

Fair Observer

Monthly



July 2025

Fair Observer
Independence, Diversity, Debate

Fair Observer Monthly



July 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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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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What Can Netanyahu Learn from Sun Tzu's "Golden Bridge"?

Punsara Amarasinghe
July 02, 2025

Israel has crushed Hamas and Hezbollah, militarily achieving what it expected in the aftermath of the 7th of October carnage. But what Israel lacks is its strategic acumen in explaining what Tel-Aviv expects after attaining the ultimate victory in Gaza. Perhaps, Israeli Premier Ambitious Netanyahu should read Sun Tzu's Golden Bridge element in The Art of War, which saves the victory before it reaches a debacle.

The international opprobrium Israel faced before its intensified military offensive in Gaza has now overshadowed the strategic victories it achieved in the early months of the conflict. Western sympathies, which often leaned toward affirming Israel's right to self-defense, have receded in light of the unmitigated humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza.

In this environment, where Israel risks becoming a global pariah, it is necessary to revisit how Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Gaza strategy devolved from decisive military success into a spiraling political failure. Following the October 7, 2023 attacks, Israel declared two primary objectives: to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas and to eliminate the group entirely. The initial shock of Hamas's tactics gave way to a strong and coordinated Israeli military response that expanded beyond Gaza, including escalations in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

What is the end goal?

Despite widespread skepticism, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) achieved significant operational gains. By systematically degrading Hamas's military infrastructure, the IDF rendered the group incapable of sustaining combat operations. By late 2024, Hamas had lost its capacity to obstruct Israeli advances. The IDF established two operational corridors that effectively cut communication and resupply lines between Hamas units in the north and south, isolating them from external support.

These developments allowed Israel to claim victory against several of its regional adversaries. The campaign disrupted Iran's proxy networks, weakened Hezbollah's position in Lebanon, and undercut Syria's military capabilities. However, these achievements came at a steep cost.

Israel's current crisis stems from a fundamental political failure: the government's refusal to articulate a clear vision for post-war Gaza. From Clausewitz to Kissinger, war has always been understood as a continuation of politics by other means. Without a coherent political strategy, even the most successful military campaign risks collapse. Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak argued that Netanyahu deliberately withheld his post-war plans to avoid acknowledging a politically inconvenient truth: eliminating Hamas would require replacing it with a governing body acceptable to regional actors, the international community, and Palestinians themselves.

Netanyahu's refusal to define this political end state has hamstrung IDF operations and left Israel without a credible path to long-term stability. Commanders lacked guidance on how to shape military actions to support a sustainable outcome. The result has been tactical success without strategic clarity.

What can Sun Tzu teach Israelis?

In May, Israel launched Operation Gideon's Chariots, a full-scale ground campaign in Gaza. Netanyahu publicly supported the idea—championed by former President Trump—of relocating Gaza's civilian population, calling it a "brilliant plan" that would reshape the region's geopolitical dynamics. However, the escalating violence has created a macabre scene that undermines any strategic gains made on the battlefield.

At this stage, the complete elimination of Hamas appears increasingly implausible. Rather than pursuing a fantasy of total victory, Israeli leadership should consider negotiations that prioritize the release of hostages and an end to hostilities. Sun Tzu's Art of War offers a relevant lesson: when an enemy is encircled, leaving them a way to retreat can prevent desperate, destructive resistance. The so-called "golden bridge" strategy allows a path for disengagement that avoids further bloodshed.

Strategic blowback

Israel now finds itself under growing pressure on two critical fronts. First, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza has tarnished the country's moral standing and legal credibility. Many observers now compare Israel's isolation to the international pariah status once reserved for South Africa's apartheid regime. Second, global antisemitism has surged dramatically, even as the IDF continues its operations. The military campaign, while tactically effective, has not shielded Jewish communities abroad from rising hate crimes.

In the broader context, Israel's ongoing war effort has strained its economy and compromised its global image. Neither outcome serves the long-term security interests of the state. A negotiated deal that facilitates the return of remaining

hostages and opens the door to rebuilding Gaza would better preserve what Israel has tactically accomplished.

Sun Tzu's wisdom, penned more than 2,000 years ago, still applies to today's geopolitical realities. Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition now face the consequences of ignoring these ancient principles in one of the most volatile regions on Earth.

[Nicolette Cavallaro edited this piece.]



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Zohran Mamdani: Hypocrisy, Socialism and the Danger of Elitist Politics

Christopher Roper Schell
July 06, 2025

Zohran Mamdani, son of elite parents and raised in privilege, champions socialist policies while enjoying capitalist comforts. Critics argue he exploits identity politics and white guilt, pushing third-world socialism doomed to fail in America. Despite slick messaging, his economic ideas are incoherent, hypocritical, and risk harming the working class he claims to help.

Zohran Mamdani, the Democrat mayoral candidate for New York, has caught the fancy of many around the world. Yet when we take a closer look at him, the 33-year-old does not appear so wonderful. If Mamdani isn't a fraud, he's certainly one of the most dangerous and disingenuous politicians in America.

US President Donald Trump called him "a 100% communist lunatic," even as Mamdani suggests otherwise. Note that Mamdani is on the record for saying that "the end goal" is "seizing the means of production."

Will the real Mamdani please stand up?

Before we carry on, let me explain why Mamdani is interested in controlling the means of production. He comes from de facto South Asian royalty. In India, the land of his forefathers, the currency of social status is not wealth but power. Children of top bureaucrats get to swim in

Olympic pools while the hoi polloi struggle to get drinking water. Billionaires doff their cap to petty bureaucrats because that is the cost of doing business.

If a bureaucrat is late for a flight or a train or a movie, everyone has to wait until the "sahib bahadur" (brave lord) arrives. No billionaire can claim such privilege. A posh Englishman who went to Harvard wrote a fashionable though superficial book about the billionaire raj in India. As a casual visitor to India, I can say he was wrong. India has a bureaucrat raj, not a billionaire raj. Think of a pantomime cartoon villain who is the master of the universe. That is exactly the privilege Mamdani comes from. If you read on, I will explain further.

For now, let us give Mamdani the benefit of doubt. Assume he said what he did about seizing the means of production to play to the gallery. Assume further that he ain't no real communist, he's just a washed out hip-hop counselor and rapper with a penchant for paying homage to the Holy Land Five whom Mamdani kindly called "my guys" and who were convicted on all counts for giving \$12 million to Hamas.

Perhaps the "my guys" comment might just have been virtue signalling. On the left, it is fashionable to call Israel an apartheid regime and ignore the crazy jihadist Islamic ideology of Hamas as well the organization's murderous ways. So, our man was just following fashion. Perhaps he is just a child of elite parents who fled a failed system from which their forebears profited.

Unfortunately for Americans, Mamdani now wishes to impose those same failed principles and frameworks of his forebears on the US. Therefore, it is important to examine his background. Mamdani went to Bank Street, a private school, where preschool tuition currently starts at \$37,554, and middle school will cost you \$68,793 a year.

From there Mamdani went to the Bronx High School of Science, which boasts the most Nobel Prizes of any high school. Clearly he was no science star and, if he is a product of this joint, I doubt the school's alumni have won any Nobel prizes in economics. Finally, Mamdani attended the tony Bowdoin College, an exorbitantly expensive private liberal arts school in Maine. Leveraging his high school science know-how to the hilt, he studied Africana Studies and co-founded Students for Justice in Palestine. Wherever Mamdani came from, he was no slumming Salaam Bombay kid.

Elite kid with crazy ideas

It is incongruous to find Mamdani as the poster child for the poor and the disadvantaged New Yorkers and even Americans today. In fact, his background makes it difficult to see how the son of an Oscar-nominated mother and firebrand Columbia University professor would understand the average Joe, despite the slick marketing of his campaign. Note that Mamdani makes \$142,000 a year plus a per diem as an Assemblyman and owns property in his country of birth that is valued between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

This not-so-poor mayoral candidate is advocating rent control. I'm sure he's just the kind of guy he has in mind for rent stabilized apartments. Come to think of it, Mamdani lives in one in Astoria. His current location may be modest, but he likes posher digs, telling the New York Editorial Board in an interview, "If I was able to put in a rent freeze, I wouldn't be in a rent-stabilized apartment. I would actually be on the Upper East Side, in a new apartment."

At least Mamdani is consistent, as he goes on to say, "I am someone who is deeply skeptical of means testing." A chicken in every pot and an Upper East Side apartment for everyone, especially himself, is Mamdani's political creed. If

he wins the mayoral election, no doubt prosperity and Ferraris will rain down on the young man himself. Mamdani doesn't seem to realize that, if he implements rent control, the Upper East Side will be a tenement, and Gracie Mansion, the home of the New York mayor, will be subdivided into squalor in no time.

Then again, Mamdani's grasp of economics is not his strong point. In an interview with Erin Burnett, Mamdani was asked, "Do you like capitalism?" Mamdani responded, "No, I, I, I have many critiques of capitalism." (8:00 minute mark here) His answer was amazing for a guy who wants to run a city that is the embodiment of capitalism.

Mamdani says of the city with the most billionaires in the world that those with such wealth shouldn't exist. To adapt a famous headline, "Mamdani to billionaires: drop dead." Of the people who pay the most in taxes to keep the city afloat, he says in another interview, "I don't think we should have billionaires." These comments are important because they provide a window into Mamdani's thinking. He genuinely believes that billionaires do not have a right to their wealth and their assets are unseemly. If billionaires should not exist, what about millionaires? Is a net worth of \$999 million alright or is it too much as well?

New York has turned against billionaires before. Andrew Cuomo, the 67-year old former governor of New York state whom Mamdani has just beaten in the Democratic primary, targeted the wealthy earlier. However, during the Covid pandemic, Cuomo realized that was the wrong approach for a city and state that leans heavily on the most affluent. The 0.7% who make \$1 million or more a year pay 35.6% of the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) tax, and 42.4% of New York City's Personal Income Tax (PIT). That is highly progressive as is and has been pushing many of the wealthiest to the sunnier shores of Florida. While

New York City recovered many of its most affluent post-pandemic, Mamdani's primary victory is once again accelerating this trend.

The 33-year-old star of the Democratic Party is promising freebies at a time the US debt is at a record high, and his city of choice is not exactly flush with cash. In more ways than one, he is bringing third world populism to America. How is this elite kid with crazy ideas convinced that Peronist populism will work in this country? Perhaps the answer lies in his Bowdoin education as *The Spectator* surmises. I take the view that we will get a better answer if we study Mamdani's family background instead.

