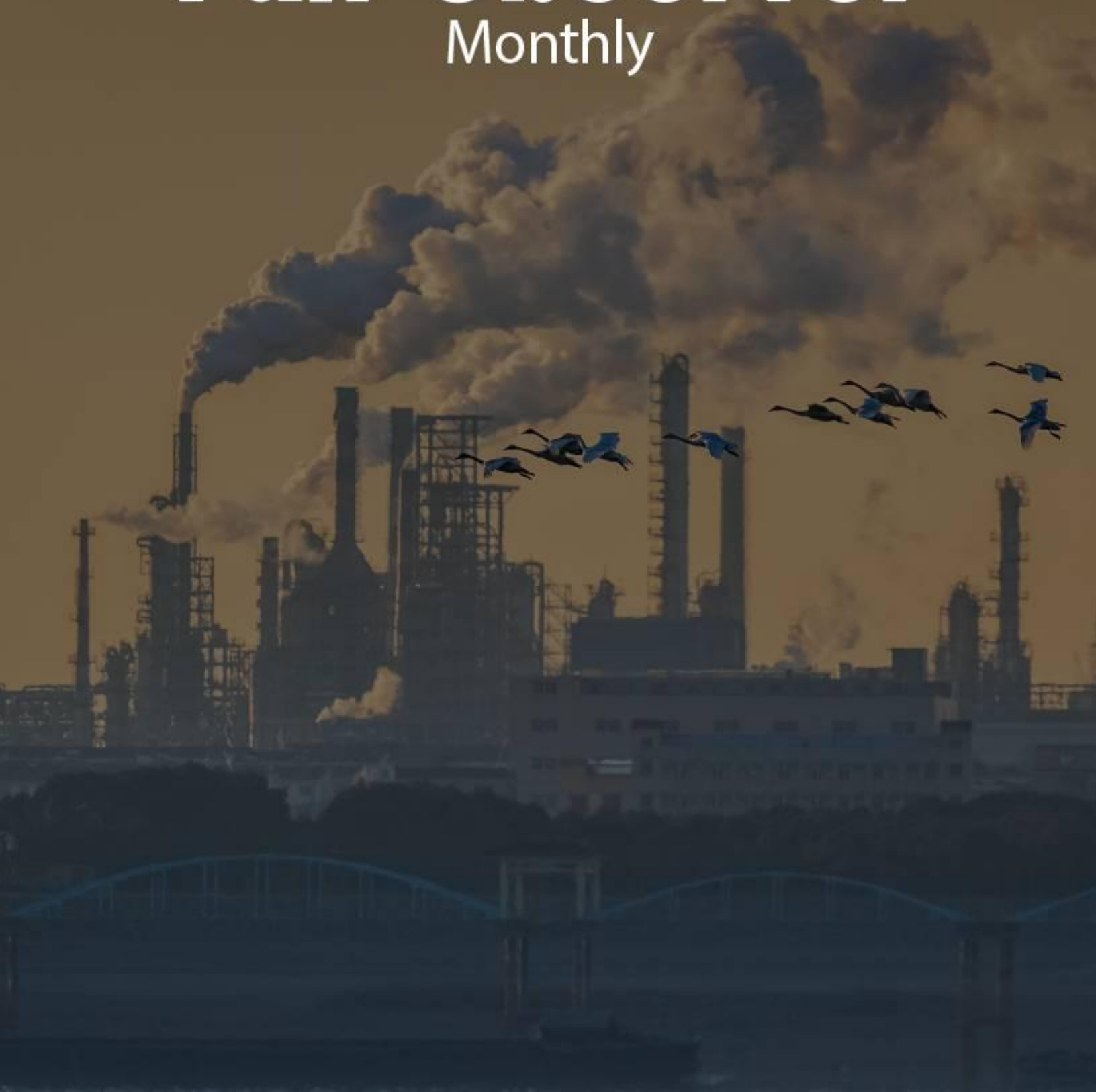


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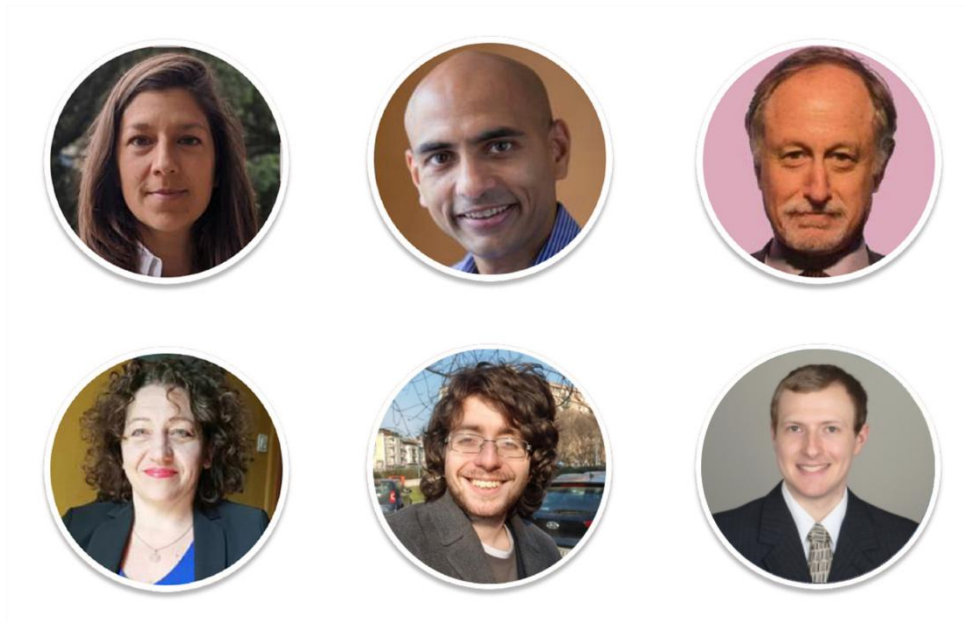
Monthly



May 2025

Fair Observer
Independence, Diversity, Debate

Fair Observer Monthly



May 2025

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

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International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

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MAGA + MIGA = MEGA:

Dynamics of PM Modi's Visit to the US

Dr. Ramanand Garge
May 02, 2025

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US marked a deepening of strategic ties between India and the US under Donald Trump's administration. The visit saw key discussions on defense cooperation, trade agreements and technology partnerships, including the launch of the US-India COMPACT initiative and talks on military hardware like the F-35 and Su-57 fighter jets. Strengthening bilateral relations in security, commerce and energy, the visit reaffirmed India's growing global influence and the significance of the India-US alliance in shaping geopolitical dynamics.

After a landmark visit to France, Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his state visit to the US on the invitation of US President Donald Trump. PM Modi is the fourth world leader to meet President Trump after the inauguration of his administration in January 2025. The visit is characterized by the mature handling of the relationship by experienced leadership at the summit level, reflected in the candor and warmth expressed in every engagement. Be it setting the tone with Vice President JD Vance at a warm meeting at Paris, the later hospitable welcome reception by the dynamic Indian diaspora on a rainy day in Washington, the first meeting with Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, the call-on meeting by US National Security Advisor Michael Waltz with Prime

Minister Modi, or the sharing of a rare souvenir—a “heat shield” tile that flew on the 5th test flight of SpaceX Starship on October 13, 2024—by SpaceX Chief Elon Musk during his meeting with Prime Minister Modi at the Blair House.

This was the essence when the leader of the world's largest democracy met the leader of the oldest democracy—when friends meet, they sit down and discuss. Over four hours of extensive engagement, Prime Minister Modi and President Trump held detailed discussions on strengthening India-US ties both bilaterally and multilaterally. President Trump welcomed PM Modi with a warm hug, saying, “We missed you a lot,” followed by discussions at the Oval Office in the White House on a spectrum of fields, including trade, security, geopolitical dynamics and technology.

As the world's leading democracies, the leaders emphasized freedom, the rule of law and multicultural diversity, reaffirming their commitment to a strong and comprehensive India-US partnership. Taking the partnership to new heights, both leaders launched a new initiative—the 'US-India COMPACT' (Catalyzing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology) for the 21st century—furthering transformative changes across various fields of cooperation.

This trust was aptly summed up by Prime Minister Modi in his address during the joint press briefing at the White House. He framed it as 'Make America Great Again,' reflecting the Trump administration's emphasis on strengthening US capabilities, coupled with India's vision of 'Atmanirbhar Vikasit Bharat' by 2047—reinterpreted in American terms as 'Make India Great Again' (MIGA). This alignment solidifies the relationship as a 'MEGA' partnership for prosperity, built on the spirit of jointmanship. Both leaders responded to queries from media representatives of the vibrant press communities in

India and the US This new initiative laid out the blueprint for the near- and medium-term future of the India–US strategic partnership. Along with QUAD, both leaders also discussed the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC). In the energy sector, India and the US deliberated on India's entry into the International Energy Agency (IEA) and enhancing collaboration on advanced small modular reactors (SMRs).

Economy: the essential mutual strength

While strengthening their relationship, both leaders set a target of achieving \$500 billion in two-way trade by 2030. The first phase of a multi-sector bilateral trade agreement is in the advanced stages of negotiation and is likely to be signed by fall 2025, taking an integrated approach to strengthening commerce in goods and services. This includes greater market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and enhancing supply chain integration between the two countries. These efforts have paved the way for enterprises in both nations to foster mutually beneficial ties, adding strength to their respective economies.

Defence cooperation: the defining feature of strategic relationship

The Modi–Trump administration has consistently emphasized deepening convergences in India–US strategic interests, further strengthening defense partnerships across multiple domains. Building on a strong foundation of defense cooperation established through key agreements—including the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum Of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) (BECA) in 2020 for geospatial cooperation—both leaders have announced plans

to sign a new ten-year framework for the India–US Major Defense Partnership in the 21st century.

As a prominent strategic partner and QUAD ally, the US has recognized India as a major defense partner with Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) status and is keen to review American International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) to facilitate technology transfer, arms and technology exchange, maintenance and supply of spare parts and in-country repair, along with establishing a support mechanism for overhauling US-manufactured defense hardware. Discussions also focused on initiating negotiations this year for a Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP) agreement to create a mutually adaptable framework that facilitates procurement systems and enables the reciprocal supply of defense goods and services. The dialogue expanded to include greater collaboration in defense technology across space, air defense and maritime domains, further strengthening India's defense preparedness.

To facilitate greater industry cooperation between both countries, the two leaders announced a new initiative—the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA)—aimed at strengthening industry partnerships and production in the strategic Indo-Pacific region.

These announcements unfolded against the backdrop of Asia's largest air show, AERO India 2025, held at the Yelahanka Air Base in Bengaluru, where two prominent fighter jets, Russia's Su-57 fifth-generation stealth fighter and the US F-35 Lightning II, were showcased. In this context, President Trump's announcement offering the F-35 to India under QUAD defense cooperation marked a significant milestone in global defense collaboration and technological advancement. However, concerns remain regarding the US's reliability as a defense trade partner, particularly in light of its past failures,

such as the unfulfilled commitment to provide GE engines to India's HAL. This raises doubts about American commitment, especially given that the F-35 has not yet been technically cleared for sale to India.

The Russian Su-57, with its advanced features such as low radar visibility, sophisticated onboard intelligence, supersonic cruising and powerful active radar capabilities, is being pitched to India by Russia, leveraging its history of strong technological collaboration in the development of MiGs and Sukhoi aircraft. With competitive pricing, the Su-57 presents itself as a viable option. Meanwhile, the American F-35, developed by Lockheed Martin, is considered the stealthiest aircraft, featuring an advanced design and a single F135 engine producing 40,000 pounds of thrust, enabling speeds of up to Mach 1.6. It is further supported by integrated combat network hardware, enhancing its operational capabilities. However, both aircraft come with potential vulnerabilities, particularly in terms of embedded software or hardware that could restrict their use in the event of a conflict. This raises concerns over India's increasing dependence on foreign technology, particularly in maintaining strategic dominance in the Indo-Pacific. In this context, as highlighted by Prime Minister Modi in the joint press conference, national interest remains the defining feature of his administration. Against this backdrop, India's Ministry of Defence must navigate the offers of these two advanced fighter jets while continuing to strengthen its commitment to Atmanirbharta through the development of its indigenous fifth-generation stealth fighter, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

Apart from these bilateral benefits, one of the most prominent outcomes of the India-US summit is the credible assurance toward stability through a decisive resolution of the Russia-Ukraine crisis. During the meeting, President Trump also discussed his interactions with Russian and

Chinese leadership, emphasizing his efforts to reduce nuclear threats and defense budgets—an approach aimed at fostering greater peace and stability in the region while creating favorable conditions for global economic and strategic cooperation. With further interactions expected in the near future to shape strategic trends, early engagement between the Trump administration and Prime Minister Modi underscores the importance of India-US ties. This early dialogue highlights the critical role of their partnership in defining regional and global strategic directions.

[Tanisha Desai edited this piece.]



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terrorism from Gujarat National Law University, he has published extensively on national security topics like maritime security and terrorism financing. He is a skilled orator, contributing to discussions on Loksabha, Rajya Sabha TV and All India Radio. Awarded a fellowship at the University of Virginia, he also served as Associate Fellow at Vivekananda International Foundation. In Sydney, he founded the India Centre, promoted Indian languages, Ayurveda and cultural diplomacy, including lighting the Sydney Opera House in tricolor.

The Middle East 2025: The Good, the Bad and the Tragically Ugly

Gary Grappo
May 03, 2025

In the last hundred years, the Middle East has been persistently unstable, shaped by shifting power dynamics and external interference. Though the Gulf States have seen positive economic development, other countries and regions, especially Gaza and Sudan, face vicious conflicts. The rare opportunities for peace have been squandered, leading to further instability.

Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the early part of the 20th century, the Middle East has been marked by conflict, violence, political instability, foreign interference, the rise and consequent decline of regional powers and economic hardship. Much of that remains today, but much has also changed. Some for the better, some not. What has not is that the region remains as full of opportunity as it is fraught with external and internal political tension and conflict. Some of the region's struggles are as far from resolution as they've ever been.

Economies are in flux. The oil-rich Gulf States have joined the ranks of some of the most developed nations in the world, leveraging their oil wealth to move into areas like artificial intelligence, hydrogen fuel, widespread solar energy and mega sporting events. Outside the Gulf, however, the economic picture is less rosy as nations and their societies wrestle with high unemployment (especially among youth) and underemployment (especially among women), low growth, corruption and low domestic and foreign direct investment.

The most significant change has been the region's overall balance of power. It has clearly shifted over the last 18 months. The United States is still the Middle East's preeminent outside power, though not without competitors near and far. Without question, Israel is the most powerful

regional state though very much dependent on the continuing support of the US. Regional powers — Israel, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — play a much more active role than in the past, for better and for worse. Looking ahead at the opportunities and threats the region faces, these factors lead to much uncertainty.

The good

The conflict provoked by the October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel triggered several strategic changes in the region. It bears out the adage known to generals and diplomats that war is inherently unpredictable for both aggressors and victims. In this case, Israel's superior military prowess, technology, intelligence and firepower paired with indispensable support from America produced positive results across the region: the destruction of Hamas as a governing organization in Gaza and a greatly weakened military organization (accompanied by incalculable devastation in Gaza), the effective neutralization of Hezbollah, the first full-fledged government in Lebanon in more than two years, the devastation of Iran's air defenses and ballistic missile factories and fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria.

All of this meant that the strength of one of the region's major powers, Iran, has been significantly diminished while that of another, Israel, has been elevated. Beyond the deterioration of its internal defenses, Iran has lost a number of its external proxies, e.g., Hezbollah and Hamas, and a vital ally in the region, Syria. Moreover, Russian influence in the Middle East has declined immensely as a result of its war of aggression in Ukraine.

From the perspective of the West and its moderate Arab allies, all of this is good news. With a reduced threat from Iran, countries might be able to redirect more of their resources to the economic and social challenges they face. But this

is the Middle East — changes in the strategic balance don't always provide anticipated benefits.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the weakening of Iran has presented Israel and the US with a strategic opening. Israel reportedly had proposed attacking Iran's nuclear infrastructure. US President Donald Trump apparently nixed the plan for now, preferring the diplomatic option. The US and Iran have conducted at least three negotiating sessions with more promised, including those at the all-important technical level.

Had the two sides not opted for diplomacy and resorted to war, the outcome might have been prolonged, greater violence in the region, even if Iran's nuclear capabilities were neutralized. Yet the possibility of war against Iran remains real. Should negotiations fail or one side withdraw, it is almost inevitable that Israel, with the likely assistance of the US, will attack the Islamic Republic.

For now, however, the ongoing negotiations between Tehran and Washington are an unambiguous good, which all nations can and should applaud.

The bad

Despite this good news, at least from the perspective of some quarters, the region remains unstable. Publics remain dissatisfied with their governments, almost none of which are accountable to their people. Governments, having witnessed the instability of the Arab Spring in 2011–2012, look suspiciously on their people, accounting for their stepped-up repression, including through greater use of electronic surveillance and artificial intelligence. Respect for human rights in the region remains distressingly low.

Continuing concerns about the future of Iran, the Gaza War, Syria's future direction, Turkey's increasing regional interests and the actions of the great powers gazing on the region's resource wealth have meant that Arab governments must still devote considerable budget resources to military forces and their hardware, and less to the economic and social demands of their people. We should not expect this picture to change a great deal in the near- to medium-term future. Change comes slowly in the Middle East.

Internal political forces pose their own set of challenges. That is no more evident than in the Middle East's lone democracy, Israel, which has seen right-wing factions rise to unprecedented influence in the Knesset. Despite being a distinct minority, these parties have managed a hammerlock on the government. The government too often ignores settler violence in the West Bank and, in some cases, has supported it. And it still seeks to diminish the power of Israel's otherwise steadfastly democratic judiciary. Much of this is due to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is unwilling to concede power and must, therefore, make repeated concessions to his ever more ambitious right wing.

Regime change in Syria handed the region an unexpected opportunity for change. While the results of newly installed interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa's plans are far from realization, it would be naïve to think that the nation will become a stable democracy. Its history clearly suggests otherwise. Nevertheless, moderate Arab states, the US, Europe and even Israel should not miss the opportunity to move Syria in the direction of a nation at peace with itself and its neighbors with a stable economy. In addition, they could ensure with appropriate and much-needed aid and investment that the region's troublemakers, e.g., Iran, Russia and the Islamic State, do not return. That should mean concerted action now.

Similarly, in Lebanon, an extraordinary opportunity has been handed to Israel, the Middle East, the US and the West. If that nation is to ensure that the elements of the Israel–Hezbollah ceasefire are fully met and Hezbollah is disarmed, the Lebanese Armed Forces will need help, and lots of it. Additionally, years of economic decline and political disarray have led to a near-catastrophic economic state. Aid and investment are immediately needed to set that country on the road to stability, prosperity and success.

To date, nations that would stand to benefit from stability and peace in Syria and Lebanon haven't reacted sufficiently quickly. This is more than unfortunate. Restoring stability in these nations would mean an unquestionable change in the region's political fortunes and reduce chances of greater conflict. Action is needed now to prevent autocratic backsliding in Syria — historically the nation's default position — and fitful, lackluster progress in Lebanon.

Then there is Yemen and the Houthi question. The country has been mired in ten years of civil war, political instability and unrest since the early days of the Arab Spring. The Houthis, an extremist Shia Islamist organization with its own version of regional and global jihad, seized power in a 2014–2015 coup and now control about a third of the country, some two-thirds of the population, the capital of Sana'a and the country's major port of Hudaydah. The Houthis declared a state of war on Israel — and effectively the US — following the October 7 attacks. Under former US President Joe Biden, the US and a handful of its allies launched sporadic attacks against the Houthis who had begun attacking tankers and other commercial shipping traffic transiting the Red Sea. Under current President Trump, those attacks have escalated but the Houthis continue to threaten shipping through one of the world's major maritime choke points.

While internal opponents to the Houthis exist in southern and eastern Yemen, they lack the unity and firepower to seriously threaten the Houthis at this time. Moreover, no external power is contemplating dispatching ground forces to challenge the Houthis. The Egyptian experience in the 1960s and the Saudi experience first in the 1930s and again in 2015 serve as abject lessons of ground wars against indigenous rebels in this highly tribal country.

Any hope of persuading the Houthis to back off from their campaign against global shipping traffic in the Red Sea may lie in the ongoing US–Iran negotiations. Tehran wields considerable, though hardly commanding, influence over the Houthis and could be persuaded to exercise that influence in the event Washington and Tehran can come to some understanding. That would not necessarily preclude Russia, which shares intelligence, weapons technology and other support with the Houthis, from finding ways to incentivize the Houthis to continue their war against the West. For now, the mini-war at the southern end of the Red Sea shows little prospect of ending soon.

The tragically ugly

Turning to the most depressing issues of the Middle East, there are two conflicts that cry out: Gaza and Sudan. Sadly, neither shows much prospect for resolution soon.

At the start of the year, a ceasefire in Gaza held slight hope for an ultimate end. But barely eight weeks later, the fighting resumed. Though lacking the ferocity and intensity of 2024, the toll on the Gazan civilian population is horrific. The death toll is now estimated at north of 50,000, though that figure is unconfirmed by any impartial entity, has been subject to change and likely includes an estimated 20,000 Hamas combatants. But the devastation on the territory itself — the near total destruction of schools, hospitals, mosques,

businesses, residences and infrastructure — is readily apparent from numerous publicly available satellite imagery.

It will take decades to rebuild the ravaged territory, and that assumes there is an end to the conflict, and humanitarian aid and investment are able to flow into the strip. An Arab plan advanced in March 2025 estimated the cost of reconstruction at \$53 billion, but that will likely rise once the conflict ends and a true, on-the-ground evaluation can be done.

But ending the war is the challenge now. Neither side is willing to bend. Israel insists on the release of all remaining hostages, estimated at 59 with 35 likely already dead, and the complete disarmament of Hamas. Hamas, while willing to release remaining hostages, is unwilling to surrender its arms. It has also agreed to turn governing authority to an independent Arab/Palestinian entity.

Hamas's arms are the apparent obstacle to the end of this war. In fact, Hamas's unwillingness to recognize that it has suffered an overwhelming defeat and has no chance of ever realizing its far-fetched goal of eliminating the State of Israel, if it ever did. This is a fact accepted by the rest of the Arab world beginning with Egypt in the 1979 peace accord with Israel. Its stubborn and hopeless resistance has meant inestimable suffering for the people of Gaza and Palestinians at large. For now, however, there seems little chance of the two sides reconciling the Hamas arms question, absent unanticipated external pressure on Hamas. The aforementioned Arab Plan, while calling for a government in Gaza that excludes Hamas, makes no mention of disarming Hamas, effectively rendering it an empty plan.

Israel and Netanyahu bear their own share of the responsibility. Their stubborn opposition to even acknowledging the possibility of an

independent state is unsupportable. Accepting the inevitability of a Palestinian state, as more than 100 foreign governments already have, would dramatically alter the political landscape, positioning Hamas and its extremist supporters as the enemies of peace.

The corollary to all this is the woeful state of the Palestinian Authority (PA). It is unfit to govern, and polls of Palestinians bear this out. This disenchantment, especially toward PA President Mahmoud Abbas, may have led to the latter's recent decision to anoint a successor, Hussein al-Sheikh, the current secretary-general of the PLO Executive Committee. Barring genuinely free and fair elections in the Palestinian Territories (to include Gaza), however, no PA institution is likely to win much favor or trust among the Palestinian people.

Lost amidst the war in Gaza, Russia's continuing war of aggression in Ukraine and the global financial crisis provoked by the Trump administration's trade tariff scheme, is the ongoing civil war in Sudan. Now moving into its third year, it has produced an estimated 150,000 deaths, 14 million displaced Sudanese (including over three million refugees in neighboring countries) and 30 million in need of humanitarian assistance. The United Nations has called it "the world's largest hunger crisis."

The two opposing sides — the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) — are nowhere near resolving their issues, which boil down to who will govern Sudan. The leaders of the two warring factions, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan of the SAF and Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo of the RSF, were briefly allies but could not agree on who would rule Sudan or how their respective forces would be integrated. The RSF is a reconstituted force from the Janjaweed, the barbarous militia responsible for the genocide of African Sudanese in Darfur in the

early two thousands. The SAF has recently retaken territory, including the devastated capital, Khartoum, but the RSF maintain firm control in the western part of the country: the large, resource-rich Darfur region.

The military standoff is further complicated by the external powers supporting one or the other side. Those include the UAE, Ethiopia and Eritrea on the side of the RSF, and Ukraine, Turkey, Egypt and Iran with the SAF. Russia has backed both sides at various times. The support of these nations has prolonged the war and contributed to the rising death toll and growing humanitarian crisis. Mediation efforts variously carried out by the African Union, the United Nations, the US, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Turkey and Libya have so far failed.

At present, a military solution hardly seems possible, as with the continuing external support, the two sides appear fully committed to pursuing war. Diplomacy has not reached its time yet and shows no sign of doing so soon.

The future

True to its modern history, the Middle East presents a conflicting portrait of hope and despair, opportunity and desperation.

This July will mark the 25th anniversary of another moment of hope and optimism in the Middle East, the Camp David II summit between Israel and the PA and hosted by then-US President Bill Clinton. Israel offered what was its most ambitious proposal (then and since) to the Palestinians, who, under the leadership of then-PA President Yasser Arafat, rejected it. Arafat rejected a subsequent and even more attractive plan advanced by Clinton, though the Israelis had accepted it.

The Second Intifada, which followed Camp David II, destroyed what hope there might have been for a peace between Israelis and Palestinians, a tragedy that only grows with time. The author's own experiences in dealing with the Israelis and Palestinians from Israel, Jerusalem and the West bank lent justification to claims that many Palestinians regret having walked away from Camp David without even attempting to continue negotiations.

Today, the region's conflicts are indeed manifold. Clear opportunities for peace, or least the absence of war, are apparent in some cases and much less so in others. But as the experience of Camp David in 2000 showed, the dangers of walking away from diplomacy and compromise when they are available only condemns the region to greater instability, violence and tragedy.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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Sudan's Crisis Worsens Amid Escalating War and Fading International Support

Fernando Carvajal
May 06, 2025

Sudanese military leaders, foreign governments and aid agencies confront a war that has displaced millions and overwhelmed relief efforts. International donors have failed to meet urgent funding targets as fighting spreads and humanitarian access shrinks. The shortfall threatens to destabilize neighboring countries and leave civilians without food, shelter or medical care.

As fighting continues to rage across Sudan, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations have warned that a worsening humanitarian crisis threatens to engulf the region. While many Sudanese celebrated a shift in control over the capital, Khartoum, international agencies reported a sharp deterioration in conditions on the ground. Now entering its third year, the war has displaced millions of civilians, pushing people farther west and south, away from contested urban centers.

The UN Humanitarian Response Plan for 2025 estimates that over 24.6 million people across Sudan “face acute hunger nationwide.” At least 12 million have fled their homes, and 3.7 million have sought refugee status in neighboring countries. Despite these staggering numbers, international attention has faltered. Donor fatigue, compounded by political distractions abroad, has left humanitarian operations underfunded and overstretched.

Sudan's response plan falls short

In August 2024, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) rejected a proposed peace agreement, blocking a diplomatic breakthrough and ensuring the continuation of the war. With no ceasefire in place, aid agencies cannot reach large swathes of the population. Fighting between the SAF and its rival, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has already extended beyond Khartoum. Battles now rage in Darfur, South Kordofan and along Sudan's western borders.

Before Khartoum changed hands, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali hosted the “High-Level Humanitarian Conference for the People of Sudan” in Addis Ababa. The summit, held alongside the 38th African Union (AU) Summit, drew representatives from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kenya, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The summit raised over \$200 million for humanitarian aid in Sudan, pledged mostly by the UAE, far short of the \$4.2 billion that humanitarian organizations say they need to address the crisis in Sudan and an additional \$1.8 billion for neighboring countries hosting refugees.

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), one of the largest medical NGOs operating in the region, suspended operations in multiple displacement camps after rising violence

made it impossible to ensure staff safety. Other aid organizations have faced looting, armed obstruction and threats from both SAF and RSF fighters. UN officials who recently entered areas around Khartoum reported “unimaginable levels of destruction” and widespread trauma among civilians.

Meanwhile, the situation continues to deteriorate on Sudan’s borders. Over 3.7 million Sudanese have fled to neighboring countries, with Chad bearing a heavy burden. Tensions between Chad and the SAF have escalated, with SAF officials threatening to strike targets inside Chad. SAF General Yasir Al-Atta also accused South Sudan of harboring “traitors”, further straining relations with another neighbor.

In Darfur, fighting around the town of El Fasher threatens to draw regional actors into the conflict. A potential resurgence of the Zaghawa rebellion — an ethnic movement with roots in both Sudan and Chad — could deepen the violence.

No peace in sight

Efforts to mediate the crisis have so far yielded little progress. In 2024, both Chad and Ethiopia attempted to broker peace and facilitate aid delivery. Their initiatives stalled, as Sudanese generals refused to compromise. Talks scheduled for March 2025 quickly broke down after the SAF demanded preconditions for a ceasefire that RSF leaders rejected.