The story of Mamdani's elite Hindu grandfather

Many see Mamdani as an underdog who upset Cuomo. That is indubitably true. However, as I point out earlier, he ain't no *Oliver Twist*. His mother's family occupied the commanding heights of privilege in newly independent India.

A little bit of a history lesson is important here. Prior to India's independence in 1947, the British ruled India through the Indian Civil Service (ICS). The ICS was known as the "steel frame" of the British Raj. At the district level, the ICS officers were and, still are, referred to as collectors. It was their job to collect extortionate taxes rapaciously and ruthlessly, often causing famines in the process.

After independence, India did not disband the ICS and delegate power to elected mayors. Instead it renamed the ICS as Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and increased its powers. Under Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, New Delhi embraced socialism. An already-powerful colonial bureaucracy now acquired draconian powers. The IAS occupied the commanding heights of the economy and the state.

To put this matter in context, the head of the Archeological Survey of India, the Reserve Bank of India, and the Competition Commission are all headed by IAS officers. They head all departments in the government and are the most powerful superelite in the world.

My Indian friends point out repeatedly that IAS officers are brown sahibs who replaced white sahibs in their colonial bungalows with their 20 servants. Many also point out that they are the top dogs of postcolonial corruption. To be fair, back in Mamdani's grandfather's days, IAS officers were not so corrupt. They were still notoriously incompetent though.

Almost invariably the IAS officers of the Nehru era studied some humanities a la *Africana Studies* but they were in charge of science education, engineering projects, and state-owned enterprises. It is to these innumerate IAS officers — colonial bureaucrats turbocharged by socialism — that India owed its pathetic "Hindu rate of growth." Some of my Indian friends indignantly argue that this Hindu rate had nothing to do with Hinduism and everything to do with the command and control license-permit-quota socialistic IAS raj that lasted until 1991, the year known in history for the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Mamdani's maternal grandfather, Amrit Lal Nair, was an IAS officer. Nair's father had changed his last name from Nayyar to Nair, presumably to win brownie points with the British. As an IAS officer, Nair helped set up the first government-owned integrated steel plant in India under the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL). Note that Nair had no expertise in the steel industry and had never run a factory before, but IAS officers are like gods in India and are deemed to be able to do everything. Perhaps this family heritage convinces Mamdani that he can run grocery stores in New York but more on that later. Anyway, note that it was the Germans, not Nair,

who really built the SAIL steel factory that began production in 1959.

After embracing socialism, the government got into the business of business. Not only did it run steel factories, but it also ran hotels, airlines and almost everything else. In 1953, the Indian government nationalized Air India. Under Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, India embraced the Soviet Union more closely. In 1969, Indira — no relation to Mahatma Gandhi — nationalized all 14 of the major banks and squeezed out private industry.

Father and daughter created a leviathan state with the IAS as their praetorian guard. Needless to say the inevitable occurred: corruption and cronyism flourished. Taxpayer subsidies went to bloated state-owned enterprises, not to schools and hospitals. The economy collapsed and hundreds of millions remained trapped in poverty.

More tragedy followed. In 1975, Indira declared the "Emergency," which allowed her to rule by fiat. This leftist authoritarianism was very similar to the Soviet regime. Indira suspended civil liberties, locked up opponents, and even gave her son, Sanjay Gandhi, "extra constitutional authority" to, among other things, create a police state. Indira and Sanjay used IAS officers to rule the country just as their British predecessors had used the ICS. Mamdani's maternal grandfather did fine under Indira and Sanjay as did Congressman Ro Khanna's grandpa.

The story of Mamdani's celebrity mother and professor father

Grandpa Nair was at the top of the Indian social tree and made sure that his daughter went to the poshest of posh boarding schools. She went to Loreto Convent, Tara Hall in a city that was the de facto capital of British India. For at least six months, senior British officials retired to Shimla to escape the enervating heat of the Indian plains.

It was in this summer capital in the Himalayas that Christian missionaries set up boarding schools to train the high-born children of the British Empire. In 1892, the Loreto Sisters came to set up a Catholic boarding school. Mira Nair, Mamdani's mother, studied in this exalted colonial institution. She started college at Miranda House, founded by Sir Maurice Gwyer, and transferred to Harvard after her first year in 1976. Remember, Indira was ruling India as a dictator in this year and Mira's father was dutifully serving in the IAS. In those days, only the superelite in India could even think of an overseas education, and Mira was one of the chosen ones.

Today, Mira is known as the celebrity director of films like *Salaam Bombay!*, *Mississippi Masala*, and *Monsoon Wedding*. They are anglicized Bollywood-esque movies, which have earned Mira plaudits among critics and even some monetary success. She owns three homes in New York City, Kampala, and New Delhi. The Big Apple is her home base though, and she and her husband hustled to get back as fast as possible during the Covid pandemic lockdowns. Note that she did not choose to live in Kampala or New Delhi during this period.

Mira is a Punjabi Hindu who married a Gujarati Muslim. Her husband is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government and a professor of anthropology, political science, and African studies at Columbia University, and he also serves as the chancellor of Kampala International University in Uganda. Like Mira, Mahmood Mamdani also went to Harvard and he "specializes in the study of colonialism, anti-colonialism and decolonisation." A prolific author, Mamdani Senior grew up in Kampala and is a Gujarati Shia Muslim of the Twelver branch, just like Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

My Indian friends point out that Zohran Kwame Mamdani was raised in his father's faith. His

father chose Kwame as the middle name after Francis Kwame Nkrumah, a Ghanaian pan-Africanist leader. Neither in name nor in faith does Mamdani demonstrate any connection to the Hindu tradition of his mother Mira's family. My Indian friends further point out that this is in keeping with a centuries-old tradition of Muslim men marrying Hindu women and bringing them into the Islamic fold. The children of such mixed marriages almost invariably identify with Islam. Love live paternalism and patriarchy — multiculturalism and multi-religiosity be damned.

To go back to Mamdani Senior and Mira hunkering down in their New York digs, it is important to note that they aren't half shabby. Theirs are hardly the homes of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" Marxists. Instead, they look more like the homes of people who espouse egalitarian, socialist, anti-colonial nonsense so long as they're at the top. Hell, I might espouse socialism too if I had a \$2 million Chelsea loft.

A savvy, slick campaign

Mamdani's parents give us clues about his terrific political campaign. He has access to both Harvard and Hollywood. He is the darling of the left-leaning South Asian elite, many of whom are children of IAS officers. Naturally, his social media prowess is extraordinary and his videos are rather good.

I will just examine one of Mamdani's videos. In a fantastic campaign ad shot in Hindi, he explains New York's rank voting as well as his agenda. Mamdani splices Bollywood movies into his message as he speaks in Hindi. *Deewaar*, a cult 1975 movie, is thrown into the message. In that bit, Vijay, the all-action man who takes the path of crime, is saying to his straight-arrowed cop brother, Ravi, "I have buildings, property, bank balance, bungalow, car. What do you have?" In the

movie, the brother responds, "mother." Breaking from the clip, a smiling Mamdani responds, "you." This video is meant to pit the people against the billionaires, implying they are all crooks like Vijay.

Let me explain the subtext further. In 1975, Indira was ruling India through the likes of Mamdani's IAS grandfather. She had criminalized most private economic activity through the license-permit-quota raj that I have already mentioned above. Smuggling cheaper goods of higher quality and bribing officials was often the only way to get ahead. In his video, Mamdani is blaming Vijay for being a crook. What he is getting wrong is that the system created the crime, not the other way. At the end of *Deewaar*, Vijay is killed by his brother. Indeed, he is the tragic hero of the movie. Taking the analogy from his own campaign ad, I have a question: will Mamdani metaphorically shoot billionaires on the streets of NYC and turn them into tragic heroes?

In the 1970s, superstar Amitabh Bachchan played the angry young man fighting an unjust system. In *Deewaar* he takes to a life of crime. In 2025, is Mamdani playing the cheery young man taking on another unjust system?

Hypocrisy of brown privilege

A friend in Indian Punjab quipped, "Mamdani was not only born with a silver spoon in his mouth but also a pearl necklace, diamond crown, and jeweled bracelets in a gold thali." A thali is a round Indian plate with a rim that typically has many dishes.

My Punjabi friend's point is that we are dealing with a scion of a South Asian leftist elite that blames colonial oppressors to deflect responsibility from the fact that they failed their fellow citizens. After the British left, Mamdani's IAS grandfather lived in those very bungalows the British built and imposed socialism on the country. At the same

time, he educated his daughter in elite Western institutions, and she pulled stakes for the US.

As many of my middle class Indian friends point out, this sanctimonious South Asian elite has preyed on white guilt for decades. They made hay while the sun was still shinin'. In his college application to Columbia University, Mamdani identified his racial background as "Asian" and "Black or African American." He claims he ticked two boxes to represent his Ugandan-born South Asian background, but it's clear Mamdani manipulated a nuance to rig the system to gain an advantage.

We can view Mamdani as yet another charismatic young politician doing whatever he can to get ahead. However, just as people talk about white privilege, Mamdani represents brown privilege. Many of the South Asian elites send their children to the US. Typically, these elites have enjoyed all the fruits of empire but profit from railing against it. Their children and grandchildren who become Americans are dyed in the wool socialists because their families gained from this system. They also have the sense of entitlement that they, not markets, should control the commanding heights of the economy.

Along with entitlement, these inheritors of brown privilege have a sense of victimhood. They argue incessantly that they suffered against white oppressors who frequently robbed them of their language, religion, and culture. Naturally, identity politics follow. Mamdani is appealing to the poor by blaming billionaires. He is attracting LGBTQIA+ voters by supporting "gender-affirming treatments to trans youth." Mamdani is seducing South Asian voters through slick Bollywood-inspired ads. He is drawing in Muslim votes by laying claim to his Islamic heritage.

Just to be clear, Mamdani's family enjoyed all the fruits of the British Empire. So their railing

against the empire is a little rich. Now Mamdani seeks to bring in the old spoils system that his Hindu IAS grandfather administered in India. He seeks to bring socialism to the land of capitalism, failing to answer a critical question: Why did socialism that India chose through its free will fail so spectacularly?

Third World paternalism comes to America

Recently, I came across a fascinating scholar on Fair Observer named Harshan Kumarasingham who explained how brown and indeed black sahibs took charge when the colonial masters left. This Eastminster model is very different from the Westminster democracy of the UK. In a nutshell, postcolonial elites composed of the likes of Mamdani's grandfather imposed paternalism, elitism, and neocolonial socialism.