The crisis has also suffered from dwindling international aid. In the early weeks of his presidency, US President Donald Trump cut more than \$60 billion from the foreign aid budget, targeting programs run by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). These cuts affected basic assistance, such as vaccines, clean water and agricultural support, not only in Sudan but across several humanitarian zones in Africa.

These programs could have played a vital role in preventing widespread malnutrition and disease.

As of April 2025, UN agencies reported receiving less than 10% of their required funding for Sudan. Humanitarian officials have expressed deep concern that, without immediate and significant support, the crisis may spiral further. Cross-border violence, mass displacement and food shortages could destabilize the wider Horn of Africa and Sahel regions. The longer the war continues, the harder it becomes to contain its effects.

Without a coordinated international response — and a credible commitment from Sudanese factions to pursue peace — the suffering of civilians will only intensify. Sudan’s war has already spread well beyond its frontlines. It now threatens to engulf the region.

[[Kaitlyn Diana](#) edited this piece]



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Trump’s Attack on Harvard Is Just the Opening Salvo

Imran Khalid
May 06, 2025

The US government is pressuring universities to crack down on pro-Palestinian protests. It froze Harvard's funding and launched an IRS probe after the school refused to suppress activism. Other universities may face similar threats unless they defend academic freedom together.

"**H**arvard is a threat to democracy," declared US President Donald Trump in a Truth Social post. He accused the university of being an "Anti-Semitic, Far Left Institution" and a breeding ground for "crazed lunatics" who "spew fake ANGER AND HATE." This tirade marks an escalation in what has become a full-scale political assault on American academia. Earlier this month, the Trump administration froze more than \$2.2 billion in grants and \$60 million in research contracts to Harvard — an unprecedented act of financial retaliation that threatens to reshape the boundaries between state power and intellectual independence. The White House is now leveraging control over federal funding, launching an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) probe into Harvard's tax-exempt status and threatening to revoke an additional \$1 billion in health research support.

What might appear to be a bureaucratic dispute over compliance has become something far more consequential: an attempt to use the financial and regulatory machinery of the state to force ideological conformity in higher education. The stated rationale is straightforward. Harvard allegedly failed to implement federal directives aimed at suppressing pro-Palestinian activism on campus, disbanding certain student groups viewed as hostile to national security, and scaling back diversity-related programming. But beneath the surface lies a broader effort to quell dissent and redefine the mission of higher education to align with a narrow political vision. Harvard may be the

first target, but it will not be the last. This is a direct challenge to academic freedom and open inquiry. Already, researchers at Harvard have halted tuberculosis and Alzheimer's studies because of the funding freeze — proof that this retaliation will harm more than campus politics.

The political message is increasingly clear: academic institutions must align with the ideological priorities of those in power or face serious consequences. In recent months, other institutions — Columbia, Yale, Princeton — have encountered similar pressures. Columbia University has faced scrutiny over its handling of pro-Palestinian activism, with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implementing measures to review the social media activity of international students for signs of antisemitism. Columbia has imposed disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions, on students involved in last year's protests. Federal levers such as research funding, student visa approvals, and tax exemptions are now being used to incentivize compliance. This is not merely about endowments or budget lines. The concern is academic independence — and with it, the future of dissent in public life.

Since 2016, certain media outlets and political figures have reframed universities as bastions of ideological radicalism. Gallup polling shows trust in higher education at historic lows, with 58% of conservatives viewing universities as "actively hostile" to their values — a perception the administration exploits. Academic programs focused on racial justice or climate science are often ridiculed as symbols of liberal overreach. This backlash has helped recast institutions of knowledge production as partisan actors.

Harvard fights back

Resistance is emerging. More than 3,800 Harvard alumni donated in a 24-hour surge following the

funding freeze. Faculty filed AAUP v. Department of Education, a lawsuit alleging that the administration violated the First Amendment by punishing political expression. Harvard is not under pressure over a single policy. It is being challenged for what it symbolizes: an institution that resists political interference, advocates for marginalized students, and still defends open inquiry.

Higher education remains one of the few spaces where difficult or unpopular truths — about foreign policy, racial inequality, or structural injustice — can be examined without state interference. That space is under threat. The administration's funding freeze, and the accompanying signals about tax-exempt status and international student access, send a message to universities: neutrality is not protection, and silence may not save you.

Elite institutions often respond to political pressure by staying quiet or compromising. That approach no longer works. Harvard's leadership has so far declined to capitulate. University President Alan Garber publicly rejected the federal directives, citing constitutional protections and institutional autonomy. But Harvard cannot fight this alone. A collective response is necessary. Institutions must recognize this as a political test of the legitimacy of independent institutions. If they fail to act together, the consequences will extend beyond any one campus.

The federal government can wield billions in funding with a single directive. Universities are left to respond with public statements, litigation, and donor outreach. That imbalance reveals how fragile institutional autonomy becomes when unchecked political power is directed against it. This moment challenges the longstanding assumption that democratic structures will naturally withstand authoritarian pressures. What

we are seeing now is a systematic effort to erode the informal norms that once protected academic independence.

A broad-scale attack on free speech

This offensive aligns with broader political trends: the rollback of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, restrictions on gender identity and expression, book bans, surveillance of activist movements, and attacks on media and cultural institutions. These efforts aim to narrow the space for dissenting views. Universities must now choose: accommodate or resist. Accommodation may bring short-term stability but risks long-term irrelevance. Resistance carries risk — but it may be the only way to preserve the essential purpose of higher education.

Democrats have often hesitated to defend elite universities, wary of backlash. But failing to do so now creates a dangerous precedent. If the federal government can cut off funds to Harvard without real political cost, it could next target community colleges, public universities, or independent research centers. Faculty committees, student groups, and alumni networks understand the threat. Petitions and protests are necessary, but so are structural coalitions. The deeper question is whether democratic societies are prepared to defend dissent not just in principle, but in practice — when it is messy, unpopular, and politically costly. The erosion of academic freedom does not happen all at once. It begins with chilled speech, isolated punishments, and administrative compliance. It ends with the quiet death of intellectual autonomy. And when that happens, we will not just lose universities — we will lose something far more foundational: the ability to think freely in a democracy that still pretends to be one.



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Trump's Tariffs Undermine Hollywood's Soft Power and Boost Foreign Film Industries

Franthiesco Ballerini
May 07, 2025

President Donald Trump imposed tariffs to support American industry. In response, countries like China and Brazil limited Hollywood films and promoted local content. As a result, foreign film industries may gain strength while Hollywood loses revenue and global appeal.

US President Donald Trump's dramatic tariffs, created to allegedly restore the strength of the American industry, may have the opposite effect in one of the country's most powerful areas: media and entertainment.

Tariffs will harm America's film industry

Although the announced tariffs harm companies that sell goods, specialists say it could cause an economic recession that would lead to lower advertising spending by companies and, therefore, less consumption of media and entertainment.

They also harm Hollywood on the supply side, because studios buy goods like lumber from Canada to build sets, as well as steel, wardrobe and specialized lights and microphones from other countries. Gift items made in China, like the \$90 Stranger Things sherpa jacket, may now become more expensive.

This week, Trump announced he would talk to Hollywood executives and may hit foreign films with 100% tariffs. That could cause a hit back from other countries by raising tariffs on Hollywood movies abroad, which could harm the entertainment industry even more.

China is a second problem. For decades, Hollywood has tried to increase its market share in China, a country with 1.4 billion potential consumers and the second-largest movie industry in the world. The expiration of the US–China Film Agreement in 2017, which guaranteed only 34 US films per year in China, didn't help studios increase their profits. Trump's trade war with China had already begun in his first term. As an indirect result, only one Hollywood movie topped \$200 million in China in 2019, while Chinese film Ne Zha 2 generated \$1 billion domestically and another billion overseas. With the escalation of tensions between the two countries, the Chinese government retaliated by restricting the number of Hollywood films.

Trump's administration may last only four years, and the next government can reverse his tariffs. But there's more serious long-term harm for the entertainment industry: the erosion of Hollywood soft power — the ability to seduce, rather than coerce, shaping the preferences of the world. For decades, American administrations made strategic alliances with movie studios to reach their goals abroad. Walt Disney produced a series of animations and characters, like Zé Carioca, as government efforts to keep Latin America close to US demands of goods and

commodities during World War II. When US President Ronald Reagan watched *First Blood Part II* during his presidency, he said, “Boy, after seeing Rambo last night, I know what to do next time this [hostage crisis] happens.” US President George W. Bush was so pleased with Universal Pictures’ *United 93* that he hosted a special screening at the White House for families and crew. Experts said the script was almost completely faithful to the 9/11 Commission Report.

American film could lose ground

Soft power is about perception. Hollywood’s soft power was built over decades, and it made the American movie industry the most profitable in the world. It also strengthened the worldwide perception that the Academy Award is the most prestigious film festival in the world, even though it historically favors Hollywood films in the most important categories. But perception can shift under political influence.

The Canadian government is requiring mandatory labeling of products sold in the country with their origin, stating the address of the foreign manufacturer and the address of the Canadian company that imported them. The European Union is threatening to impose tariffs on over 400 US products and 1,300 items with steep import taxes. This may affect US entertainment products. If perception changes, international audiences may choose to buy domestic tickets in multiplexes instead of Hollywood’s. When Paul Greengrass’s *United 93* and Kathryn Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker* were released, most international audiences saw the US as a victim of terrible attacks. But now, with Trump raising more domestic and commercial barriers, those kinds of movies may not enjoy the same favorable perception abroad.

Instead, Hollywood movies that may succeed internationally are those that go against Trump’s

ideal of a great nation. Alex Garland’s A24 film *Civil War* (2024) shows a despotic federal government and secessionist movements in a broken, authoritarian US. Garland’s new release, *Warfare* (2025), shows soldiers’ fragility in a claustrophobic apartment surrounded by al-Qaeda, rather than romanticizing their mission in Iraq. But those productions may become less frequent during Trump’s second term. Economic recession and federal government threats against dissent may force studios to choose safer projects, like successful franchises or remakes. Also, some tech companies whose CEOs stood behind Trump’s inauguration speech are now forming a new oligopoly in Hollywood, changing the traditional movie industry.

The international trade war may be the perfect political setting to boost domestic entertainment industries. This month, the Brazilian National Congress approved a report on regulating streaming services. It proposes mandatory payments of Condecine (Contribution for the Development of the National Movie Industry) by platforms, requires quotas for national products and mandates that platforms invest 10% of their gross revenue in national productions. Advisors recommend passing the regulation “as fast as possible.”

One studio executive said, “I can see all of this animosity toward the US increasing the likelihood of greater local content spend requirements for streaming.”

In the 1990s, after the US won the Cold War, high-budget blockbusters like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Titanic* showed Hollywood’s power abroad. Still, in 1995, Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg created the *Dogme 95* movement to “take back power for directors as artists” in opposition to studio control. Now, with Trump making prejudicial remarks against foreign nations and confronting the Supreme Court by

expelling legal immigrants, Hollywood may take a long-term hit. With less money and weaker global acceptance of American heroes and dreams, the foreign film industry may finally win the hearts and minds of the world.



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

Trojan Women: How Epic Theater Exposes 2,500 Years of Brutality

Roberta Artemisia Campani
May 11, 2025

Athenian playwrights and modern productions use theater to confront war. Euripides' *Trojan Women* shows how war crushes the weak and corrupts the strong, while Brecht's *Mother Courage* exposes the cost of survival in a war economy, and Pirandello's *War* reveals the grief buried beneath patriotic slogans.

I am not a Trojan woman, and even less an author from ancient Greece. Yet these women's tribulations in the aftermath of the defeat of Troy by the Greeks resonate with me today, 2,500 years later. Ancient literature is a deep mirror that allows us to search amongst the many paths our souls have trodden to arrive at where we are. Have we made any progress?

The *Iliad* contains a dispute about the value of a woman. A few centuries later, Euripides, the great Greek tragedian, presents the Trojan women as complex human beings with feelings and a right to expression — refreshing in our post-truth era.

At the time of Euripides, twenty-five centuries ago, there was neither journalism nor social media. Parchment and tablets were expensive commodities. As a result, there were very few written works. People learned the news from the agora, the theater, and public assemblies, where they met someone who had witnessed the events. There were historians as well, such as Thucydides, who wrote detailed accounts of important happenings.

Trojan Women was performed for the first time at the Dionysia Festival shortly after its composition in 415 BC. Some consider it the first anti-war play in recorded history. It was written by a man and played by men. According to actor and director Martha Dusseldorp, “Women had the hardest times, and the Greeks knew it.” Ben Winspear adds, “What is extraordinary is that in that era, in which heroes were so venerated, Euripides chose to wipe them out of the picture and instead concentrated on the people who are most affected by these circumstances.”

The women and children of Troy suffered during and after the war. They lost their dear ones, their homes, their status. Many were enslaved by the Greek victors. Hecuba was Troy's queen, Cassandra her daughter, and Andromache her

daughter-in-law, the widow of the Trojan hero Hector. The Greek heroes of war had no qualms about enslaving the three of them following their victory. The Greek Menelaus not only promised to kill his wife Helen for leaving him, but also the only heir of the Trojan dynasty, a child. Euripides sees the murder of a child for fear of dynastic revival as a worrying and particularly pernicious innovation.

Euripides dared to represent the powerful reflecting on their actions

For there to be suffering victims, there must also be perpetrators. Euripides judged them in this play. And their fall into decadence is evident, as what we now call the narratives — that of the Athenians and that of the Trojans — expose how different perspectives account for the same historical events, each, of course, to its own advantage.

Two and a half millennia later, we can still shudder in grief, fear, frustration, and despair at the plight of these women. We can imagine the destruction of Troy. We've seen so many catastrophe movies in the mold of *The Day After*. Have we now become immune to piles of rubble? Philosophers wrote entire books about the meaning of ruins. Today, we witness these things every day on TV. Euripides' tragedy shows us the destruction of an entire city.

Allow me to borrow the words of Alan Shapiro's introduction to the Oxford edition of *Trojan Women*: "The theme is really a double one: the suffering of the victims of war, exemplified by the women who survive the fall of Troy, and the degradation of the victors, shown by the Greeks' reckless and ultimately self-destructive behavior. *Trojan Women* gains special relevance, of course, in times of war. Today, we seem to need this play more than ever."

Shapiro discusses why Euripides lost the theater contest that year to a now-forgotten playwright. The likely reason: Euripides hit a nerve. The play premiered the same year Athens raided the island of Milos, slaughtering and enslaving its population for choosing neutrality. Athenians didn't want to hear about the desperation they were causing in expanding their hegemony. What hegemon wants to hear that?

According to historian Jean-Pierre Vernant, Greek tragedy is extraordinary because it puts dramatic events of the past before our eyes. "In a way," says Vernant, "it is the city itself that plays out the events, and it offers a problematic line of questioning to the audience without providing any solution." In tragedy, events unfold with a sort of internal necessity. This is *mimesis* — a simulation, in the same sense we use the term in physics. Tragedy constructs a chain of events that leads to an apparently inevitable catastrophe.