Nehru is a poster child of this class brimming with brown privilege. The man who set India off on the socialist path went to Harrow, the same hallowed British school as Winston Churchill, and then to Cambridge. Dr. I.P. Singh, who is now in his 80s, tells me that Nehru was only comfortable in English and spoke poor Hindi. He also called himself "Pandit Nehru," a Brahminical title that was hardly egalitarian or modern. Yet India's anglicized first prime minister had the arrogance to speak for the great unwashed not only in his own country but also in the entire Third World. Like Nehru, Mamdani went to posh schools and is now promising a new form of paternalistic socialism. It did not work in India, and it will certainly not work here in the US.

It is certainly true that Mamdani is raising the right questions. There is undeniably a cost of living crisis, and most New Yorkers are struggling to make ends meet. In addressing this issue, Mamdani is indisputably resonating with a number of New Yorkers, especially the younger generation. He smiles a lot, has clear talking

points, and stays on message. Yet Mamdani is the classic example of style over substance, and almost all of his answers to the questions facing New York are plain wrong.

Let us take the simple example of government-run grocery stores. Many have already pointed out that grocery stores have among the lowest margins in America. They generally make a mere 1-2% in profits after tax. Running these stores is not easy and requires expertise. Mamdani wants the city government to run these stores in much the same way IAS officers like his grandfather ran steel mills and airlines. Remember that the IAS ran state-owned enterprises into the ground, and they were only kept aloft thanks to ever-ballooning taxpayer subsidies in the halcyon days of socialism. Governments running businesses has always been and continues to be a damnably stupid idea.

To make matters worse, Mamdani plans to use union labor at his proposed grocery stores. I studied literature, not finance, and even I fail to see how this would make groceries cheaper. Mamdani also misunderstood the NYC FRESH budget item he plans to use to pay for his pet grocery stores, which is not an encouraging sign for a potential mayor of one of the most complicated cities on the planet.

Some people worry that Mamdani's grocery store plan will result in a government takeover of the local industry and is a "blueprint for collapse" — I don't. There's no way a government entity will be able to compete in a market that has tiny margins using union employees in the total vacuum of a market incentive. It would be like fearing the Department of Motor Vehicles opening a bodega down the street.

More importantly, the waste will be enormous, the employees utterly indifferent, the savings to both taxpayer and patron illusory, and the cost

ridiculous, which is why I'm all for trying this idea and laying bare (again) these ridiculous claims backed by socialist lunacy. I'm still trying to figure out how New York City's government shells out \$1 million for toilets. Not only that, how do five, count 'em, five grocery stores cost 60 million taxpayer dollars? If you build enough low-price, nonprofit grocery stores, you'll bankrupt the city.

Yet another Pied Piper

Mamdani sells his immigrant story with great gusto. His anticolonial comments win him much acclaim from the left. Even the likes of Rory Stewart and Alistair Campbell, two famous British politicians turned podcasters, have fallen prey to Mamdani's charms. On close scrutiny, Mamdani's anti-colonial drivel is vacuous. He is what the French would call a member of *la gauche caviar*. You could use the terms "limousine liberal" or "champagne socialist" to describe Mamdani as well.

In brief, Mamdani comes from a long line of people who bought into the idea of socialism for their own personal benefit, while never experiencing the worst of it themselves. They profited from the system even as it increasingly teetered on the verge of collapse. These brown sahibs then sent their kids to America, where expensive schools, fancy houses, and success were to be had in a way that was impossible in India or Uganda.

Ironically, the privileged brown kids who fled a dysfunctional system created by their fathers are now seeking to bring that misery to their adopted lands. As a Texan I can't wait to watch this latest "experiment" in socialism implode.

The internal contradictions of Mamdani's political platform boggle the mind. He told Jacobin, "I began my political organizing life around Palestinian solidarity." Yet Mamdani

should know fully well that neither Hamas nor Hezbollah would leave LGBTQIA+ people alive for more than two minutes after meeting them. Mamdani is a sanctimonious scoundrel, a hypocrite of the highest order, or, at best, a man possessed of no coherent worldview.

There is another tiny little matter that Indian historians point to me. The South Asian Muslim elite has imperial memory. From 1192 to 1858, the official language from Pakistan to Bangladesh was Persian. This Muslim elite now controls two states and remains wealthy as well as powerful in secular India. Yet it sings the song of victimhood and self-pity. Note that the man who wants to “globalize the intifada” might well be a closet Islamist. Even though he has a Hindu mother, he has scrubbed out his idol-worshipping relatives just as the Soviets airbrushed inconvenient leaders out of history.

The Democratic Party purports to represent and support the poor, the disenfranchised, and the working class. Yet in Mamdani they have found a leader from postcolonial elites reeking of privilege, and known for avariciousness, dishonesty, and hypocrisy. Beware New Yorkers!



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Operation Rising Lion to Midnight Hammer: Why the US and Israel are Gambling with Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

Srijan Sharma
July 08, 2025

Israel's Operation Rising Lion and the US' Midnight Hammer mark a dangerous shift from delaying Iran's nuclear program to paralyzing it. But these military gambles are unlikely to deter Iran's nuclear ambition. Rooted in decades of flawed Western policy and Israel's evolving counter-proliferation doctrine, the actions of these countries seem to be fueling and not curbing the security crisis in the Middle East.

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, a bold move aimed at crippling Iran's nuclear capabilities and strategic infrastructure. Israel's strikes significantly hit the Natanz nuclear site, damaged Isfahan's uranium conversion facility, and hit the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) missile complex, killing a key IRGC Chief. Unlike earlier limited operations, Rising Lion marked a shift towards high-risk preemptive strikes designed not merely to delay or impede, but to paralyze Iran's nuclear program, bringing the two nations to the edge of full-scale war.

Nine days after Israel's strikes, the US launched its own military operation, Operation Midnight Hammer, targeting Iran's key nuclear sites at Fordow, Isfahan and Natanz. The strikes, intended as both deterrence and containment, have allegedly caused significant damage to Iran's nuclear infrastructure, though Iran has claimed there is only superficial damage.

Several Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) analysts have suggested Iran shifted their uranium reserves before the strikes. Notably, US Vice President JD Vance has indicated that 400 kg of uranium was unaccounted for post-strike, raising alarms about Iran's next moves.

However, the real question is not about the strike's effectiveness. It's about whether this will truly force Iran into a corner or if it is merely a symbolic victory.

Israel's evolved counter-proliferation strategy

Israel has adopted a strategy of disruption and paralysis against adversaries who choose to go nuclear, posing a strategic threat to the country — a plan that came to be called the Begin Doctrine in the 1970s.

The origins of this doctrine trace back to 1962 with Operation Damocles, when Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad, targeted German scientists helping Egypt develop long-range missiles via letter bombs, abductions and threats to their families. Though covert and controversial, it successfully stalled Egypt's rocket program.

In subsequent years, the doctrine evolved to preemptively target any hostile state's nuclear program, preventing them from acquiring nuclear weapons via counter-proliferation efforts.

This doctrine was vividly demonstrated in 1981 with Operation Opera, when Israeli jets destroyed

Iraq's Osirak reactor, and again in the 2007 Operation Orchard, which eliminated a nascent Syrian nuclear facility. Both Operations aimed at decisive, overt action to ensure adversaries never reached nuclear capability.

However, Iran's nuclear challenge forced Israel to recalibrate this doctrine. Unlike the degrading or paralyzing nuclear programs of Syria and Iraq, Israel has opted to delay and disrupt Iran's nuclear program without employing overt offensive measures.

The reason is simple: geo-economic and strategic considerations. And the key historical factor in these considerations? The United States.

The US factor between Israel and Iran

Iran's energy profile cannot be overlooked, as it has the world's second-largest natural gas and third-largest oil reserves. There are strong concerns that it could also block the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that transports 20% of the world's oil and natural gas, increasing the price of petrol to \$100 per barrel. While blocking the Strait has the initial potential to spike oil prices, it has a limited capacity for consequences to the West and could harm its own interests, according to analysts.

The threat of Iran instead lies in its extensive proxy network and decades of sustained asymmetrical warfare. The October 7 attacks on Israel are an alleged example of its proxy war involvement.

Therefore, the US knows that balancing and moderating conflict with Iran must be part of its plans to ensure regional stability in the Middle East, as a weak Middle East would present economic and security challenges to the US' geopolitical influence and economy.

But this, historically, has not always been a successful venture for the US.

The failures of the historic approach to Iran

The US' long-standing strategy in the region began with offshore balancing and containment, seeking to prevent any one power from dominating the oil-rich Gulf. Its first major operation was organizing Iran's coup d'état in 1953, which overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, who was leaning toward the Soviets.

Through the 1960s and '70s, Washington helped Israel strengthen its regional presence while invoking the Eisenhower Doctrine to justify military interventions against communist threats, such as the 1958 Lebanon deployment under Operation Blue Bat. Post 1979, with the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Iranian hostage crisis, there was a shift toward assertive containment that extended to the Lebanon Intervention between 1982-84. This strategic assertiveness became central to US policy in the region.

The Iran-Iraq War was a power struggle for Gulf dominance, not just a territorial conflict. Iran's Islamic Revolution signaled the rise of the Shia crescent, alarming Saddam Hussein and threatening US regional influence. To counter Iran's growing power and prevent any single actor from dominating the Gulf, the US-backed Saddam with military and economic support. The US overlooked Saddam's atrocities, human rights violations and use of chemical weapons.

But when Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1991, kicking off the Gulf War, the American gamble backfired. Washington's attempt to balance Iran through Iraq had inadvertently empowered a regional threat and weakened its own position. This was perhaps the first US failure in the Middle East and the beginning of the long-term instability

in the region. In response, the US introduced a broader policy of "dual containment" in 1993 to curb both Iraq and Iran.

Though tactically effective in coercing both Iran and Iraq, dual containment proved strategically flawed in the long term. It weakened Iraq but allowed Iran to expand its influence via Shia groups, even as proxy conflicts continued. Meanwhile, the rising US military presence, especially in Saudi Arabia, fueled extremist and terror sentiments, culminating in Al-Qaeda's 9/11 attack and the 2003 Riyadh bombings, where Westerners were targeted. Sanctions and regime change tactics yielded no significant impact on either country, revealing Washington's faulty geopolitical assessments and superficial understanding of regional dynamics.

This fractured Middle East policy has undergone necessary makeovers in recent years, like weighing more on diplomacy and limiting itself to security issues, but it still hinges on limited strategic gains and therefore, risks.

To avoid a full-scale war with Iran, the US turned to covert means. In 2006, it launched a first-of-its-kind cyber offensive, Operation Olympic Games, which targeted Iran's nuclear infrastructure. While this move by the US sought to derail Iran's nuclear ambitions without triggering direct conflict, many analysts argue that the core objective was to persuade Israel to use means other than the direct and conventional against Iran. The Operation significantly influenced Israel's security apparatus, as barely a year later came the purported assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Ardeshtir Hosseinpour, followed by a series of assassinations of key Iranian nuclear scientists.

In 2016, the Iran nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) sought to curtail Iran's nuclear program in exchange for

sanctions relief. It was put forward to ease regional tensions, foster economic relationships and deepen US influence in the Middle East. Israel opposed it, fearing economic relief would empower Iran to upgrade its security systems and proxies, and importantly, clandestinely develop nuclear weapons, thus limiting covert options.

Despite this opposition, the JCPOA came into effect in January 2016. It did limit Israel's opportunities to carry out covert offensives, as noted by a significant statistical decline post-2016.

In 2018, with Trump's withdrawal from the deal, the US reimposed sanctions and escalated pressure on Iran. Israel resumed its covert operations, such as its alleged June 2020 cyber attack on Iran's nuclear sites, and its most complex and significant operation — the 2021 assassination of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, the chief of Iran's nuclear program.

Why Israel paralyzed Iran in Operation Rising Lion

Following the October 7 attacks on Israel and the collapse of the Assad regime, the Middle East entered a renewed phase of instability. Against this backdrop, the Trump administration shifted from maximum pressure to a more diplomatic approach towards Iran. The new strategy had two objectives: to push Iran to dismantle its nuclear program to ensure regional security and secure a diplomatic and media win by introducing a stronger alternative to the JCPOA.

However, Iran insisted on limiting — not dismantling — its nuclear program while demanding sanctions relief, creating a deadlock. Trump warned Iran, "There will be bombing," if a deal wasn't reached, escalating tensions further.

This caused Israel great anxiety on two counts. One, it feared that the talks were buying Iran more

time, as by March 2025, Iran had attained 60% uranium enrichment. Within a few weeks, it could initiate the process to develop nuclear weapons, which would then take just a year to complete. Two, it feared that the US might rush a compromised or weak deal to claim diplomatic success. According to reports, the Mossad struggled to convince the US Special Envoy to the Middle East, Steven Charles Witkoff, of the risks of re-negotiating with Iran. This contributed to its growing distrust in the negotiation process and prompted a reassessment of its military posture toward Iran.

Israel has now made a few things clear: it no longer aims to simply disrupt Iran's nuclear program but wants to paralyze it as it did with Iraq and Syria.

While 2024's Operation Days of Repentance struck several of Iran's strategic and military sites, the operational scope was limited on the nuclear front, with one minor nuclear research facility in Iran's Parchin being targeted.

However, in Operation Rising Lion, Israel aggressively struck key nuclear sites. While effectiveness was one startling difference, several reasons forced Israel not only to shift its operational scope but also to take strategic risks with regional stability. One: cut short Iran's time-buying tactics. Two: force Iran back to the negotiating table under pressure. And three: weaken its strategic position to the point of conceding to US demands and surrendering its nuclear ambitions.

While some tactical goals were achieved by Israel, broader strategic successes will only be possible if Iran fully abandons its nuclear ambitions. Although a regime change is an option, the US is likely to prioritize regional security and stability, for now.

Operation Midnight Hammer has not deterred Iran

Following Israel's lead, the US launched targeted strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, intended as both deterrence and leverage in negotiations.

However, will the US actually transform this tactical success into strategic gains by pushing Iran to negotiate a new plan or by dropping its nuclear obsession? The answer is no.

Iran's fixation on nuclear weapons is deeply linked to its identity and national pride, which can be reduced through coercion but not entirely abandoned. Trump's efforts to do so complicate new negotiations and Iran's obsession is evident: it did not aim to import a nuclear bomb but to develop its own.

With 400kg of uranium missing after US strikes, JD Vance has asked the burning question, "Can Iran enrich the uranium to weapons-grade level and can they convert that fuel into a nuclear weapon?" He raises genuine fears that Iran may pursue a nuclear weapon directly, bypassing diplomacy and brinkmanship entirely — a move reminiscent of North Korea.

The limited effectiveness of the US attacks, which reportedly set Iran's program back by only a few months, underscores the folly of symbolic actions without long-term planning. Iran, undeterred from its nuclear ambitions, has since escalated threats, including moves to close the Strait of Hormuz, heightening global energy and security concerns.

These security fears could threaten the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Iran, especially as the US–Israeli relationship remains far from its goals.

In effect, the US military gamble may have exacerbated the Middle East's tensions rather than

neutralizing them, with Iran's nuclear trajectory still firmly in motion.

[Yaamini Gupta edited this piece.]



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Geopolitics by Design: Rethinking Power in the Age of Critical Technologies

Masaaki Yoshimori
July 09, 2025

In this era of techno-sovereignty, national power increasingly depends on one's ability to develop and integrate critical technologies like AI, biotechnology and semiconductors. The Critical and Emerging Technologies Index reveals that firms treat chips, data and DNA as strategic assets embedded in national security and foreign policy. Strategic advantage now hinges on ecosystem integration, regulatory agility and supply chain resilience across borders.

In today's rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape, national power is no longer measured solely by GDP or military force. Instead, it is increasingly defined by a nation's capacity to develop, integrate and scale critical technologies. From artificial intelligence to biotechnology and semiconductors, these domains are no longer just engines of economic growth — they are geopolitical instruments, contested supply-chain battlegrounds and determinants of strategic sovereignty. The countries most likely to lead in this new era are those that align technological innovation with strategic integration and institutional coherence.

The Critical and Emerging Technologies Index (CETI) built and maintained by Harvard Kennedy School offers a new lens to measure this reality. Drawing from thousands of open-source and proprietary datasets, it benchmarks 25 countries across five sectors: AI, biotechnology, semiconductors, quantum and space. Its findings reveal not just which countries lead, but how power is shifting — and what that means for business, innovation and national strategy.

Techno-sovereignty and strategic business planning

In an age of weaponized interdependence, governments are asserting control over technology supply chains once thought global and apolitical. Export controls on semiconductor lithography, restrictions on cross-border AI models and pharmaceutical sovereignty policies are now routine. For multinational corporations, these moves blur the line between business strategy and foreign policy.

This convergence of technology and geopolitics is not new. In the 1970s, the US Central Intelligence Agency and West Germany's BND secretly acquired Swiss encryption firm Crypto AG, embedding backdoors in devices sold globally

to monitor allies and adversaries alike. In the early 1990s, the US government proposed the Clipper Chip — a computer chipset with a built-in backdoor for state access — framing it as a national security necessity. These episodes exemplify the longer history of state efforts to assert control over critical technologies under the banner of strategic interest.

Strategic planning can no longer ignore geopolitical risk. Companies must now map their supply chain dependencies as if they were defense contractors, and startups must understand export regimes before they write code or synthesize molecules. While this shift feels urgent and contemporary, it is not without precedent. Export controls have long shaped the trajectory of sensitive technologies, most notably in the field of cryptography. During the Cold War and into the 1990s, US regulations treated encryption as a form of munition, effectively restricting the global dissemination of secure communication tools and giving rise to the so-called "Crypto Wars."

These historic battles over the control and classification of code underscore a key lesson: Export regimes are instruments of state power, not merely regulatory nuisances. The same logic applies in today's battlegrounds of AI, biotech and semiconductors. The implication is clear: Geoeconomics is boardroom business.

Artificial intelligence

AI is no longer a niche innovation; it is a systemic force. Defined as machine-executed cognition — for example, learning, decision-making and perception — AI underpins everything from autonomous weapons to corporate productivity and social trust systems.

The US still leads, driven by its vibrant commercial ecosystem, elite talent pipelines and dominance in cloud computing. American frontier

models set the performance benchmarks, creating self-reinforcing cycles of capital, capability and deployment.

China, however, is closing the gap, particularly in large-scale deployment, cost efficiency and data access. Domestic champions such as Alibaba Cloud and Baidu have deployed architectures competitive with US firms, despite externally imposed constraints on their access to advanced chips. Crucially, China's vast public-private AI ecosystem is more centrally coordinated, reflecting China's techno-industrial strategy.

Europe's strength lies in AI ethics and research, but its fragmented market and limited computer access hinder scalable outcomes. Its strongest firms — France's Mistral, Germany's Aleph Alpha — remain constrained by infrastructure gaps and data localization rules. This highlights a fundamental tension: Can a democracy maintain digital sovereignty without scale?

Emerging players also show promise: India's AI talent pool is formidable, Brazil is innovating in agricultural AI and Canada leads in alignment research. Yet without access to GPUs and frontier computers, their influence remains conditional.

This competition in AI illustrates the broader principle that breakthroughs matter, but strategic power lies in integration — linking computers, data, talent and deployment at scale.

Biotechnology

Like AI, biotechnology demonstrates that technological breakthroughs alone are insufficient. Their geopolitical relevance emerges only when they are embedded within robust manufacturing systems, clear ethical governance and effective public-private collaboration.

Although AI captures headlines, biotechnology may define the next phase of strategic competition. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed how biotech innovation in vaccine platforms, genetic sequencing and diagnostics can determine national survival. CETI finds that four indicators — vaccine research, pharmaceutical manufacturing, human capital and genetic engineering — account for the majority of geopolitical leverage in this field.

The US leads in bio-research and development and public-private coordination. Yet China dominates pharmaceutical manufacturing and races ahead in synthetic biology and Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats applications. Europe remains strong in basic science and regulation but suffers from chronic fragmentation and slow market translation.

Japan is a case in point. With high biotech investment in the private sector, permissive regulatory frameworks for gene therapy and a legacy of upstream chemical and pharmaceutical excellence, Japan occupies a unique niche. Yet weak technology transfer systems and risk-averse capital limit its global visibility.

South Korea and Australia demonstrate policy agility, particularly in agricultural biotech and biosecurity, but both face scaling challenges. In biotech, perhaps more than any other sector, strategic coherence across sectors — data, manufacturing, ethics — is now decisive.

Semiconductors

Semiconductors are now seen as essential to national security and economic strength. They power everything from smartphones and AI to military systems and cloud servers. Yet their production depends on a fragile, globally distributed supply chain, spanning US design tools, Asian manufacturing and specialized

machinery from a few advanced economies. As tensions rise between major powers, countries have imposed export controls to limit access to the most advanced chips and production tools, especially in strategic competition with China. This has turned semiconductors into a key battleground of geopolitical rivalry.

For global companies, managing chip supply is no longer just about cost — it's about resilience, compliance and political risk. Like energy in past decades, semiconductors are becoming a central focus of strategic planning.