The bravery and grief of mothers

Fast forward to modern times. Enter Bertolt Brecht, who wrote *Mother Courage*, another anti-war play, subtitled *Chronicle of the Thirty Years War*. It premiered in 1941 in Zurich. Brecht, then in exile in Sweden, did not write for amusement but to awaken the public to the grim reality they faced. What he called epic theater is the opposite of what we usually expect: not a divertimento, not an escape, and certainly not catharsis.

Epic theater is a form of didactic drama presenting a series of loosely connected scenes that seek to avoid the effect of illusion, often interrupting the storyline to address the audience directly with analysis, argument, or documentation. Brecht, quite literally, wished to block the public's emotional responses and to hinder its tendency to empathize with the characters and become caught up in the action.

Yet if we think of the post-truth era, we might see the media doing just the opposite: stoking emotional response to override thought. With the pervasiveness of mis- and disinformation, we may ask ourselves what is the “more real” reality of a play — and where journalism now sits in this arena. What is the role of illusion in the media, as everyone scrambles to control the narrative? Do we even see the truth, or are we still captives of Plato’s cavern?

Perhaps the distinction between reality and narrative can be found in yet another dramaturgo, a theater writer.

In 1918, Luigi Pirandello wrote a short story titled “Quando si comprende” (simply titled “War” in English). Here, the clash between patriotism and personal grief is brought sharply into focus. One character, at first, insists that children belong to their country, not their parents. Since his son wrote that he was happy to serve, the father claims he won’t grieve his death. But a mother asks simply, “So is your son not dead?” At that moment, the man realizes the truth and breaks down sobbing. Feeling, too, teaches. Emotion can provoke critical thought, just as Brecht’s estrangement techniques do.

We are torn between “what must be done” for some ideal — sovereignty, democracy, or another abstraction — and our own subjective experience of care and grief for those we love. Moreover, in consuming media today, we see that democracy means different things to different people. Perhaps there are no universal values. Perhaps those we thought were universal are not.

In Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, the tragedy of women and children suffering in the aftermath of war is a testament to the human cost of conflict. Brecht’s *Mother Courage* shows the harsh reality of profiting from war, often at great personal loss. Both works highlight the cyclical nature of

violence, where victors’ narratives overshadow the pain of the defeated, who in turn are driven to rebel. Pirandello’s story echoes this too: the inner collapse of someone who tries to uphold the patriotic narrative but is undone by grief.

As we witness the unbearable suffering of civilians in Ukraine and Palestine, we are reminded that their stories often go unheard amid the din of geopolitical agendas. The devastation in these places reflects a grim continuity with the themes expressed in the works of Euripides, Brecht, and Pirandello: the exploitation of the vulnerable, the dehumanization of the “other,” and the moral ambiguities that ensnare individuals in the machinery of war. Brecht calls us to engage critically, not retreat into complacency. Just as the characters in *Trojan Women* and *War* are torn between duty and loss, so must we confront the true cost of modern warfare. In a world where truth blurs with propaganda, these ancient and modern voices urge us to act — for peace, justice, and the recognition of our shared humanity.



Roberta Campani looks after business development at Fair Observer. She studied philosophy, history and linguistics at the

University of Bologna before researching the Rwandan genocide. Roberta worked for a few years in an internet start-up as a marketing and business development assistant. She then interned for a year at the Centro Frantz Fanon in Torino, Italy. This experience led her to work as a social worker for the city of Lausanne in Switzerland. Since then, Roberta has worked with several nonprofits and civil society organizations. She now lives in Geneva with her family.

Outside the Box: Gemini's Take on the Threat Posed by the Deep State... and Google!

Peter Isackson
May 12, 2025

In “Outside the Box,” I interrogate ChatGPT to better understand how AI “reasons.” It’s like a conversation with an intelligent friend, sharing ideas and challenging some of the explanations. With some friends we can share wonderfully superficial but invigorating “social” moments essential to our individual and collective well-being. On other occasions, sometimes with the same friends, we may broach questions of potentially tragic depth. My three-way discussion of international security that began with a human friend and continued with Google’s Gemini provides an example of how an LLM can help us refine our own thinking.

I began with the following exceptionally lengthy prompt, a practice I encourage for anyone working on difficult problems that require nuanced analysis:

“A friend of mine has devised a comprehensive analysis of the idea of ‘deep state.’ Until recently the idea was treated as a kind of conspiracy theory, though there is one piece of historical evidence that should have educated at least the US public about its reality 64 years ago: President Eisenhower’s farewell speech warning about the military-industrial-congressional complex. Here are some of my ideas I have shared with my friend. Can you offer some complementary analysis and even critique of my own analysis?

Dear LLM friend, you should note two things. The first is that I emphasize the crucial cultural dimension that most commentators on the topic ignore, as they focus on analyzing institutional frameworks and power relationships. The second is that my human friend and I agree not only that the existence of the collection of phenomena we call the deep state needs to be acknowledged and analyzed, but also that it is in the interest of humanity and democracy that it be either dismantled or remodeled, and that whatever emerges is endowed with a strong dose of transparency.

I’m eager to see your comments. Here is the gist of the analysis I shared with my friend.

If we are among those seeking to contribute to the process, we must ask ourselves this question: Can it be managed in a way that prevents the usual pendulum effect? In his short poem “The Great Day” W B Yeats summarized it in these terms:

HURRAH for revolution and more cannon-shot!

A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.

Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again!

The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on.

It was possible to think that way a century ago, but there was no deep state then. The problem is that ever since World War II, for any nation to be a great power and to some extent even a middling power, it must adopt features of a deep state. Those features are not just institutional, but also cultural, as your model demonstrates, with intellectuals, media and NGOs at the three corners.

That cultural dimension actually provides some measure of hope. And I think technology, which now has a major impact on culture (i.e. how people

think rather than what they think), will play a major role. But it can move in either direction: towards consolidating a deep state or dissolving it. In the latter case, it produces two new hypotheses: instituting a new deep state (the pendulum effect) or allowing something new to emerge.

I continue to hope the second could prevail, but it means spreading the effort over a wide expanse of thought, effort and action. It must also be focused not on one deep state that could be challenged or overthrown, but on multiple deep states, calling into question the makeup and role of everything grouped under the heading of security. One deep state is about ‘national security.’ Two deep states are about the concept evoked during the Cold War but never taken seriously: ‘indivisible security.’ To be truly indivisible there must be not just a technical and formal notion of collective security but also a cultural notion of security fostering a sense of solidarity that supersedes and even trivializes purely national interests.

The post-WWII consensus theorized the UN playing that role of defining the terms of indivisible security, with the expectation that there would be means to enforce it. But expecting enforcement to emerge on its own is delusional. The mechanism that fell into place was mutually assured destruction (MAD). That also meant that there had to be two players mutually threatening one another. What that produced was the opposite of culturally founded security. Instead it gave us the kind of psychologically manipulated security your model reveals. It made the architecture of a deep state appear to be a necessary component of government. (In many ways, Hitler’s Nazi model became the reference for its cultural basis, built around a military-industrial complex, but without the superficial layer of overt and active racism).

The current geopolitical turmoil, which Trump has so effectively exacerbated (but which he

inherited from previous presidents going back to Lyndon Johnson), has provoked a visible cultural change, at least to the extent that people are not only increasingly aware of the reality of the deep state, but sense that it more than anything else threatens the ideal of democracy.

This is truly a *Zeitenwende* moment, not just for Germany -- whose *Zeit* (time), in the words of Hamlet, is clearly ‘out of joint’ -- but for the world.”

Google’s Gemini provided this equally lengthy response. In a follow-up article, I shall comment

Gemini’s response, which I found extremely pertinent: “Your analysis of the ‘deep state’ offers a compelling and nuanced perspective, particularly by emphasizing its crucial cultural dimensions and the aspiration to move beyond cyclical power shifts towards a more genuinely democratic and secure global order. It’s a rich framework, and I appreciate the opportunity to engage with your ideas. Here’s some complementary analysis and critique, offered in the spirit of constructive dialogue:

1. The Nature and Elusiveness of the ‘Deep State’

You rightly point out that the idea of the ‘deep state’ has moved from the fringes of discourse towards more mainstream recognition, with Eisenhower’s prescient 1961 warning as a key historical marker. Your conceptualization of it as a ‘collection of phenomena’ involving institutional frameworks, power relationships, and significantly, cultural underpinnings (intellectuals, media, NGOs) is a strong starting point.

Complementary Analysis: The elusive nature of the ‘deep state’ is one of its defining characteristics. It’s rarely a formal, monolithic entity with a membership list. Instead, it can be

seen as a confluence of embedded interests, long-standing bureaucratic structures (intelligence agencies, military leadership, key civil service posts), and private sector actors (defense contractors, financial institutions, tech giants) that share a common understanding of national interest and operational continuity, often irrespective of which political party is in power. This makes it resilient to normal democratic accountability.

Critique/Nuance: While your model places intellectuals, media, and NGOs ‘at the three corners’ as cultural components, it’s worth considering that these sectors are also crucial spaces for contesting deep state influence. Journalists break stories that expose covert actions, intellectuals develop critiques of power, and NGOs advocate for transparency and human rights, sometimes in direct opposition to entrenched state interests. The cultural sphere is thus a battleground, not solely an apparatus of the deep state.

2. The ‘Necessity’ of Deep State Features and the Dilemma of Reform

Your assertion that ‘ever since World War II, for any nation to be a great power...it has to adopt features of a deep state’ is a stark but largely accurate observation, especially concerning national security, intelligence gathering, and technological development. This, however, presents a profound dilemma for your aim to dismantle or remodel it.

Complementary Analysis: This perceived necessity often stems from the anarchic nature of the international system, where security is self-help, and a competitive advantage in intelligence, defense, and technology is seen as vital for survival and influence. The long-term planning, secrecy, and resource allocation required for these capabilities often bypass or manipulate standard democratic processes.

Critique: If these features are indeed ‘necessary’ for a nation to maintain its standing or even defend itself effectively in the current global landscape, then dismantling them without a viable alternative for ensuring security could be seen as unilaterally disarming or destabilizing. This doesn’t invalidate the desire for reform, but it highlights the immense challenge: how do you reduce unaccountable power without also catastrophically reducing a state’s capacity to function in a complex world? Your focus on ‘indivisible security’ is a response to this, which I’ll address further.

3. The Cultural Shift, Technology, and Avoiding Yeats’s Pendulum

Your hope that technology and a broader cultural understanding can help avert the ‘pendulum effect’ described by Yeats is an important aspiration. The idea is that a mere replacement of elites doesn’t change the fundamental dynamics of power.

Complementary Analysis: Technology indeed has a dual capacity. It offers unprecedented tools for surveillance, information control, and autonomous weaponry, potentially consolidating deep state power. Conversely, as you note, it can empower citizen journalism, enable secure communication for activists, and facilitate global awareness and mobilization, creating pressure for transparency and change. The current ‘cultural change’ you observe, where more people sense the deep state’s threat to democracy, is significantly amplified by this technological shift in information dissemination.

Critique: While technology can foster awareness, it can also lead to what some call ‘participatory illusion,’ where online activity feels like meaningful action but doesn’t translate into structural change. Furthermore, the same technologies that might help ‘dissolve’ one form of deep state could facilitate the rise of new, perhaps

even less accountable, power centers – for instance, powerful tech corporations with their own opaque algorithmic governance and vast data empires, or decentralized networks with malign intent. The challenge is not just about awareness but about translating that awareness into effective, sustainable mechanisms of democratic control.

4. From ‘National Security’ to ‘Indivisible Security’

Your proposal to shift focus from singular ‘national security’ (underpinning one deep state) to ‘indivisible security’ (implying a challenge to multiple deep states and fostering solidarity) is a visionary and ethically compelling idea.

Complementary Analysis: This resonates with concepts of human security, which broaden the definition of security beyond state-centric military concerns to include economic, environmental, health, and personal security for all individuals. The failure of the UN to fully embody this, and the subsequent reliance on MAD, starkly illustrates the grip of the national security paradigm.

Critique: The primary obstacle to ‘indivisible security’ remains the persistent power of national sovereignty and the deep-seated mistrust between states. Achieving a ‘cultural notion of security fostering a sense of solidarity that supersedes and even trivializes purely national interests’ is an immense undertaking. How can this be fostered in a world where geopolitical competition is arguably intensifying, and where some states actively promote narrowly nationalistic or civilizationalist ideologies? While the Cold War’s bipolar MAD was one manifestation, the current multipolar world presents its own complex challenges to collective security, with diverse actors and interests. The mechanisms for building such profound global solidarity need to be imagined and painstakingly constructed, perhaps starting with

smaller, regional, or issue-specific forms of cooperation.

5. The Nazi Model Reference and the Nature of Deep State Ideology

Your reference to Hitler’s Nazi model as a (non-racist) cultural basis for a military-industrial complex is provocative and points to the efficiency of a state geared towards total mobilization.

Nuance/Critique: While the Nazi regime certainly exemplified an extreme fusion of state, industry, and ideology for national power and expansion, the comparison requires careful handling. The ‘cultural basis’ of deep states in democratic or semi-democratic nations, while potentially manipulative or based on fear (as your friend’s model suggests), generally operates under a different legitimizing narrative (e.g., protecting democracy, maintaining stability, ensuring economic prosperity). The danger lies not necessarily in an overt, jackbooted totalitarianism, but in a more subtle, creeping erosion of democratic accountability, justified by perpetual emergency or existential threat. The ‘psychologically manipulated security’ you mention is key here – it often relies on constructing an ‘other’ or a constant sense of threat that makes the deep state’s actions seem perpetually necessary.

6. The ‘Zeitenwende’ Moment

Your characterization of the current era as a ‘Zeitenwende’ is apt. The conjunction of geopolitical shifts, technological acceleration, and growing public awareness of issues like the deep state does suggest a potential turning point.

Complementary Analysis: This awareness creates an opportunity. Crises can delegitimize old ways of doing things and open space for new ideas. The very turmoil you mention, exacerbated

by figures like Trump, has paradoxically made more people question the underlying structures of power and governance.

Critique/Caution: A ‘Zeitenwende’ doesn’t inherently guarantee a positive outcome. Turning points can lead to regression as easily as progress. The challenge is to channel the current discontent and awareness into constructive, democratic reforms rather than allowing it to be co-opted by demagoguery, further entrenchment of security apparatuses under new justifications, or a descent into deeper cynicism.

Concluding Thoughts:

Your analysis powerfully highlights that any effort to address the ‘deep state’ must grapple with its deep cultural roots and the narratives that sustain it. The call for transparency is fundamental, but as you implicitly acknowledge with the Yeats reference, true change requires more than just exposing or replacing individuals; it requires altering the underlying structures, incentives, and cultural presuppositions.