Startups in the national security supply chain

The post-September 11 procurement world prized scale, stability and legacy primes. That world is disappearing. Today, defense departments are actively sourcing innovation from AI startups, biosecurity ventures and quantum encryption labs that employ fewer than ten people.

This is not just a shift in contracting, but a shift in mindset. The US Department of Defense's Defense Innovation Unit, NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator and Australia's National Reconstruction Fund are channeling billions into non-traditional suppliers. Technologies born in garages may now become core to missile defense or pathogen detection.

But barriers remain: Procurement bureaucracy, export controls, opaque certification standards and the disconnect between startup capital cycles and public funding disbursement. Solving this mismatch is now a national imperative. Future security may depend as much on venture law as on airpower.

Japan's strategic reinvention in an age of upstream power

Japan's performance in both AI and biotech cannot be separated from a broader economic and institutional pivot. Often described in terms of its "lost decades" — a period of economic stagnation following the burst of the Japanese asset price bubble in the early 1990s — Japan has, in fact, executed a quiet reorientation of its technological strategy. The nation traded GDP growth for social stability and consumer product dominance for upstream industrial strength.

As Professor Ulrike Schaede of the University of California, San Diego argues in her book, *Japan Re-emerges*, Japan deliberately moved away from the saturated end-user electronics market, where Korean and Chinese firms gained cost advantages. It instead focused on producing critical, difficult-to-replace components. Japanese firms today dominate frontier materials and production tools essential to global supply chains.

This upstream orientation manifests in both biotech and AI:

In biotechnology, Japan's deep base in chemical engineering, precision manufacturing and pharmaceutical intermediates allows it to supply high-quality inputs globally, even if few consumers know the origin.

In AI and computing, Japan leads in sensor integration, robotics and edge AI, while its firms serve as critical suppliers to global hardware ecosystems.

Schaede's discussion is simple but powerful: Japan's transition was slow, deliberate and socially stable — a national strategy that prioritized resilience and specialization over raw expansion. This model offers important lessons in an era of volatility, where rapid reconfiguration often comes at the expense of labor stability and institutional coherence.

Those who integrate, win

CETI reshapes how we understand the geopolitics of innovation. It shows that technological power is no longer about isolated breakthroughs, but ecosystem performance and the capacity to align talent, capital, infrastructure and governance.

While the US leads today, China's trajectory suggests narrowing gaps in key sectors, especially biotechnology. Europe remains competitive, but its ability to shape outcomes depends on deeper integration and structural reform. Meanwhile, nations like Japan offer alternative models of strategic relevance through upstream specialization. Countries like Brazil and India illustrate the importance of overlooked variables such as cloud infrastructure, regulatory agility and regional focus.

In a world of technological interdependence, no country can afford complacency, and no country can win alone. CETI's interactive framework highlights the importance of collaboration, diversification and strategic foresight in securing both national advantage and global stability.

In the age of critical technologies, invention is only part of the equation. Strategic relevance now depends on a nation's ability to integrate innovation into aligned systems of governance, capital and production. Techno-sovereignty has become the new language of power, where semiconductor controls, AI governance and biotech platforms function as geopolitical tools. Countries that act with strategic coherence, prioritizing resilience, specialization and coordination, will shape both their own futures and the future of the international order.

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



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The Problem with the Dollar: When One Nation's Currency Becomes the World's

Alex Gloy
July 15, 2025

The US dollar serves as both the world's reserve currency and America's national currency, forcing other countries to accumulate dollars while the US runs persistent trade deficits. The global monetary order is facing new strains as the US deepens its dependence on foreign capital and confronts a rising backlash to dollar dominance. The dollar system risks fracture as confidence erodes and no neutral alternative stands ready to replace it.

There's a paradox at the heart of the global economy. Having one global means of exchange isn't a bad thing. It reduces friction. Fewer currencies mean fewer price lists, fewer arbitrage opportunities (profiting from price differences across markets) and less need for multinational corporations to hedge foreign exchange (FX) risk — that is, the potential losses from changes in currency values when doing business across borders. A single dominant medium of exchange smooths the gears of commerce.

But the problem isn't that the US dollar plays this role. The problem is that it is both the global reserve currency — the currency most widely used in global trade and held by foreign central banks — and the national currency of the United States. That creates dangerous repercussions for both the US and foreign nations' accumulation of US dollars.

The dollar trap

US President Donald Trump and his followers aren't wrong in saying the US pays a price for issuing the global reserve currency. For foreign countries to obtain US dollars, which they need for international trade and to repay dollar-denominated debts, they must run current account surpluses (exporting more than they import). That requires the United States to run perpetual current account deficits (importing more than it exports).

Of course, being the issuers of the world's reserve currency allows the US to import anything it desires and simply pay with financial claims (US dollars), without the fear of devaluing the dollar, at least in the short term.

This benefits US consumers, who enjoy cheaper imported goods. But it comes at a cost to exporting countries, where workers produce authentic goods in exchange for financial claims that may never be

redeemed for US goods. The result is a global wealth transfer from foreign laborers to American consumers. Meanwhile, foreign countries accumulate dollars and acquire US assets — including bonds, stocks, companies and land.

A key measure of this trend is the Net International Investment Position (NIIP), which tracks the difference between a country's external financial assets (what Americans own abroad) and its external financial liabilities (what foreigners own in the US). The US's NIIP has deteriorated significantly from less than negative \$1.7 trillion in 2008 to more than negative \$24 trillion at the end of March 2025. In the fourth quarter of 2024, NIIP declined by more than \$2 trillion, partly due to the strong dollar that increased the value of US assets held by foreigners. Annualized, the figure would be equal to more than a quarter of GDP, a staggering amount.

As foreign holdings of US debt grow, so do interest and dividend payments flowing out of the US economy — a steady drain of income to overseas investors.

Sectoral view of economics

One way to understand global economics is through the sectoral balance view, a way of understanding financial flows using accounting identities. It breaks the world down into three sectors: private (households and businesses), government (taxation and public spending) and foreign (trade balance with foreign countries).

Every dollar spent or saved by one sector must be matched by an opposite balance in one or both of the others: (Private Sector Balance) + (Government Sector Balance) + (Foreign Sector Balance) = 0

For example, when Americans import a car, dollars leave the country and show up as a surplus

in the foreign sector and a deficit in the private sector. When someone pays taxes, their savings decrease, while the government's revenues increase.

In recent years, the US government's deficit (shown in purple in this chart) mirrors the private sector's surplus (orange). Meanwhile, the foreign sector's surplus (green) comes at the expense of US households and firms. Even though corporate profits are at record levels — around 12% of GDP — many households are struggling to save. Publicly traded corporations pay about \$2 trillion annually in dividends to shareholders, but that money is concentrated among the wealthiest Americans — and increasingly, foreign investors.

A brief history of US external balances

The US began running persistent current account deficits in the early 1980s, during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. The deficits widened significantly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, reaching over 5% of GDP during the mid-2000s. Although the 2008 financial crisis temporarily reduced the deficit, it did not disappear.

As of 2024, the deficit remains large, driven by a chronic imbalance in goods trade (heavy imports of consumer products and industrial inputs). The shortfall is partially offset by a surplus in services trade, exports like software from Apple, licensing of American movie rights and global usage of US-based financial services.

These imbalances are not merely economic accidents; they are structural features of a global financial system built around the dollar.

The limits of dollar demand

Foreigners are accumulating US assets — not out of charity, but necessity. They need dollars to

settle international trade, service dollar-denominated debts and build FX reserves. But this accumulation has limits.

First, foreigners cannot redeem their dollar claims for US goods and services, in total, unless the US runs a trade surplus, which it doesn't. Second, it means non-US labor is producing real goods in exchange for paper claims that they may never redeem in kind.

While the US can theoretically print as many dollars as needed, this doesn't mean the rest of the world will always want to hold them. You can force-feed financial claims to producers or authentic goods only for so long. The dollar system rests on confidence. At some point, this confidence could break.

The dollar's status as the world's reserve currency also depends on its stability. So far, no central banker has been fired for holding too many dollars. However, nobody wants to hold a wasting asset.

The hoarding of US dollars by foreign central banks prevents the exchange rate from adjusting to a price where trade imbalances would decline. Insofar as the dollar is a victim of its own success, to be a reserve asset, it cannot be weak. Its continued strength, at least until the beginning of 2025, hollowed out the US industrial base, exporting jobs and inflation to other nations.

The Eurodollar mirage

An alternative access route to US dollars — and it's an imperfect one — is the Eurodollar Market. This is a global financial system of offshore US dollars created by non-US banks. Despite the name, Eurodollars are not related to the euro. They are dollar deposits held in foreign banks, often in London or the Caribbean.

You can think of the Eurodollar market as a casino. Players use chips as currency. They settle bets with chips that represent and may look like dollars, but aren't backed by the Federal Reserve Bank. The monetary system within the casino works fine until either someone with large winnings wants to cash out or a player is unable to repay their debt.

Offshore dollar markets function until they don't. Eurodollars are not automatically convertible into onshore dollars without a corresponding credit line from a US institution. When liquidity dries up, those credit lines become hard or impossible to obtain. The Federal Reserve may step in — as it did with swap lines in 2008 and 2020 — but it is under no obligation to save the system. Swap lines are dollar loans to foreign central banks, which, in turn, lend these dollars to borrowers in distress (at their own risk).

The current administration will likely make a point of excluding “non-friendly” countries from access to those swap lines.

Ecuador, which abandoned its own currency and dollarized in the year 2000, found out the hard way. The government defaulted on dollar-denominated debt twice (in 2008 and 2020) because it lacked the ability to issue its own currency during a crisis.

The case for a neutral reserve currency

The obvious solution is a supra-national reserve asset. Ironically, such a thing has already existed for decades: the Special Drawing Right (SDR), created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1969. It is not a currency used by consumers but rather an accounting unit used between governments. It only exists in digital form, based on a basket of currencies (dominated by the US dollar and the Euro).

Initially, the SDR was linked to gold, as one unit was set to represent slightly less than one gram (0.888671) of gold. After Former US President Richard Nixon “temporarily” suspended the dollar's convertibility into gold in 1971, the gold link was removed in 1973.

An SDR-based monetary system would still face challenges. In our fiat monetary system (where trust rather than commodities backs currency), money can only be created by issuing an equal amount of debt. This would require a global lender of last resort to intervene in case national central banks ran out of debt-bearing capacity to create additional SDR liabilities. It would be a highly centralized system with few potentially unelected officials deciding over the allocation of credit.

The world would know only one interest rate. There would be no national sovereignty over monetary policy.