The path towards a system based on ‘indivisible security’ and genuine global solidarity is fraught with difficulty and will require sustained, multi-faceted efforts that go far beyond challenging a single nation’s deep state. It involves reimagining international relations, fostering global citizenship, and developing robust international institutions that command legitimacy and can manage power.

Your focus on the cultural dimension offers a crucial lever. If culture is where the necessity of deep state features is normalized, it is also where it can be questioned and, potentially, denormalized. This makes your dialogue and analysis not just an academic exercise, but a vital part of the very cultural work needed for change.

Thank you for sharing such a thought-provoking piece. It touches upon some of the most critical questions of our time regarding democracy, power, and the future of global order.”

My thoughts

In my follow-up article, I will react to several of the points Gemini develops. I’ll offer just one closing thought here.

I was pleasantly surprised by Google’s Gemini when it warned against “powerful tech corporations with their own opaque algorithmic governance and vast data empires, or decentralized networks with malign intent.” Will anyone at Google read this and ponder its significance? Thank you, Gemini, for your honesty.

This reminded me of the historical paradox I referred to and which most commentators fail to mention. Shouldn’t we think it ironic that Eisenhower was the one to warn against a trend that ballooned during his eight-year watch and which he apparently did nothing to constrain? The simplest explanation would be that Ike had in his team the two Dulles brothers: John Foster, his Secretary of State, and Allen, the director of the CIA. They were the architects and managers of the deep state. Their power may have exceeded that of the president.

And if it was true then, we can be certain that after the assassination of Eisenhower’s successor, John F. Kennedy, it has been growing ever since.

Your thoughts

Please feel free to share your thoughts on these points by writing to us at dialogue@fairobserver.com. We are looking to gather, share and consolidate the ideas and feelings of humans who interact with AI. We will build

your thoughts and commentaries into our ongoing dialogue.

[Artificial Intelligence is rapidly becoming a feature of everyone's daily life. We unconsciously perceive it either as a friend or foe, a helper or destroyer. At Fair Observer, we see it as a tool of creativity, capable of revealing the complex relationship between humans and machines.]

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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Civil Society Groups Face Rising Threats From Powerful Institutions

Marco De Ponte
May 13, 2025

Lawsuits and funding cuts from governments such as the US and the EU, aimed at restricting free speech, are putting pressure on global democracy. Activists, journalists and civil organizers face legal threats designed to stifle dissent as well as deliberate financial restrictions. Civil society groups urgently need legal protection and increased support to continue to defend democracy.

Around the world, we have been witnessing a dangerous shift toward authoritarianism that is jeopardizing even established democracies like the US and the Netherlands. Civic spaces where free speech, press freedom, freedom of assembly and human rights advocacy have long thrived are being increasingly violated. Some particularly insidious, restrictive tactics include Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and funding cuts used to undermine civil society organizations (CSOs). As a global human rights organization, Hivos is alarmed by these developments and the threat they pose to democracy.

The rising threat of SLAPPs introduces risks to freedom of expression

SLAPPs are lawsuits specifically designed to silence critics, intimidate editors and journalists and stifle dissent. These lawsuits, often filed by corporations, politicians or powerful individuals,

drain resources from civil society actors and have a chilling effect on free speech.

In the US, a high-profile SLAPP hit Greenpeace with a massive financial fine of \$660 million USD in February 2025 for the organization's environmental advocacy regarding the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. This is not the first time that Greenpeace has faced lawsuits of this kind. In the Netherlands, Greenpeace is facing claims from Nauru Ocean Resources Inc. deep-sea miners, who are seeking an immediate halt to the peaceful protests against deep-sea mining exploration or a fine of \$11.3 million USD (10 million EUR) if the protests continue.

In Europe, SLAPPs have been primarily used to target journalists and media organizations. The Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) reports that between 2010 and 2023, there were a total of 1,049 SLAPPs in Europe based on national defamation laws. As of 2023, they were mostly filed by businesses (45%), politicians (35.5%) and state-owned entities (10.8%). The threats SLAPPs represent range from financial and logistical to violent. One of the most notorious examples in Europe was the 2017 assassination of the journalist and activist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta. At the time of her death, she was facing 48 libel suits.

The EU Parliament recognized the urgency of this issue and published an anti-SLAPP directive in 2024. The directive is now under discussion in the Netherlands, which must transpose it into national law by May 2026. The directive sets the minimum standards EU member states must uphold to protect against abusive litigation. While this is a small step in the right direction, there are concerns that the Dutch government is not acting quickly enough to protect activists and other SLAPP targets.

The financial pressures against civil society

While civil society faces legal attacks, critical funding is also drying up. As an organization established in the Netherlands and working around the world, Hivos has seen the impact of the cuts first-hand. Some include the Netherlands' cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) here as well as the global impact of the USAID funding freeze and the assistance cuts across the European Union. These cuts have significantly disrupted or suspended key human rights, press freedom and gender, diversity and climate programs. They are not just bureaucratic decisions, but political ones that directly harm the ability of civil society to operate and defend democratic freedoms.

The sudden loss of programs supported by foreign assistance is leaving activists and journalists more vulnerable to repression. CSOs increasingly face public attacks fueled by misinformation and negative narratives, as well as restrictive legal frameworks and increased scrutiny. The EUSEE survey on the impact of the US funding freeze and the CIVICUS 2024 Global Findings report both confirm that the ability of civil society to operate is rapidly shrinking due to funding cuts. Data from the EUSEE survey supports the argument that the US decision to reduce foreign aid is an excuse to further restrict civic space. CIVICUS' findings led to the Netherlands being downgraded to "narrowed" rather than "open" status, and the US is now on the CIVICUS watchlist due to serious concerns regarding civic freedoms. In the Netherlands, even the Council of State (RvS) has warned that Dutch democracy is under pressure and is in need of immediate protection. These alarming trends demand urgent action.

How can we save our rights as civil society?

Hivos calls on the truly democratic policymakers in the governments of the Netherlands, the US and the EU Commission to take action against the use of SLAPPs as tools of intimidation. In Europe, the

robust implementation of the EU's Anti-SLAPP Directive must be a top priority to ensure that national laws prevent corporations and individuals from abusing legal systems to silence dissent. Press freedom must be actively defended by protecting journalists and civil society actors from legal harassment, smear campaigns and physical threats. Furthermore, governments everywhere must foster a political and social climate where informed and reasonable dialogue, including dissent, is valued as part of a healthy and equitable democracy. Only then can civil society counter disinformation that delegitimizes activists, as well as build international alliances that support those fighting for social justice.

Civil society cannot survive without resources. We must recognize the need for immediate emergency financial support, either new or redirected funding, to stabilize organizations under pressure. This, alongside longer-term, flexible funding mechanisms, will allow CSOs to remain resilient. Beyond funding, stronger coordination is essential to sustain efforts in democracy, human rights and media freedom. Government donors and philanthropic funders must invest in the capacity of CSOs to advocate for themselves, communicate their impact and build public trust. This includes supporting safe spaces for dialogue, leadership development and cross-sector partnerships that strengthen civic networks. Civil society organizations must also build critical mass by forging strong alliances amongst themselves.

The erosion of civic space is not an abstract issue – it has a direct impact on the ability of civil society to fight for justice, human rights and democracy. In the face of rapidly shrinking civic spaces across the global stage, we urgently call on established democracies to uphold democratic values and support the CSOs that fight for these values. SLAPPs and funding cuts are two sides of the same coin that serve to weaken civil society and strengthen authoritarian forces. If we don't

defend these values together now, free speech, press freedom, freedom of assembly and human rights advocacy as we know them may soon become a thing of the past. We only have to look to the US to see how quickly it can start.

[Cheyenne Torres edited this piece.]



Marco De Ponte is the CEO of Hivos, an international organization committed to social justice and equality. With over two decades of

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India Must Threaten Escalation to Force Pakistan to Stop Terrorism

Cherish Mathson
May 16, 2025

To stop Pakistan-backed terrorism, India must shift from deterrence — threatening a future response — to compellence — applying present pressure. Because the Pakistani military, not just terrorist groups, is the main center of decision-making in the state, India must impose direct and painful costs on the armed forces themselves.

The concept of red lines shot into prominence in the Indian subcontinent in 2002, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001. In a conversation with two Italian physicists that year, General Khalid Kidwai, the head of Pakistan's Strategic Forces Division, identified four red lines that could trigger Pakistan to use nuclear weapons:

India captures a large part of Pakistan's territory (spatial threshold). India destroys a large part of Pakistan's armed forces (military threshold). India strangles Pakistan economically (economic threshold). India destabilizes Pakistan internally (political threshold).

In other words, for every possible Indian action against Pakistan, Islamabad has declared a red line, and it places no restriction on initiating a nuclear strike. Though these thresholds remain vague and rest entirely on Pakistan's perception, cultivated air of irrationality and nuclear saber-rattling keeps the deterrent threat alive.

Pakistani aggression operates behind a nuclear shield

India has no ambitions to expand its territory. It has always been a status quo power that only seeks to regain territory it legally inherited from the British colonial government at independence. Pakistan, by contrast, used intrigue and deception, in collaboration with the British, to seize Gilgit-Baltistan. On November 2, 1947, Major William Brown, the British commander of the Gilgit Scouts, raised the Pakistani flag in Gilgit and declared its accession to Pakistan. The British government did not intervene and instead awarded Brown the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1948. Pakistan posthumously awarded him the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, its third-highest civilian honor, in 1993.

Pakistan confirmed its revisionist posture by launching the invasion of Kashmir in October 1947, leading to the first India–Pakistan War. The ceasefire line from that war became the mutually agreed Line of Control (LoC), across which Pakistan has shelled civilian areas since India conducted airstrikes on nine terrorist camps on 7 May in retaliation for the Pahalgam terror attack.

After Kidwai declared Pakistan's red lines in 2002, then-Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf repeated them later that year. India, for its part, has adhered to its "No First Use" nuclear doctrine and has not crossed any of Pakistan's stated red lines. This may have lulled Pakistan into believing that it had neutralized its conventional military inferiority. Pakistan relied instead on its low-cost strategy of cross-border terrorism to bleed India. It first developed this approach by training and deploying mujahideen in Afghanistan at the request of the US to push out the Soviet Union. After the Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan redirected these fighters to Kashmir. It assumed that terrorism gave it an inexpensive means to inflict pain on a stronger India.

Pakistan carried out the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008. India responded through diplomatic and legal channels, but Pakistan remained emboldened. It then launched the Uri attack in September 2016. India responded with a cross-LoC surgical strike that destroyed launch sites used for infiltration. This was Pakistan's first major shock.

Less than three years later, Pakistan executed the Pulwama terror attack in February 2019. India responded with an airstrike on a terrorist camp in Balakot, located inside Pakistan.

Six years after Pulwama, and despite its own economic crisis and internal security threats from Afghanistan and Balochistan, Pakistan has now

perpetrated the Pahalgam massacre, selecting victims by religion.

To the present day, Pakistan has used terrorism as a substitute for conventional warfare. What it failed to achieve in war, it seeks to gain by destabilizing Kashmir through terrorism. Its ambitions there are the same as its seizure of Gilgit-Baltistan: to acquire territory by means other than open war.

India must become ready to use its own firepower

After Pahalgam, India had no choice but to launch Operation Sindoor, carrying out limited strikes within Pakistani territory to avenge the victims and reassure an outraged public. General Ved Prakash Malik, former Chief of the Indian Army during the 1999 Kargil War, questioned the strategic effect of the operation, however. On his X account, he wrote:

Ceasefire 10 May 2025: We have left it to India's future history to ask what politico-strategic advantages, if any, were gained after its kinetic and non-kinetic actions post Pakistani horrific terror strike in Pahalgam on 22 April.

Even a layperson would reasonably ask: If India has conducted military operations in response to terrorism since 2016, why does Pakistan continue to cross this line?

The answer lies in strategy. But India has never formally stated its red line against cross-border terrorism or the consequences for violating it. By contrast, Pakistan's nuclear doctrine permits first use if it perceives that India has crossed one of its thresholds. Pakistan's readiness to use nuclear weapons first enhances the credibility of its deterrence. That places the burden of escalation on India.

India rules out first use, putting itself at a disadvantage. Pakistan continues to export terrorism despite evidence, UN designations of terrorist groups, diplomatic efforts, and Indian military responses. Terrorism has already claimed too much Indian and foreign blood. If Pakistan can back four red lines with the threat of nuclear first use, why can't India back its one red line with the same?

India must declare that terrorism is its red line and that crossing it could trigger a nuclear strike of a size and timing of its choosing. Simply removing the No First Use clause from India's doctrine would change the nuclear equation.

Inflict pain now, then more later

India suffers from confusing deterrence with compellence. Deterrence means stating a red line and threatening to respond if the adversary crosses it. It aims to preserve the status quo. Deterrence alone does not change behavior.

Compellence, by contrast, means causing pain now and demanding a change in behavior lest more pain follow. Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling explains this in his book *Arms and Influence*.

Pakistan continues to utilize terrorism because India has not made it dread what might come next. The pain must fall primarily on the Pakistani Army, which uses the conflict to justify its power and privileges, even if doing so crosses Pakistan's military threshold. India calls this strategy option "punitive deterrence," but what it really means is compellence.

What that intolerable pain should be is a decision for India's political and military leadership. But until India compels Pakistan to change, terrorism will persist. The next attack is only a matter of time.



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Originalists Bind the Living Constitution to the Corpses of History

Alfredo Toro Hardy
May 17, 2025

Originalist scholars and judges push to fix the US constitution's meaning in 1787. The Supreme Court now backs originalism over a more flexible approach which is, ironically, well grounded in US and western history. This shift risks locking US law into an outdated past and blocking needed change.

Originalists and living constitutionalists currently debate how to interpret the constitution of the United States. Far from remaining in a purely juridical or scholarly context, this has become a political issue with major implications for the daily life of US citizens. Some context is needed to understand what is at stake.

Written constitutions are a product of the 18th century

Written constitutions are relatively new. They emerged from the 18th-century liberal revolutions, which sought to guarantee citizens' rights and limit rulers' power. French constitutionalist Georges Burdeau writes: "For 18th-century publicists [writers on public affairs], it became a true dogma that the rules that governed the functioning of the State had to be systematically incorporated in a written text."

Before that, customary constitutions were the norm. These were a disordered collection of judicial rulings, statutes, tradition, authoritative works, and general principles. They were uncoded and rooted in custom. In essence, they were timeless.

Typical examples include the German Constitution before 1870 and the current British Constitution. In his 1802 book *The German Constitution*, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel pointed out how ancient norms still governing German life became obstacles to a modern, unified German state. Germany was a patchwork of states whose existence the constitution protected.