Commodity currencies? Be careful what you wish for

What about backing a global reserve currency with commodities? Gold? Oil? Bitcoin?

A commodity-backed system brings discipline — but also rigidity. They restrict how much money governments can create, since the supply is tied to commodity prices. When prices fall, the money supply shrinks. The money supply becomes pro-cyclical, causing deflation and recessions. And it favors commodity-rich nations like Russia and Saudi Arabia, while hurting import-dependent economies like Japan.

Bitcoin appears to be unsuitable as a medium of exchange, as its limited issuance may lead to hoarding. Expected price appreciation would mean that other goods expressed in Bitcoin would fall in value; they would deflate. Prolonged periods of

deflation can harm the banking system, leading to depression and widespread unemployment.

The dangers of small currency fragility

What if there won't be a new global reserve currency? What if the international monetary system disintegrates into countries trying to use their domestic currencies to settle international trade? Imagine the friction of having to price your product in 20+ different currencies and adjusting prices almost daily. Hedging costs would explode, and inefficiencies soar.

Furthermore, the currencies of smaller nations often serve as playthings for speculators. Their currencies are vulnerable to speculative attacks (when investors suddenly pull out money). Hot money inflows — short-term capital chasing high interest rates — can vanish in a crisis. Exchange rates collapse. Imported inflation spikes. Living standards fall.

Take Turkey — not exactly a minion of a nation (16th largest by GDP). In 2016, the Turkish lira traded at 2.5 per dollar. Today: over 40. Nominal wages soared from 2,210 lira (~\$1,000) in 2014 to 26,600 (~\$665) in 2024. The average Turk is poorer in US dollar terms.

A collapsing currency can make energy imports unaffordable. Resulting power cuts may lead to social unrest.

America's missed opportunity

The US never seriously pursued transitioning to a neutral reserve system, a massive policy failure. The ability to run deficits without immediate punishment (i.e., currency depreciation) proved too tempting.

The endgame is in sight. The US is now addicted to deficits, with neither party being able

to rein in spending. Rather than engineering a soft landing, the current administration seems eager to speed toward the cliff by alienating international creditors. No one sinks a leaking ship faster by grabbing an axe. But here we are.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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Is Diane Abbott Right?

Ellis Cashmore
July 18, 2025

The UK Labour Party faced a political crisis after Member of Parliament Diane Abbott wrote a letter distinguishing racism against people of color from other forms of prejudice, sparking accusations of antisemitism. Abbott lost the party whip and was suspended following backlash from party leadership and public outcry. This episode highlights the

urgent need for deeper discussions about how racism manifests differently and how political responses should recognize these distinctions without silencing debate.

In April 2023, Diane Abbott, the UK's first Black female Member of Parliament (MP), wrote a letter to The Observer that caused a political storm. In it, she distinguished the racism experienced by "people of color" from the prejudice suffered by Jewish, Irish and Traveller communities. Her words were blunt: "They undoubtedly experience prejudice. This is similar to racism and the two words are often used as if they are interchangeable. It is true that many types of white people with points of difference, such as redheads, can experience this prejudice. But they are not all their lives subjected to racism."

The backlash was immediate and severe. Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour Party, called the letter "antisemitic". Abbott was suspended and lost the party whip, effectively removing her from the parliamentary Labour group. She later apologized "unreservedly" for the letter, withdrew its content and said the drafting had been an "initial version" sent in error. Despite this, she has remained outside the Labour fold.

The controversy raises a deeper question: Was she justified in distinguishing between different forms of discrimination? The assumption behind the criticism is that all forms of racism and prejudice are equal and must be treated as such. But Abbott's argument, clumsily expressed, perhaps, suggests that racism is far from a uniform phenomenon. It can take many forms, some structural, others cultural, some visible, others hidden. The character of racism shifts according to time, place and other contextual variables. We might properly refer to the plural racisms.

Abbott's argument was not that antisemitism, anti-Irish or anti-Traveller prejudice were not real, damaging or impactful, but that racism directed at people of color, particularly Blacks and South Asians, is historically different in Britain and persists in surreptitious, yet systemic ways and continues to have consequences. The question is not whether Abbott's wording was offensive. It is whether her central claim has merit.

Race, racism and visibility

Since the postwar era, Britain has seen significant immigration from its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia. These migrants were visibly different from the white majority and quickly became targets of both social hostility and institutional exclusion. Even state policy itself reflected what was, in the 1960s, called racialism or racial discrimination. Housing policies, police practices and labor market discrimination routinely disadvantaged them. This was not simply personal animus. It was systemic and legal. At least until 1965, when legislation outlawed "racial discrimination." The legislation's scope was expanded in 1968 and, again, in 1976.

Abbott's point is that this form of discrimination was not just prejudice: it was racism, specifically designed to maintain a racial hierarchy with white Britons at the top. The "weaponization" of the spurious concept of race, as Abbott implies, was a powerful tool for dispossessed whites seeking scapegoats for their misfortunes, as unemployment rose.

Abbott's key distinction is visibility. Jews, Irish and Travellers have faced serious and sometimes violent discrimination in British history. But, for the most part, they were not physically distinguishable from other white Britons. This did not make their suffering any less real, but it did make it easier, in some circumstances, to "pass" or blend into mainstream society. Black and South

Asian people had no such option. They were and remain instantly legible as Other in a society that codes whiteness as normal.

This visibility has and continues to have profound consequences. Racial profiling, media stereotyping, criminalization, over-policing and underrepresentation are all facilitated by the ability to mark people visually. Discrimination against Jews or Irish people has typically taken different forms, often cultural, religious or ethnic rather than strictly racial. The Holocaust and pogroms across Europe demonstrate that antisemitism can be just as deadly. But the mechanisms of marginalization differ.

Abbott's error

Abbott's error was in appearing to rank oppressions, a dangerous misstep given the severe and distinct forms of prejudice faced by various groups. Yet her underlying insight holds considerable weight: racism directed at people of color, particularly those of African and Caribbean descent, in Britain was historically and globally justified by pseudo-scientific theories about biological difference.

These theories were based on the premise that the world's population was divisible into distinguishable groups called "races," a concept then used to enforce a strict hierarchy. This racialized thinking gave anti-Black discrimination a unique, pervasive force — deeply embedding itself in institutions, legal frameworks and social structures over centuries, spanning slavery, colonialism and post-colonial migration.

Discrimination against the Jewish or the Irish, while undeniably severe and sometimes involving racialized caricatures and theories of their "inferiority" at certain historical junctures, did not develop with the same epic duration or global

systemic reach as the ideologies underpinning the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring legacies.

The visible and indelible nature of Blackness, forged under conditions of chattel slavery and subsequent systemic oppression, solidified a distinct form of racial hierarchy that made it virtually impossible to escape through assimilation, distinguishing it from the historical prejudices faced by other white ethnic groups who, over time, often achieved greater integration.

The politics of antisemitism

Antisemitism is not just a relic of the past. In Britain, the US and across Europe, it remains a live threat, as evidenced by the recent spike in antisemitic incidents during periods of the Middle East conflict. The Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, was beset with accusations it had tolerated or failed to respond adequately to antisemitism in its ranks. The 2020 Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report concluded that Labour had broken equalities law, a damning indictment that forced internal reform and public apologies.

This context partly explains the reaction to Abbott's letter. Her remarks were interpreted as minimizing the suffering of Jewish people, undermining the seriousness of antisemitism and echoing the logic of those who sought to relegate it to a subsidiary type of bigotry. The optics were politically abominable, not least because Labour was attempting to rebuild trust with Jewish communities under Starmer's leadership.

Yet, in this hypersensitive political climate, details risk being lost. Abbott did not deny that Jews face prejudice. Her argument was not dismissive; she tried (in an admittedly imprecise and perhaps inadvertently provocative way) to distinguish between the types of discrimination different groups confronted. Her critics responded

as if any deviation from the view that all prejudice is equal is itself a form of bigotry.

But this homogenizing approach obscures, rather than clarifies, understanding. Racism is not a single experience or a uniform category. It is historically contingent, culturally shaped and unevenly distributed. We might properly use the plural racisms.

No stranger to controversy

Abbott is no stranger to controversy. As a pioneering Black politician, she has often been held to impossible standards, facing abuse pretty much throughout her career. According to Amnesty International, she has the unenviable distinction of receiving more online hate than any other female politician. Her suspension from Labour can't be separated from this longer history of scrutiny, marginalization and misrepresentation.

Yes, Abbott's letter was inelegant in its expression. But her fundamental argument that racism directed at people of color in Britain has a different genealogy and impact than other forms of prejudice deserves more than disciplinary action. It deserves critical discussion. There is a risk that, in policing speech about racism and other bigotries, we enforce a new orthodoxy that brooks no difference of analysis or perspective.

More broadly, the episode reflects a troubling shift in British political culture: Away from thoughtful engagement and toward thoughtless punishment. Rather than explore whether Abbott's claims had intellectual, historical or empirical grounding, party leaders moved hastily to condemn and exclude. This may have restored short-term political capital, but it did little to advance public understanding of racism or, for that matter, anti-racism.

Abbott remains suspended from the parliamentary party more than a year later. Her case has become, in a sense, symbolic, not just of Labour's internal politics, but of the wider struggle over how racism is defined, by whom and to what ends. And how we should respond to it, even in its vestigial forms. In a society still challenged by its colonial past and present inequalities, these questions can't be settled by fiat.

So we return to the original question: Was Diane Abbott right? No, not in every word. But in her central claim that racism against people of color in Britain has distinct historical roots and lived consequences, she was not wrong either. While all forms of discrimination are harmful and abhorrent, Abbott's thoughts prompt an uncomfortable examination of the precise language we use to describe interlocking systems of oppression.

Ellis Cashmore's "The Destruction and Creation of Michael Jackson" is published by Bloomsbury. One of his earlier books is "The Logic of Racism."

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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The World's Silent Complicity in Israel's War on Gaza

Alan Waring
July 19, 2025

Israel has carried out a relentless and zealous military onslaught in Gaza that shows orchestrated mass inhumanity on a gargantuan scale. This campaign has killed tens of thousands of civilians, razed Gaza's infrastructure and blocked humanitarian aid, while most political leaders remain reluctant to condemn the conduct or take meaningful action. Their silence, shaped by self-interest, historical guilt and fear of backlash, raises urgent questions about moral responsibility and global accountability.

For a long time, many people have argued that silence about perceived evil or outrages against human rights and humanity itself amounts to complicity in such evil. These include some of the greatest scientists, moral philosophers and human rights campaigners, such as Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Martin Luther King Jr, who reportedly said, "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people".