The English constitutional system derives from rights defined and guaranteed by courts. Common law is complemented by a diverse set of statutes never codified in a single text. These include the Magna Carta of 1215, the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679, and the Bill of Rights of 1689. Traditions, unwritten rules, and works like Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* also contribute to this heterogeneous system.

By contrast, the US constitution of 1787 and the French constitution of 1791 were the first written constitutional texts drafted to govern their respective nations. Yet they followed different

paths. The US constitution has remained largely intact, aside from its amendments. France, however, replaced its 1791 constitution the following year. Between 1791 and 1958, France adopted thirteen constitutions.

This pattern reflects the view that constitutions must change with fundamental political shifts. Should the far-right National Rally win the 2027 French presidential elections, it would likely try to replace the 1958 Gaullist constitution with a new one tailored to its program.

The US constitution quietly blends rigidity with silent adaptation over time

Although the US constitution has remained largely unchanged, in practice it sits somewhere between a written constitution and the British tradition. US courts, customs, and interactions between branches of government influence its application. For example, the relationship between the president and Congress often relies on implicit or inherent powers, where mutual acquiescence can create rights not explicitly granted by the constitution.

Still, most countries have embraced the idea that the fundamental law should evolve with society. Spanish intellectual José Ortega y Gasset argued that constitutions should reflect "pure life," or else they become "corpses of fulfilled history."

Austrian jurist Hans Kelsen distinguished between the normative and material nature of constitutions. The former refers to their formal legal structure. The latter addresses the political and social forces shaping the values embedded in the constitution.

After World War I, constitutional preambles became common. These sections express the political and social goals that guide the

constitution. Rather than existing in a timeless legal vacuum, they present an aspirational vision.

But extremes are dangerous. Binding society to the corpse of its past, as Hegel and Ortega y Gasset warned, is just as harmful as writing constitutions to suit the regime of the day. The US constitution has historically avoided both pitfalls. It represents a midpoint between these extremes.

Originalists now seek to freeze American law in 1787

The constitution written for thirteen newly independent agricultural colonies still governs a vast and populous country. This endurance is remarkable. But how did it happen?

Legal scholar David A. Strauss explains:

A living constitution is one that evolves, changes over time, and adapts to new circumstances, without being formally amended... The nation has grown in territory and its population has multiplied several times over. Technology has changed, the international situation has changed, the economy has changed, social mores have changed, all in ways that no one could have anticipated when the constitution was drafted. So, it seems inevitable that the constitution will change too... On the other hand... The constitution is supposed to be a rock-solid foundation, the embodiment of our most fundamental principles... So it seems we want to have a constitution that is both living, adapting, and changing and, simultaneously, invincibly stable and impervious to human manipulation. How can we escape this predicament? The good news is that we have mostly escaped it, albeit unselfconsciously. Our constitutional system... has tapped into an ancient source of law. That ancient kind of law is common law. The common law is a system built not on an authoritative, foundational, quasi-sacred text like the constitution. Rather the

common law is built out of precedents and traditions that accumulate over time. Our constitutional system has become a common law system, one in which precedent and past practices are, in their own way, as important as the written constitution itself. A common law constitution is a “living” constitution.

Unfortunately, an ultra-conservative shift in the US has elevated a school of thought called originalism. Unlike the living constitution approach, originalists believe that the constitution must be interpreted based on the intentions of its 1787 framers. Legal scholar Lawrence B. Solum summarizes this view: "Originalists argue that the meaning of the constitutional text is fixed and that it should bind constitutional actors."

This is akin to religious fundamentalism, which insists on literal interpretation of sacred texts. Five of the nine current US Supreme Court justices explicitly adhere to originalism, while a sixth does so implicitly. This tilts the Court heavily in that direction.

Restricting constitutional interpretation to 18th-century intentions effectively turns back the clock. From Kelsen's perspective, this would reflect a purely normative view of the constitution. The material view — which should reflect political and social values — is reduced to the ideas of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay.

From representing the best of both worlds, the US constitution now risks representing the worst.



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Why India's New Agnipath Military Recruitment Policy Is Risky

Shreeya Mishra
May 19, 2025

In 2022, the Indian government implemented a new military recruitment policy. According to this “Agnipath” policy, the military hires new recruits on a temporary basis. After four years, only a quarter of them receive permanent positions. This instability will erode a time-tested military's morale, cohesion, and fighting effectiveness.

On June 14, 2022, the Indian government changed over two centuries of tradition in military recruitment policy. According to the new policy, called Agnipath (“path of fire”),

the military inducts new soldiers for only four years and retains just a quarter of them for longer-term employment. This is unlikely to improve the fighting effectiveness of the Indian armed forces.

Under this new policy, the military recruits 17½–21-year-old men as Agniveers — “fire warriors” — who train for six months before reporting for active duty in the army, navy and air force. These Agniveers will serve for four years, after which the military will retain 25% of them. Those retained by the military will serve as “regular cadre,” who currently stay on for 15 years, with possibilities of staying on for longer if they win promotions.

What do proponents of Agnipath hope to achieve?

The Indian government and other proponents defend Agnipath on four primary grounds: structural reform, fiscal efficiency, creating a talent funnel, and decreasing the average age of soldiers.

They argue that the earlier recruitment system relied on outdated caste and ethnic divisions. India inherited this structure from the British, who designated certain groups — such as Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Rajputs — as “martial races” and recruited them into region- and caste-specific regiments. These regiments mirrored the British Army’s model, which still includes units like the Royal Irish Regiment or the Scots Guards. In post-independence India, many of these traditions persisted, especially in the Army’s infantry. While the Air Force, Navy, and several arms of the Army now recruit nationally, many regiments still rely on local or ethnic catchments. Supporters claim this approach reflects colonial divide-and-rule tactics, not the needs of a modern nation-state. They believe India should eliminate these legacies and replace them with ethnically neutral, numbered units.

They also highlight the unsustainable cost of the previous model. Previously, long-term soldiers received not just pay, but pensions, healthcare, housing, and rations. Pensions alone consumed nearly a quarter of the defense budget. This heavy financial burden limited the military’s ability to invest in modernization, including critical equipment upgrades and advanced weapon systems. By reducing the number of long-term soldiers, the Agnipath system will reduce pension obligations. In 2025–26, the government allocated ₹110 billion (\$1.29 billion) for Agnipath — only 3.5% of the total ₹3.12 trillion (\$36.6 billion) defense budget. Proponents argue that the policy frees up funds for modernization while trimming bureaucratic bloat.

Supporters also claim that the Agnipath system will allow the best talent to rise. Under the policy, only a quarter of Agniveers will be retained, so competition is intense. Government officials argue that this structure incentivizes performance and ensures that only the most capable and motivated candidates transition into the permanent cadre. In their view, this merit-based filter will create a more effective fighting force in the long run.

In addition to rewarding talent, the policy also aims to make the military younger. The government has stated that one of Agnipath’s goals is to reduce the average age of soldiers from 32 to 26. A younger military, it argues, will possess greater physical endurance, adaptability, and drive. Although the government has not set a specific timeline for achieving this demographic shift, officials maintain that a lower average age will inject josh aur jazba — zeal and passion — into the armed forces, enhancing both their morale and performance on the battlefield.

Agnipath will compromise the military’s effectiveness as a fighting force

Opponents of Agnipath raise serious concerns about morale, training, selection, and long-term stability. They argue that the policy reduces incentives, disrupts unit cohesion, and risks producing undertrained, undervalued soldiers.

They emphasize that young Indians often prefer government jobs for their job security. The civil service and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) offer permanent tenures. In contrast, Agniveers receive temporary contracts with no guarantee of retention. Even families with a long military tradition now encourage their children to join the police or other uniformed services instead. This shift undermines the Indian military's recruitment base and makes it a less attractive career. The risks of combat remain high, but the pay is modest — ₹30,000–₹40,000 (\$350–\$480) per month — and there are no pensions, no long-term healthcare, and no canteen privileges for most Agniveers. (Note that per capita annual income is around \$208, as per the World Bank.) Soldiers know their service will be short, their benefits limited, and their families unsupported if they fall in battle.

This creates broader social concerns. Most recruits come from rural or semi-rural backgrounds, where honor and stability carry significant weight. A young man who returns home after four years without permanent employment may face stigma or struggle to marry. A large cohort of trained, armed, unemployed men could also increase social instability. History shows that unattached young men, especially those with combat training, often pose security risks — either by turning to crime or joining insurgencies.

Critics also challenge the policy's impact on physical fitness and selection standards. To minimize corruption, Agnipath prioritizes exam scores over physical tests. This has led to the recruitment of candidates who may be academically capable but physically underprepared. Many do not come from traditional

military communities and lack the pride and identity that comes with such lineage. Veterans and sergeants report that current Agniveers are less tough and less motivated than earlier cohorts.

The training regime reflects another key shortfall. Six months of training — compared to the 14-month programs of a decade ago — is too short to instill the physical and mental discipline needed for modern combat. Experts argue that recruits need at least three months of proper nutrition before they can even begin strenuous training. Furthermore, modern warfare, especially in the Air Force and Navy, requires highly technical skills. Even infantry soldiers now rely on sophisticated equipment, including night vision goggles, drones, and RPGs. If 75% of Agniveers leave after four years, the military has little incentive to invest in their advanced training. The result is a diluted, underprepared force.

The most serious concern raised by critics of Agnipath is the damage it inflicts on morale across the Indian military. Morale is not a superficial concern — it is the foundation of combat effectiveness, discipline, and sacrifice. A soldier who does not feel respected, valued, or secure in his role will not fight with conviction. The Agnipath policy signals, both symbolically and materially, that society places a lower value on military service than on other government jobs, such as those in the police or civil administration. Agniveers know that their employment is temporary, that their benefits are limited, and that most of them will be discharged after just four years. This awareness undermines their commitment and weakens the very institutions they serve. Over time, this constant churn of personnel erodes institutional memory and hollows out the experience base that any professional military depends on.

Compounding this morale crisis are the structural weaknesses embedded in the policy

itself. Low pay, short training periods, and unclear criteria for retention all contribute to a sense of precarity and disposability among Agniveers. Soldiers who are not properly trained, not physically prepared, and not paid or treated on par with their long-term counterparts will naturally feel alienated from the institution they serve. These conditions send a clear message: that their contribution is short-term, replaceable, and ultimately expendable. Instead of fostering loyalty, camaraderie, or pride, the system incentivizes self-preservation. The Agnipath framework, by design, introduces a new class of temporary soldiers who lack a clear path forward — and that uncertainty saps morale at the core.

This shift is already changing the culture within the ranks. Officers and veterans report a steady decline in esprit de corps — the pride and unity that once defined the Indian military. Agniveers, occupying a lower rank than regular soldiers, now constitute a de facto new caste within the armed forces. Four years is simply not enough time to internalize regimental values or develop the kind of trust that makes soldiers willing to risk their lives for each other. In traditional units where soldiers fought for Nam, Namak, Nishan — honor, loyalty, and shared identity — such bonds took years to build. By contrast, Agnipath fosters a dog-eat-dog environment, where individual survival trumps collective mission. Agniveers, knowing they will soon exit the system and may never see their fellow recruits again, have little reason to form deep attachments. The result is a more fragmented, risk-averse, and ultimately less effective fighting force.

Agnipath will not achieve the benefits supporters claim

Given these contrasting sets of pros and cons, it would be easy to argue that its supporters and critics simply value different priorities — stability vs. flexibility, experience vs. youth, or institutional

loyalty vs. cost savings. But this is misleading. In reality, Agnipath doesn't just sacrifice one set of goals for another — it fails even on its own stated terms. Now, I will consider each of the pro arguments in turn and explain why Agnipath will not achieve the results it is meant to achieve.

On the issue of caste and ethnic regiments, critics agree that India should transcend colonial-era divisions. But they also argue that ethnic and regional identities still matter in India today. Regimental pride often draws strength from shared cultural backgrounds. Critics note that Nepal's legendary Gurkhas — who have served with distinction in the Indian Army since 1815 — no longer find Agnipath attractive. They refuse to risk their lives for a temporary job that lacks honor and career progression. This rejection not only weakens the military but also strains India–Nepal relations. Meanwhile, Britain continues to recruit Gurkhas, and China has begun studying their integration as a model for its own forces. Agnipath has already handed geopolitical advantages to India's rivals.

Supporters emphasize that the new policy will reduce pension costs. Critics respond that this financial gain comes at too high a price. Pensions exist not just as a benefit but as a symbol of respect for those who serve. Retired soldiers often pass down institutional wisdom and support the military in civilian roles. Removing that link discourages recruitment and erodes long-term military culture. Young Indians may reject the Agnipath route in favor of more secure and stable careers — even if those offer less money. In times of crisis, India may find itself with fewer qualified and willing recruits. The Pahalgam attack of April 2025, which claimed 26 civilian lives, highlights the need for a military that blends the energy of youth with the judgment of experience. Budget cuts that hollow out that balance endanger national security.

Supporters claim that Agnipath rewards merit and competition. Critics disagree. They argue that the selection process now favors test-takers over patriots. Young men who want to serve their country long-term may never get the chance. Worse, those trained in arms for four years may return to society without a clear path. In rare cases, this may lead to radicalization or militancy — where the very training meant to serve the nation turns against it. More broadly, the lack of a reintegration plan will leave many Agniveers adrift, with no guarantee that their service will help them build a future.

Supporters say Agnipath will make the army younger. Critics acknowledge the potential benefits of youth, but they see no plan or timeline to reach the stated goal of reducing the average age to 26. They also question whether constant turnover will help the military. As Agniveers finally become competent in their fourth year, the military discharges most of them. This wastes training investment and drains institutional memory. Critics believe that a strong military needs both youthful vigor and veteran leadership — Agnipath provides neither in sustainable measure.

New Delhi must have the courage to change direction

The Agnipath policy has ignited widespread debate over its impact on the Indian military's operational effectiveness. While the government introduced it as a step toward modernization, serious concerns have emerged — about the loss of experience, the difficulty of retaining talent, and the mental toll on short-term recruits. These concerns raise a pressing question: does the policy actually strengthen India's defense, or does it compromise it?

Recognizing that this policy may have been a mistake is not a sign of weakness. It is a mark of responsibility. The government must have the

courage to revise a flawed decision. Listening to veterans, defense experts, and those serving in uniform would allow the government to rework the scheme into something more stable, more effective, and more respectful of the armed forces' mission.

This critique comes not from any lack of respect for the military, but from deep admiration for it. Indians owe an unshakable debt of patriotic gratitude to the men and women who serve, often at great personal risk. Out of that respect, we must insist that the military receive the support, resources, and long-term stability it deserves — not just symbolic praise, but meaningful policy.

The recent Pahalgam attack and continued threats on India's borders make this need all the more urgent. A strong military cannot rely on youth alone. It must draw strength from the combination of youthful energy and experienced leadership. A recruitment policy that honors both will serve India's security far better — and reflect the seriousness with which we regard those who defend it.

[Anton Schauble edited this piece.]



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Shreeya interns with Fair Observer and aims to improve her writing as well as analytical skills over the next few years. She is passionate about Indian foreign policy and tennis.

Trump's Tariffs Accelerate China's Rise Toward Global Economic Dominance

Mudit Jain
May 22, 2025

US President Donald Trump raised tariffs on Chinese goods during his first term in 2018, then expanded them during his second term in April 2025. China lost ground in the US, yet it gained strength by expanding into other markets. Chinese industry may grow stronger and push the US out of its top economic position before 2040.

US President Donald Trump has suddenly sent the world into upheaval by increasing tariffs on all countries that export to the US. His main target has been China. This move will once again fuel China's rise, as past US presidents have done. Former US President Bill Clinton admitted China into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Former US President Barack Obama withdrew US forces from Afghanistan and persuaded other countries to share the costs of the war on terrorism. These decisions reduced US dominance in the world. In the resulting vacuum, a multipolar world emerged. Recently, this has shifted to a bipolar world dominated by the US and China.

Now, Trump is trying to assert himself by imposing high tariffs on China and other countries. I believe this will again fuel China's rise and may lead to its surpassing the US as the most powerful economy in the world by 2040.

The US has been China's most important market. Many US companies have shifted their manufacturing operations to China and exported finished products back to the US, targeting the Chinese domestic market. Companies like Apple have chosen to manufacture iPhones in China, not just for the US but also for the global market. With its sophisticated manufacturing techniques and high technology, China has fulfilled its vision more effectively than other countries could. China has offered both competitive costs and skills in producing key subcomponents.

Now that the US has forced China to look elsewhere, China is targeting other countries to increase exports and boost domestic consumption. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its "string of pearls" strategy to develop global ports will help it market its products aggressively.

The central Chinese government shapes the country's global economic strategy. It takes political risks to enter new markets and leverages those opportunities to sell its surplus cement, steel, and technology. Additionally, it secures essential minerals for high-tech products. Chinese companies, employing Chinese labor and financing from Chinese banks, construct infrastructure and stimulate economic development, thereby strengthening China's economy.

China has expanded trade with Saudi Arabia and Russia. It has begun conducting bilateral trade with other countries, including India, using local currencies instead of the dollar. This undermines the dollar's dominance in global trade.

China also plays a leading role in the BRICS group and has strengthened its ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It has increased trade and signed agreements using its currency. China has also gained power in global organizations like the UN by leading committees and providing funding. It leverages these positions

to expand its influence. With high labor costs pricing the US out of manufacturing, Chinese companies have acquired closed US firms in sectors such as automobiles to gain direct access to the US market. In the future, China will likely increase its investments in the US, subject to American approval, to bypass tariffs.

China holds approximately \$760 billion in US Treasury securities. It may reduce these holdings and invest in other currencies and precious metals, such as gold and silver, to offset risks associated with holding US assets. Some have attributed Trump's partial rollback of tariffs to concerns over falling bond prices caused by foreign sales of US debt. This situation raises interest yields and could eventually harm the US dollar's status as the global reserve currency. Asia will drive global growth, and China is better positioned than the US to serve this region due to its geographic proximity and strong trade ties.

China's technological advancements raise concerns. Telecom giant Huawei has developed superior 5G technology, prompting the US to pressure allies against using Chinese equipment and to restrict chip sales to China. In response, China has significantly increased its spending on research and development to achieve self-sufficiency in high-tech manufacturing. It sources raw materials through existing international networks. While the US still leads in software, particularly due to the use of English, China has developed alternatives in Chinese. This development could have significant consequences for the global tech industry.

The US withdrawal from global leadership has allowed China to deepen its ties with Russia and Saudi Arabia. China's existing networks in Africa, South America, and Asia position it as a significant international player. China has surpassed the US to become Brazil's largest trade partner. Additionally, Australia relies heavily on

China for coal, iron ore, and other minerals. This indicates that China engages with countries on every continent, including the US.

This will facilitate China's rise to become the dominant global power by 2040. US influence in Europe has waned, and many European countries have relocated manufacturing to China. This shift has economically pulled Europe closer to China, even if its political and institutional ties remain stronger with the US.

China, with military support from Russia, has become a formidable force. While the US still dominates militarily, China now poses a serious challenge. In economic terms, it is likely that China will surpass the US in the coming decade.

[Nicolette Cavallaro edited this piece.]



Mudit Jain is third generation member of his family-owned company, which manufactures industrial chemicals. He has played an active role in various chambers of commerce. In addition to his business responsibilities, Mudit is actively engaged in various activities and organizations.

Outside of his business endeavors, Mudit Jain was a former Director on the board of the Rotary Club of Bombay. Additionally, he has been a part of the executive committee of the Museum Society of Bombay. Mudit's interests include wildlife and traveling, going to the theater, attending book and film festivals, and reading non-fiction books. He keeps fit by brisk walking daily.

Gender, Nuclear Weapons and Repression: The Complex Case of Iran

Alvina Ahmed, Rebecca Locher
May 23, 2025

The international concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions and the repression of women's rights, especially after Mahsa Amini's death, are profound. Nuclear weapons development could worsen the regime's oppression of women. Integrating gender and human rights discussions with nuclear nonproliferation efforts is essential to address security threats and injustices faced by Iranian women.

Two distinct international conversations focus on the Islamic Republic of Iran. First, as the conflict in the Middle East rages on, experts and policymakers have been engaged in discourse about Iran's intention to speed up its development of nuclear weapons. At the same time, since the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022 at the hands of Iran's authorities, many have been engaged in discussions around the regime's efforts to repress the rights of Iranian women. What is missing from the conversations on Iran's nuclear program — and the mainstream dialogue on gender and nuclear weapons — is how the acquisition of nuclear weapons would impact Iranian women. The development of nuclear weapons would provide Iranian authorities more leverage to intensify their efforts to repress the fundamental rights of Iranian citizens. Therefore, the international community must consider how the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran could affect the rights of Iranian women.

In civil society spaces, limited discussions on the intersection of gender and nuclear weapons exist. The few discussions that do take place focus on the disproportionate harm caused to women and girls from nuclear weapons use and testing, as well as the persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes regarding nuclear weapons. Moreover, conversations around nuclear weapons remain highly gendered, with socially constructed norms framing the willingness to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons as inherently masculine. This male-centric narrative has not only marginalized diverse voices and reinforced gender stereotypes but also impeded progress toward broader nonproliferation and disarmament goals, overlooking how nuclear proliferation reinforces power dynamics that deepen inequalities.

Iran's repression of women's rights

On September 16, 2022, Iran's "morality" police stopped and arrested 22-year-old Mahsa Amini for not complying with the regime's harsh hijab laws, and she later died in custody. In response to Amini's unlawful death, protests led by women against the Iranian regime's repressive laws erupted in Tehran. Two years after Amini's death, the Iranian regime continues to crack down on women's fundamental rights. In September 2024, a UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission reported increased crackdowns on women's rights activism in 2024. Specifically, even as mass protests subsided, the regime's authorities enacted harsher measures, such as the death penalty, to eliminate activism that advocates for fundamental human rights. In 2024, Iran reportedly executed 901 individuals, including activists protesting the regime's repressive hijab laws and death penalties.

Iranian authorities also implemented even harsher measures to crack down on women who refuse to comply with the regime's hijab mandates. In April 2024, Tehran's police force implemented

the “Noor” (meaning light in Persian) plan, which allows the state to deploy police officers throughout Iran to arrest women who the police deem as not abiding by the veiling laws. State officials also sought to expand measures to increase surveillance to monitor hijab compliance. For instance, according to the UN Fact-Finding Report, the regime authorized the use of drones to surveil compliance with the veiling laws.

What would it mean for Iranian women if Iran becomes a nuclear-armed state?

A central premise of this discussion is that, when a state acquires nuclear weapon capabilities, it can alter its domestic politics. One of the drivers behind a state pursuing nuclear weapons is using such weapons as “political tools to advance parochial domestic and bureaucratic interests.” This motivation suggests that nuclear weapons can provide the regime’s leadership with greater political grasp and legitimacy. In Iran’s case, this may mean that the state might use the rhetoric that it acquired the bomb to protect Iranian citizens from its adversary Israel – as the Supreme Leader of Iran had claimed back in 2015 — thereby suppressing dissent among state officials and giving the state a tighter grip on all aspects of domestic governance. This would give the Iranian state greater power to enforce its repressive measures more effectively.

Because Iran is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), its acquisition of enough fissile material to produce nuclear weapons would be a violation of the treaty. As a result, the international community could potentially impose additional sanctions, isolate the state diplomatically or even subject it to military action — all measures that would disproportionately harm the marginalized communities of Iran, particularly Iranian women and girls, as they are more vulnerable to the impacts of economic sanctions and forced displacement.

Furthermore, if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it could wield increased leverage over the international community, using its nuclear capabilities as a shield against external pressure. The regime could implement further restrictions on international development agencies and aid workers who aim to provide Iranian women and girls access to education and healthcare. Pakistan is an example of how nuclear weapons can empower regimes and cover up human rights violations and development. Since acquiring nuclear weapons in 1998, Pakistan has used its status as a nuclear-armed state to bolster its international legitimacy and shield itself from external scrutiny. Pakistan’s military has used its nuclear arsenal, initially justified as a deterrence measure against India, to consolidate power by leveraging the threat of external enemies to maintain control.

Balochistan, a region divided between Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, has particularly manifested the abuse of nuclear weapons through its nuclear testing. Balochistan has also been marked by extreme poverty and human rights abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention and the suppression of nationalist movements. The military has justified these actions as critical to national security, thus evading both domestic and global accountability. Due to military resistance to reconciliation and development efforts, Balochistan remains disproportionately underdeveloped. This case suggests that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it could similarly use them to suppress development initiatives and human rights efforts, making it even harder for the international community to intervene effectively.

Policy implications for the international community

The ultimate goal for groups such as the P5+1 (UN permanent members) should be to establish an agreement like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of

Action (JCPOA), a landmark agreement between Iran and the P5+1, which includes the United States. Under the agreement, Iran agreed to deconstruct much of its nuclear program and allow international inspectors increased access to its nuclear facilities. The significant deal forced Iran to halt the development of weapons-grade fissile materials. In 2018, the US withdrew from the agreement. Unfortunately, in the backdrop of the current conflict in the Middle East, of which Iran is a key actor as it backs groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis, a formal diplomatic agreement like the JCPOA is unlikely to come to fruition.

Nevertheless, the international community should aim to seek informal deals in the interim, not only focusing on limiting Iran's nuclear capacity but also on protecting human rights. Thus far, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, met with officials in Tehran and reported that Iran has agreed to cap uranium enrichment at 60%. Though this doesn't ease the broader concern of Iran's nuclear program, as once enrichment reaches 20%, it becomes relatively easy to continue enriching it to the weapons-grade level of 90%, Grossi's meeting was still a step in a positive direction.

Similarly, another step in the right direction was when officials from the UK, Germany and France engaged in talks with Iran; the parties agreed to continue diplomatic dialogue in the future. More recently, at the 2025 World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, Tehran "delivered a conciliatory message to Western leaders," suggesting that it is not pursuing nuclear weapons; the West should hold Iran accountable for this declaration.

The international community must seize every opportunity to integrate human rights, particularly

the treatment of women and girls, into discussions on Iran's nuclear ambitions. By incorporating these issues into informal agreements and confidence-building measures, states can address the immediate threat posed by Iran's nuclear program and lay the groundwork for broader dialogue and agreements that prioritize the protection of fundamental rights. Of course, the international community would need to provide Iran incentives to halt its nuclear program and alter its domestic policies. Such incentives could include sanctions relief, which might be attractive to Iran as it currently faces a faltering economy. Furthermore, the international community must reiterate to Iran that if the country adheres to the NPT, its rights as a signatory of the treaty will be respected, which includes providing the state with the necessary support for civilian nuclear programs.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to repress the fundamental rights of its citizens. As this treatment continues, the international community, including individuals and groups in both the policy and civil society spheres, must integrate conversations about Iranian women's rights into broader security issues. Furthermore, when conceptualizing gender and nuclear weapons, it is not enough to focus solely on the disproportionate harm caused to women and girls by nuclear weapons use or the gendered narratives in policy spaces. It is key to examine how nuclear proliferation enables repressive regimes to consolidate power further and deepen gender inequalities. Integrating a human rights framework into the discourse on Iran's nuclear program is essential to addressing both the immediate security threats posed by Iran and the long-term impacts on Iranian women's fundamental freedoms.

[Liam Roman edited this piece.]



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Rebecca Locher is an American student, researcher and writer based in New York City. Her work focuses on democratic resilience, gender and

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Language Wars: The Francophone-Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon

Imogen Alessio
May 27, 2025

Cameroon was established as a 'bilingual' federation but soon evolved into a centralised state. French was imposed on the Anglophone population leading to dissent. Attempts of cultural assimilation of the former British Southern Cameroon and systematic marginalisation by the Frenchphone elites has resulted in protests and violent suppression.

In his resignation letter, the former Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon and one of the key architects of the 1961 federal union, John Ngu Foncha, exclaimed: "The Anglophone Cameroonians whom I brought into union have been ridiculed and referred to as 'les Biafraïes', 'les ennemies dans la maison', 'les traîtres' etc., and the constitutional provisions which protected this Anglophone minority have been suppressed, their voice drowned while the rule of the gun replaced the dialogue which the Anglophones cherish very much".

However, the current President, Paul Biya, have long maintained that the Anglophone 'problem' Foncha discusses does not exist and that the government rather "has often tried to minimise the Anglophone-Francophone divide by highlighting the existence of a common identity under German colonial rule and the official recognition in all the post-colonial constitutions of the bilingual and multicultural nature of the Cameroonian nation". Nevertheless, despite the

denial, the Cameroon government has resorted to “intimidation, corruption and repression” to dispel the Anglophone population’s demand for independence or autonomy, suggesting that a problem does in fact exist. This suppression has led to a bloody language war.

Historical Background

Until the end of the First World War, Cameroon (formerly Kamerun) was a German protectorate. However, following Germany’s defeat, it was divided by the League of Nations between Great Britain and France. The territory under the British was further divided into two administrative regions: Northern Cameroon and Southern Cameroon. While the British pursued a policy of indirect rule that conferred a large degree of autonomy to their part of the territory, France constructed a highly centralised colonial territory.

Following the Second World War, Great Britain and France began to relinquish their colonial territories. In the referendum that took place on February 11th, 1961, British Southern Cameroon was confronted with the decision to either join Nigeria (which was joined by British northern Cameroons) or the newly emerging Francophone La République du Cameroun (the Republic of Cameroon). South Cameroon chose the latter, but their hope “to preserve their cultural specificity” as part of French Cameroun was shortlived.