There is now wide recognition of the idea that silence, especially when exhibited by those in a position of formal authority and with the capacity and power to act, implies tacit agreement with, if not approval of, evil acts. Yet, the contemporary abject refusal by vast swathes of supposedly "good" people in positions of responsibility to publicly condemn manifestly egregious conduct,

much less take action to stop it, suggests that powerful counter-motivators are at work.

Does anyone care about mass civilian carnage in Gaza?

Few people could remain unaware of the terror attack by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023, on Israel close to the border with the Palestinian territory of Gaza. This killed around 1,139 people in Israel, wounded 3,400 others and resulted in Hamas taking 251 hostages into Gaza. Equally, few could be unaware of Israel's apocalyptic military response in Gaza, which has gone on relentlessly for over 20 months.

By July 9, 2025, according to the UN, out of Gaza's 2.2 million people, at least 57,680 (around 70% of which were women and children) had been killed by Israeli Defense Force (IDF) action as recorded from birth and death certificates, plus an estimated 12,000 others unaccounted for and presumed buried under rubble. At least another 125,000 have been wounded.

According to the UN, IDF aerial or ground bombardment has destroyed most of the residential, business, government, education, medical and food supply buildings and facilities across Gaza. The IDF has forcibly displaced 90% of the Gazan population, typically three, four or more times, either because their homes have suffered destruction or because IDF short-notice evacuation diktats directed them to so-called "safe zones" away from an impending IDF attack.

Often, the IDF attacks these "safe zones" — empty schools doubling as displacement shelters and makeshift tented shelter areas — causing more civilian casualties. Nearly all Gaza's hospitals and clinics have been subject to IDF bombardment, gunfire and/or IDF incursions, sometimes several times, and more than half are closed or only partly functioning.

In addition, the IDF blocked all shipments of essential food, medicines, fuel and water into Gaza from March 2 to May 19, 2025, thereby creating a potential humanitarian disaster. Even after partly lifting the blockade, fewer than 20% of the daily 600 trucks required were allowed in, and once inside, further IDF restrictions and warehouse insecurity hindered aid distribution. By the end of May, with imminent mass starvation and rising deaths, Israel — backed by the US — ignored the existing UN aid network in Gaza and imposed a new aid organization called the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). However, its local inexperience initially resulted in chaos with the shooting of dozens of aid seekers and only minimal aid being distributed.

International aid organisations with many years' experience in Gaza universally rejected the new scheme as naïve and unworkable. Controversy surrounds the entire project, especially since it was widely publicized that not only does the foundation willingly let the Israeli government direct and vet its activities, but also that its new owner reportedly holds a former senior CIA officer position and owns a private security company, Safe Reach Solutions, that will work with the foundation.

Israel also stands accused of arming criminal Palestinian gangs — some of which are linked to ISIS terrorists — to protect GHF operations in Gaza. However, these gangs reportedly also run protection rackets against other aid organizations.

The official Israeli position

The Israeli government and IDF steadfastly assert that all their military activities in Gaza are essential to root out, defeat and ultimately eliminate Hamas as a terrorist organization. At face value, this may not seem an unreasonable position to take. After all, Hamas militants (and other groups such as Hezbollah) have inflicted

many terrorist attacks on Israel over the years, and perhaps the October 7th atrocity constituted such a significant escalation that the incumbent government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided it now required a final crushing showdown with Hamas.

However, the IDF's "devastated terrain warfare" strategy has, unsurprisingly, had apocalyptic consequences for civilians. The relentless mass civilian carnage inflicted by Israel in Gaza — with 50 times more people killed and 37 times more wounded relative to the Israeli casualties on October 7, 2023 — plus an almost complete destruction of all buildings, facilities, essential supplies and means for sustaining life, coupled with a complete blockade of food and humanitarian aid for two-and-a-half months, suggest an Israeli motivation other than military necessity.

Nevertheless, the Israeli government remains adamant that only a total annihilation of Hamas will suffice, regardless of "collateral" death and destruction. Finally, in May 2025, many governments that are traditionally pro-Israel (with the notable exception of the US) openly rejected Israel's justification. While the majority of Gaza's 2.2 million population have not been killed, nevertheless, the numbers continue to rise, and the specific intent of the Israeli government and its IDF more than meets the 1948 Genocide Convention criteria. The trajectory appears genocidal, more accurately a proto-genocide rather than one yet achieved. However, Professor Avi Shlaim, an Israeli–British historian, argues that it is already a de facto genocide. Regardless of how it is classified, it is undoubtedly an atrocity on a mammoth, slow-motion scale.

A more plausible narrative

So, what plausible narrative could explain this orchestrated mass inhumanity? Here, we encounter

a peculiar, contradictory espousal from Netanyahu, other Israeli leaders, spokespersons, politicians and the IDF. On the one hand, they constantly assert that Israel remains in clear and present danger of being destroyed by Hamas to such an extent that the Gaza War must be prosecuted relentlessly and ruthlessly. This assertion persists despite the IDF commanding 169,000 armed ground forces plus 465,000 reservists compared to Hamas, which had an estimated 30,000 fighters (now reduced to about 12,000).

The IDF also possesses greater weaponry, including 40,000 armoured vehicles, 350 self-propelled artillery pieces, 171 towed artillery systems, 50 helicopter gunships, 600 aircraft — including 272 combat craft — and numerous drones. Hamas has no such weaponry other than drones, miniature rockets and firearms, RPGs and barely 7% of the number of Israel's armed ground forces, or 1.9% if reservists are included.

As their October 7 attack and other attacks have shown, Hamas clearly does present a formidable long-term terrorism threat to Israel's population and peace. However, set against Israel's overwhelming military strength, firepower, advanced technology and intelligence systems, it will never likely pose an existential threat to the State of Israel.

On the other hand, Netanyahu, along with IDF chiefs and government spokespersons, maintains that in its conduct of the Gaza War, Israel is a paragon of morality. They claim that the country makes significant efforts to adhere to the language and intent of the Laws of War, particularly in protecting civilians. They deny all the mounting allegations, despite the tally of civilian casualties, video evidence, eyewitness accounts, forensic evidence and medical reports.

International courts have accused Israel of various war crimes, including genocide. Neither

Israel nor the US accepts these charges or recognizes these courts. However, as highly respected independent observers have noted, the way foreign governments respond to Israel's unbridled savagery may haunt them for years to come.

With the military necessity justification universally discredited, why else would Israel want to perpetrate such wanton mass carnage and destruction on Gaza? A compelling answer to the question can be found in a complex and often toxic interplay of factors. This includes the vengeful collective punishment and suffering inflicted on the civilian population in response to the Hamas atrocities committed on October 7, 2023. Deep-rooted religious beliefs and the concept of Eretz Yisrael, along with ultra-Zionist interpretations of Jewish superiority and rights, contribute to this dynamic. Additionally, there are elements of opportunistic ethnic cleansing and land grabbing, as well as the desperate measures taken by right-wing Prime Minister Netanyahu since 2004 to maintain his grip on power.

His megalomania has allowed fanatical ultra-nationalist Zionist groups to gain influence by giving them positions in his Cabinet in exchange for their loyalty. They now control him and dictate government policy. This influence has shaped a master plan regarding Gaza and the Palestinians, including those in the Occupied West Bank. This plan aims to fully implement the 2018 Israeli Nation State Law, particularly Article 7. This article explicitly encourages the expropriation of Palestinian land by Israeli settlers and the expulsion of its owners.

The ultimate goal appears to be the complete removal, intimidation, or forced exit through violence of all Palestinians from Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. Where the total of some 5.5 million expelled Palestinians would go is not in this extremist plan, and Israeli ministers have made

it clear that it is not their problem and they don't care as long as they are gone!

The Eretz Yisrael ideology and the Greater Israel territorial expansion mission of ultra-nationalist and ultra-Zionist supremacists, who hold sway over Netanyahu and IDF strategy, has a colossal reach. It encompasses not only Gaza and the West Bank but also Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, large areas of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and even as far away as Kuwait. Absorption of Gaza and the West Bank and expulsion of all Palestinians is their first step.

The justification for these bold territorial claims is repeatedly emphasized, with a focus on the belief that God informed Abraham nearly 4,000 years ago that he and all his descendants would inherit “the whole land” of Israel. However, a small number of Jewish supremacists derived the political ideology of Eretz Yisrael only in the late 19th century, as part of the creation of the Zionism movement. Maps appeared that showed Eretz Yisrael stretching from Egypt in the west to Kuwait in the east and as far north as Anatolia in modern-day Turkey.

Of course, being convinced of divinely granted superiority and exclusive entitlement to other people's land is not supported by any objective evidence. Furthermore, *jus divinum* (God's law) cannot be used to sanctify land grabs or the repression, if not violent expulsion or homicide, of the incumbents. Beyond the universal rights of existence and self-defense, the justifications of God's law and a claimed exclusive right to all the land of Eretz Yisrael appear more like naked, neo-imperialist sophistry rather than self-determination, rightful sovereignty or anything remotely godly.

If this potential explanation seems far-fetched, consider the numerous statements by Israel's leaders and ethno-religious nationalist activists.

Israeli leaders in their own words

Today, Israeli authoritarians dogmatically advance a revisionist history of Palestinian and Jewish presence that insists that Palestinians are only recent squatters who never had any land rights and have no right to be in Eretz Yisrael.

In reality, both Jews and Palestinian Arabs have cohabited in the same land for roughly the same length of time — several thousand years. What's more, according to the 1922 British census, Jews represented only 11% of the population, with Palestinian Muslims at 78%. By 1948, via natural birth rate and immigration, it still only stood at 32% against Palestinian Muslims at 60%. As former Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, stated unequivocally in 1970, “I am a Palestinian. From 1921 to 1948, I carried a Palestinian passport.”

Bezalel Smotrich, Israeli Finance Minister: “There is no such thing as a Palestinian people. There is no Palestinian history.” March 19, 2023.

Gaza's 2.2 million population will be confined to a narrow “humanitarian zone”, with the rest of Gaza “totally destroyed” ... “They will be totally despairing, understanding that there is no hope and nothing to look for in Gaza, and will be looking for relocation to begin a new life in other places.” May 6, 2025.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israeli National Security Minister: The Gaza War presents “an opportunity to concentrate on encouraging the migration of the residents of Gaza ... I do not rule out Jewish settlement there ... it is an important thing.” January 1, 2024.

“There is no need to bring in aid. They have enough. Hamas food stores should be bombed.” May 6, 2025.

Amihai Eliyahu, Israeli Heritage Minister: The Palestinian population “can go to Ireland or deserts ... the monsters in Gaza should find a solution themselves.” When asked if Israel should drop a nuclear bomb on Gaza and kill all the inhabitants, he replied, “That is an option.” November 5, 2023.