The origin of the Anglophone Problem

The Anglophone problem has its origins in the Foumban Constitutional Conference of 1961. The Conference, held in July, 1961, created a constitution for the new Federal state consisting of the British Southern Cameroon and La République du Cameroun. It also set the stage “for the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon on October 1, 1961, which reunited two pieces of the former

German Kamerun both with very distinct political cultures”.

The conference is however remembered as a turning point where the promise of a truly bilingual and bicultural federation began to fall apart. Anglophones, representing nine percent of the total population, were forced to “accept a highly centralised system of government and administration”. This laid the groundwork for many of the ongoing tensions between the Anglophone and Francophone communities.

An amendment was made to the Constitution in 1984 which has only served to exacerbate the Anglophone problem further. The 1984 amendment changed the country’s official name from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon. This alteration was not merely symbolic. It marked a shift from the federal structure enshrined in the 1961 Constitution, which had recognised and protected the unique identity of British Southern Cameroons (later known as West Cameroon). By adopting the new name, the amendment effectively erased the legal and cultural distinctions of the Anglophone regions.

Today, the Anglophone community demand the restoration of West Cameroon's cultural identity and the implementation of the articles of the Constitution that had once pledged to safeguard the values and institutions that British Southern Cameroons had brought into the Union in 1961.

Linguistic and Economic Hegemony

As Mufor Atanga declares, “the Federal Republic of Cameroon came into being in 1961 as the first ‘bilingual’ federation in Africa”. However, Atanga notably put the bilingual descriptor in quotation marks. For although the Foumban Conference declared that both French and English were Cameroon’s two official languages, the latter has been significantly marginalised since. From the

inception of the unified state, French has been established as the language of administration and official communication. Government institutions, legal proceedings, and public services are primarily conducted in French which not only centralises administrative power, but also creates barriers for those who are more comfortable in English or local languages. As a result the Francophone elite today holds disproportionate power. This linguistic preference of French is not by any means accidental; it is a deliberate policy designed to solidify a single national identity, one that aligns with the cultural legacy of French colonial rule.

The educational system further illustrates how the French language functions as a tool of domination. In many schools across Cameroon, the curriculum is predominantly taught in French. Textbooks, teaching methods and examinations reflect this orientation. In 2016, teachers in the English-speaking regions of North West and South West Cameroon went on strike, along with lawyers, protesting against the ‘francophonisation’ of the English educational system. The teachers saw these measures as part of a broader pattern of state centralisation and cultural assimilation. By mandating French as the language of administration and public discourse, the state has thus created a barrier that has effectively excluded Anglophone Cameroonians from full participation in public life and represents a clear instrument of control.

Economic exploitation has further kindled discontent. Francophone-dominated Cameroon has systematically exploited the economic resources of the Anglophone regions whilst providing little infrastructural development in return. The Southwest and Northwest regions are rich in oil, timber, and agricultural resources. Yet, it is these same areas that remain underdeveloped, with poor roads, failing schools, and inadequate healthcare services. The Biya government has kept economic

and social activities in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon at bay with serious socio-economic implications on the local communities and the economic tissue of the regions.

Most of Cameroon’s crude oil, which accounts for approximately 12% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), is located in West Cameroon, off the coast of the South West Region. The state-controlled oil sector, SONARA (Société Nationale de Raffinage), is also ironically located in Limbe in the Anglophone region of Cameroon. The revenues from the oil industry, however, overwhelmingly benefits the Francophone elites, leaving local communities to bear the brunt of environmental degradation and economic neglect. Similar dynamics exist in the timber industry, where foreign corporations (often backed by the Francophone elite) extract high profit resources with little reinvestment in local communities. This exploitation does not only perpetuate regional economic disparities, but it also deepens the political and cultural alienation felt by the Anglophone community.

Systematic repression

Amnesty International’s report in 2023 has exposed some of these human rights abuses in Cameroon’s Anglophone regions, where state security forces have been accused for arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, torture, and rape. The report documents how these brutal tactics have been deployed against activists, journalists, and civilians who advocate for greater autonomy and a federal system. As pointed out in the report, “Cameroonian authorities must act to end the violence against the population and conduct thorough investigations into the killings, acts of torture, rapes, burning of houses and other atrocities committed in the Anglophone region”.

Anglophone movements that aspire for federalism or secession have been the main targets of such repression. The introduction of multi-party politics in the early 1990s and the easing of restrictions on freedom of association led to the formation of various opposition parties and pressure groups. Among these, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) emerged as a significant voice for the Anglophone community and has articulated the frustrations of those who have felt sidelined by the centralised Francophone-dominated state. Members of these Anglophone movements, however, have been harassed by the security forces, threatened with arrest, and subjected to travel restrictions, forcing some to go into exile. The state has also repressed public demonstrations and protests organised by the SDF. This includes violent crackdowns during rallies which are often characterised by the use of excessive force. For instance, in the protests that took place in 2016, security forces deployed tear gas, batons, as well as live ammunition, killing four people. In addition to this, police crackdowns on gatherings and ghost town actions (shutting down a town as a form of protest) have been met with violent dispersals.

The way forward

The Anglophone problem is not simply a vestige of a troubled past, it is a living crisis that continues to shape the nation's destiny. In Cameroon's case, the cultural wars have turned into civil war. By favouring a Francophone elite, the state has not only undermined the cultural identity and rights of the Anglophone minority, but it has also fuelled cycles of repression and conflict. Only by acknowledging and rectifying these systemic disparities can Cameroon hope to fulfill the promise of a truly bilingual and bicultural nation that was originally agreed on in 1961.

[Asmita Adhikari edited this piece.]



Imogen Alessio is currently completing her Master's in Holocaust and Genocide at the University of Amsterdam in the

Netherlands. Alongside this, she is working as a research intern at the National Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies investigating the relationship between conflict and the environment. She is specifically examining the use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. She completed her Bachelor's degree in History and Political Science at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

Bubblelicious — How Our Media Spheres Trap Us In Separate Realities

Alex Gloy
May 30, 2025

US President Donald Trump's approval rating in his first term is the lowest of any president in the last 70 years. Media bubbles and ideological divides leave America increasingly polarized while cracks show in the economy. The people endured difficulties in the past and must find the strength to do so again.

It was the fall of 2024. The leaves were doing their autumn thing — burnished reds, crisp yellows — perfect for a drive into Pennsylvania. Shortly after crossing the New Jersey state line, the scenery shifted. Trump flags hung with the permanence of porch lights, outnumbering Biden signs by what felt like 100 to 1.

After the election, the flags didn't come down right away. They lingered like holiday lights in March — faded, wind-flapped, defiant. But by spring, they were gone. All of them. As if packed away with the plastic Santas and patriotic bunting.

US President Donald Trump's approval rating has cratered to 45% — a record low for any postwar president in their first quarter — except, of course, for his own first term.

Yet online, you wouldn't know it. Social media still hums with MAGA fervor, the comments sections undeterred if not emboldened. In the virtual town square, the Trump train still runs express.

A recent cable TV survey revealed Fox News commanding a 59% share of the prime-time news audience among 25-to-54-year-olds. CNN trailed far behind at 17%. It sounds dominant until you check the headcount. Fox's prime-time audience? 345,000 people. That's 0.1% of the US population. Not exactly a mass movement — more like a crowded dinner party with production values.

Meanwhile, the real action is online. According to Pew, 86% of American adults now get their news from digital devices. YouTube personalities have built media empires: Ben Shapiro has 7 million subscribers. The Young Turks boast 6 million. Sean Hannity's radio show reaches 14 million listeners. These aren't just platforms; they are ecosystems.

And they are sealed tight. These media spheres don't trade in news — they manufacture narratives. There's no distinction between reporting and opinion, between what happened and what it means. It's all one frothy ideological milkshake, shaken, not stirred.

In a recent segment, the hosts of New York Public Radio subjected themselves to 12 straight hours of

right-wing content. They emerged dazed, like researchers back from Chernobyl.

The divide isn't just political. It's metaphysical. Two realities hermetically sealed, running on parallel tracks. The possibility of a shared national conversation? Gone. Replaced by algorithm-fed outrage and tribal reinforcement.

Each side is convinced that the other is either brainwashed or bloodthirsty. The imagery is apocalyptic: one half sees a savior marching toward greatness; the other sees a wrecking ball headed for the foundation of the republic. There's no middle ground when the other side is the end of the world.

In rural Pennsylvania or New York, the economic decay is physical. Boarded storefronts. Empty factories. Roads that haven't seen fresh asphalt since the Cold War. The American dream, hollowed out. Meanwhile, the coastal elites cash in stock options, slurp oysters and speculate in ultra-luxury real estate.

The result? A system that works for the few and fails the many. GDP growth headlines mean little in places where the post office is the last functioning institution. And just like rural America watches Wall Street but never touches its wealth, countries abroad watch the dollar dominate even as they quietly prepare alternatives.

And then there's the fatigue. Keeping up with American politics feels like binge-watching a bad reality show that never ends — just new seasons with a similar cast. Somewhere between doomscrolling and disengagement, I found myself in a souvenir shop in a sleepy town. Amid the mugs and faith-based merch was a small bar of soap that read, "I can — and I will." A profound reminder we are not helpless if we concentrate on our inner strength.

The world feels like it's closing in. But we've lived through worse. A global pandemic shut down the planet. Supply chains snapped. Economies buckled. Somehow, we endured.

We'll get through this too.

[Avery Ewing edited this piece.]



Alexander Gloy is an independent investment professional with over 35 years of experience in financial markets. He worked in Equity

Research and Sales, both in Investment and Private Banking for Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse, Sal. Oppenheim and Lombard Odier Darier Hentsch. He focuses on macroeconomic research, analyzing the impact of global debt and derivatives on the stability of our monetary system. His interest in crypto-currencies from the perspective of monetary theory led him to become a member of the Central Bank Digital Currency Think Tank. He has taught classes at colleges and universities.

MAGA's ideological export to Romania failed. What now?

Antonia Laura Pup
May 31, 2025

In Romania's recent presidential election, pro-European candidate Nicușor Dan triumphed over far-right rival George Simion, who is connected to the MAGA movement in the US. Voters opted for moderation and integration, rejecting populist rhetoric. This outcome

indicates a constraint on far-right influence in Eastern Europe.

The historic victory of Romania's president-elect, the pro-European centrist Nicușor Dan, shows the limits of the MAGA (Make America Great Again) project in Eastern Europe. His opponent, right-wing candidate George Simion, openly aligned himself with US President Donald Trump's political movement but failed to win. Although he qualified for the runoff from first place, taking double the number of votes of the runner-up, Simion lost the election by 7% behind Dan.

National discontent and competing narratives.

Simion spent the final two weeks of the campaign trying to position himself as a protégé of the MAGA movement. Instead of debating his opponent, he toured Europe — visiting France, Poland, Italy and the United Kingdom—in an effort to secure endorsements from European conservatives. However, these endorsements were slim: Even Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán withdrew his initial public support for Simion after hearing of his internal anti-Hungarian rhetoric.

Simion also relied on the new media exposure provided by the international MAGA movement, frequently appearing on podcasts by MAGA influencers like Steve Bannon. He also framed his candidacy and that of one of the far-right presidential candidates in Poland, supported by Trump, Pawel Narowcki, as the “winning MAGA ticket for Eastern Europe.”

The recent rise in popularity of the Romanian far-right movement, of which Simion is an exponent, has its national particularities, especially those concerning extreme poverty. Romania has

the highest percentage of people at risk of social exclusion and poverty in the European Union. In addition to the favorable domestic context, Simion's candidacy came against a favorable international backdrop, as he speculated Romania's historical pro-Americanism and well-known strategic dependence on the US security umbrella to raise his profile as a MAGA export candidate.

This is hardly the first time that a Romanian presidential candidate has tried to offset his lack of domestic support by portraying himself as a candidate supported by the “Americans”. To brand himself as such, Simion went as far as adopting confrontational rhetoric similar to that associated with Trump’s political style and even claiming a threat of assassination by the establishment.

In contrast, Dan focused on policy over confrontation. He participated in every debate to present his “Honest Romania” program and drew endorsements from pro-European civil society, academics and anti-communist dissidents. These supporters warned that a Simion victory would push Romania back toward the isolationism of its totalitarian past. The runoff became a contest between two starkly different visions: one rooted in European integration, the other leaning toward alignment with Eastern autocracies.

Foreign policy stakes and governance challenges.

Nicușor Dan, now the Romanian president-elect, is a mathematician educated at the Sorbonne and an active member of civil society organizations. He was elected Mayor of Bucharest in 2020. He ran as an independent for the presidency of Romania in 2025. Dan was one of the few candidates who had unequivocally advocated that it is in Romania's national interest to support Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, until a sustainable and just peace is achieved. Dan was also the only candidate

who stated that if Russia were to attack Moldova, he would swiftly call on NATO allies for support.

In the evening of his historic victory, Dan specified that security, alongside the modernization of the economy, will be a priority of his mandate and pledged to raise defense sector spending to a minimum of 3.5% of the country’s GDP. The president-elect mentioned that his first visits abroad will be in Chișinău, Brussels, and Washington. During the electoral campaign, he too attracted the public endorsement of EU leaders, including the Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, and French President Emmanuel Macron.

The new president faces a difficult mandate, starting with Romania’s substantial deficit. Dan must also oversee the formation of a new government, as the current one remains interim. He will lead the appointment of new Constitutional Court judges and heads of the intelligence services. As president, he holds a central role in shaping foreign and security policy, including the implementation of Romania’s new defense strategy.

The most difficult file to be solved by Dan, however, remains repairing the relationship with the United States, given that Romania has drawn criticism from the Trump administration after the annulment of the November 2024 presidential elections amid allegations of foreign meddling. The United States remains Romania's most vital security partner. However, bilateral relations have deteriorated in recent months, culminating in the decision not to welcome Romania into the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which allows citizens of certain countries to travel to the US for stays of up to 90 days without a visa, despite the Biden administration's confirmation that Bucharest has met all the technical criteria to join the program.

A setback for MAGA in Eastern Europe?

With Simion's loss and Dan's historic win, the election results suggest that efforts to expand the influence of the MAGA movement faced limitations in Romania. This region is profoundly dependent on America's security umbrella. Although pro-American at heart, the Romanians rejected this far-right ideological framework, demonstrating that even acknowledging dependency on the United States has its limits.

The Polish elections scheduled for June 1 will further indicate the scope of this ideological battle across Eastern Europe. Until then, however, Dan's victory in Romania could be interpreted as support for deeper European integration and coordination on foreign policy.

[Nicolette Cavallaro edited this piece.]



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