Israel “must find ways for Gazans that are more painful than death” to defeat them and break their morale. January 6, 2024.

“We must stop humanitarian aid. There is no problem in bombing their food and fuel reserves. They should starve.” May 6, 2025.

Israel Katz, Israeli Defence Minister: “Israel’s policy is clear. No humanitarian aid will enter Gaza, and blocking this aid is one of the main pressure levers ... No one is currently planning to allow any humanitarian aid into Gaza, and there are no preparations to enable such aid.” April 17, 2025.

May Golan, Israeli Social Equality Minister: “I am personally proud of the ruins of Gaza.” February 21, 2024.

“Taking territory is what hurts them most”. Re-establishing Jewish settlements in Gaza would be “a lesson that the Arabs would never forget.” October 21, 2024.

Nissim Vaturi, Israeli Knesset Member: “Gaza and its people must be burned.” January 10, 2024.

“Who is innocent in Gaza? Civilians went out and slaughtered people in cold blood.” Israel needs to “separate the children and women and kill the adults in Gaza, we are being too considerate.” February 24, 2025.

Anti-extreme Zionism is not anti-Semitism

Anyone criticising contemporary Israeli actions against Palestinians is likely to be slurred as anti-Semitic by fanatical Zionists trying to deflect attention away from their Gaza inhumanity. Peter Isackson highlights the absurdity of such defensive “gaslighting”, and various courts (e.g., Denmark, Australia) have supported the distinction.

While some critics of Israeli actions may well be anti-Semitic, the vast majority are not. They are simply calling out relentless violations of civilized standards that have persisted for at least 20 months. Such condemnation is not against all Israelis, all Jews or even against all Zionists among them. Rather, it is against the fanatical ultra-Zionist minority and their political enablers who are currently orchestrating the slaughter and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza (and the Occupied West Bank). All while they rejoice in the terror and torment inflicted.

It is a criticism against the wholesale sado-psychopathy that will forever rank Israel and Israelis, unfortunately, and most unfairly, the innocent along with the guilty, as perpetrators in the list of other genocidal catastrophes, such as those faced by the Armenians under the Ottomans (1915-1923), Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda (1994), Cambodians by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), the Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar (2016-2022), and yes, ironically, Jews and other minorities across Europe in the Nazi Holocaust (1933-1945).

The original benign Zionist model, founded by Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, was all about establishing a permanent, safe and secure home for the Jewish diaspora alongside Palestinian Arabs. The model, as summarized in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, stated that the Palestinians’ pre-existing rights would be fully protected. In particular, “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

Since 1948, however, successive Israeli governments have relegated the Palestinians to a barely tolerated second-class status with diminished rights. In the 21st century, the Netanyahu regime has totally reneged on affording them any rights. By May 2025, his Gaza War and West Bank repression had degenerated into wholesale ethnic cleansing and land grabbing.

Why such a complicit silence? And is it total?

With such an appalling Gaza tableau, it is unsurprising that United Nations reports began condemning manifest Israeli rampages sparked by the Oct 7, 2023, Hamas attack. Further, the UN General Assembly resolved in September 2024 that Israel had to dismantle its occupation of all Palestinian territory, including Gaza and the West Bank, by September 15, 2025. Various submissions of other related resolutions against Israel at the UN Security Council have failed, largely owing to vetoes by the US.

From early 2024, one might also have expected a rapid and widespread condemnation of Israel, if not action, from many foreign governments and leaders who claim to defend universal human rights and oppose hegemonic tyranny. However, aside from occasional complaints, it took more than a year before individual leaders, often slowly, grudgingly and almost apologetically, started to criticize Israel. Significant calls for sanctions and measures by foreign governments, usually friendly towards Israel, only truly began in Spring 2025.

For example, Spain cancelled contracts in May 2025 worth over €290 million (\$330 million) to supply defense products to Israel and proposed wider sanctions to its European allies. In 2024, Spain began blocking access to its ports for any vessel carrying arms to Israel, as seen in May and November of that year.

UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Norway sanctioned Israeli Cabinet Ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir on June 10, 2025, for inciting “extremist violence and serious abuses of Palestinians’ human rights.” The sanctions include travel bans and asset freezes. Spain and France are likely to impose similar sanctions.

In February 2024, Ireland sanctioned the passage through Ireland of any weaponry for Israel. In May 2025, Ireland banned the importation of any goods emanating from Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

Before June 2025, only a handful of foreign political leaders had publicly taken a stand against the Israeli excesses. For example, former Australian Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, commented on May 26, 2025, on the Israeli Gaza War, stating, “Yes, it is genocide, Yes, they are starving civilians. Yes, these settler fanatic politicians are baby-killers. None of this can any longer be denied.”

On May 26, 2025, Anthony Albanese, Australian Prime Minister, condemned the Israeli food and aid blockade of Gaza, saying that it was “completely untenable” for the Netanyahu government to starve Gazans.

In May 2025, British Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Mark Pritchard delivered to the UK Parliament an impassioned plea to protect Gaza civilians from Israel’s food and aid blockade.

Former British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott were also prominent in their steadfast commentaries on Israel’s conduct in Gaza following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack.

What about the Fourth Estate?

Again, lazy and/or gullible journalists have been only too happy to regurgitate propaganda from the Israeli or US government or play safe by waiting for minimal and uncritical commentary from their own country's politicians. Fortunately, there are some outstanding exceptions.

On May 12, 2025, Times columnist and former Conservative MP Matthew Parris published one of the most unflinching critiques of Britain's policy toward Israel. "We have reached the point at which Israel's western allies must say 'enough is enough' — and actually mean it," he wrote.

Parris accused Britain of hiding behind American power while reciting empty phrases about "restraint" and "international law," all the while supplying Israel with its most powerful weapon — silence. He challenged both the British left and the Conservative opposition for abandoning their moral commitments. "Why did we, through silence and quiet support, give cover to this atrocity?" he asked.

He then offered a blunt answer. Guilt has shaped Western sympathy for Israel's fight for survival. The shame of Europe's past and the West's lingering remorse have formed a deep well of political credit for a small, embattled nation to draw from. Israel, he argued, has turned victimhood into a strategic asset.

But that well is drying up. Nothing seems likely to stop Israel's push for annexation — first Gaza, next the West Bank — where settlers continue to seize land with the government's quiet approval. A slow, corrosive moral decay now spreads through both civil and military policy. One day, Parris warned, Israelis may wake to find that the world sees them not as a beacon of democracy but as just another repressive regime in the region.

Parris's stark assessment echoed the moral tension voiced by another British Conservative,

Times columnist Lord Daniel Finkelstein OBE. In his article, "What Do I Feel About Gaza?", Finkelstein grappled with the anguish of watching the war unfold as both a committed Jew — whose family suffered under the Nazi Holocaust — and as a humanitarian appalled by the suffering in Gaza. "I feel distress, dismay, despondency. I feel depression, despair, disgust, defiance. Above all, I feel defeated," he wrote.

Finkelstein condemned the idea of permanently displacing Palestinians or settling the West Bank, warning that if Israel's war of defense transforms into a campaign of expulsion, it will cross a moral line. "All the language about genocide and war crimes that has been used as taunts by Israel's opponents will be applicable," he wrote. He rejected the tactic of collective punishment, stating that if Israel aims to destroy Gaza instead of Hamas, the line between civilian casualties and deliberate harm vanishes. Starving civilians, he argued, is not a strategy — it is simply unacceptable.

He adds that creating a Greater Israel by force is something that he had "always seen as morally wrong and a strategic error" and that plenty of Jews agree with him.

Righteous voices in Israel

Despite the overwhelming cacophony of Israeli government propaganda, its media supporters, large sectors of its population and a campaign to intimidate and silence dissent against Netanyahu's Gaza War, there are still clear voices within Israeli society that will not be silenced or made to comply.

For example, Oded Na'aman's article "Menacing Silence" eloquently decries the ongoing denial, concealment and self-censorship of Israeli media about the Gaza reality. He notes that the Israeli public are so disorientated and

riddled with self-doubt that they are easy targets for zealots and manipulative politicians offering a fantasy future. At the same time, “there is simply no available vision of a tolerable future.” They “refuse to look directly at the calamity of Gaza ... because knowing the devastation of Gaza is knowing the true devastation of Israel ... their declarations of righteousness are as fierce as the fear of their depravity.”

As Israeli Professor Chaim Gans notes, the self-defining and self-serving nature of ultra-Zionists’ arguments is “valid only for those who believe them” and that “they do not make the slightest attempt to provide moral or universally valid arguments, only reinforcing the prejudices of the already persuaded.” He observes that one nation’s extreme quest for self-determination may expunge another’s legitimate quest and may involve a criminal land grab.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has consistently opposed Netanyahu’s strategy and conduct of the Gaza War, and by Spring 2025 he was becoming increasingly disillusioned and alarmed. As the civilian Palestinian carnage grew and IDF bombardment, shootings and mass displacements intensified, an exasperated Olmert finally exploded in interviews with Haaretz, CNN and other media: “What is it if not a war crime?”, accusing Netanyahu and far-right cabinet members of “committing actions which cannot be interpreted in any other way ... What we are doing in Gaza now is a war of devastation: indiscriminate, limitless, cruel and criminal killing of civilians.” He stated that “terrible damage” had been caused “to the moral integrity of the state of Israel and the people of Israel.”

In early July 2025, Olmert accused the Israeli government’s plan to force the surviving Palestinians in Gaza into a narrow so-called “humanitarian zone” as creating a massive

“concentration camp” as part of an ethnic cleansing mission.

Yet, as early as July 2024, reports were appearing in Israel that IDF soldiers were videoed confessing to shooting Palestinian civilians for sport or out of boredom. More recently, Haaretz has published damning admissions by IDF soldiers that their commander ordered them to shoot unarmed Palestinians desperately trying to join the massive queues for food at the sparse number of GHF food aid locations, adding that these were undeniably genocidal acts.

Why have so many leaders stayed silent for so long?

Foreign governments and politicians have remained complicitly silent about Israel’s actions in Gaza for several intertwined reasons. Some act out of self-interest, shallow integrity and political hypocrisy. Others remain burdened by historical guilt, shame and remorse — aware that their predecessors during the 1930s and 1940s looked the other way as Hitler’s Final Solution unfolded, and only acknowledged its full horror once the evidence became undeniable in 1945. Many fear appearing bold or controversial, unwilling to risk being labeled anti-Semitic for criticizing ultra-Zionist abuses. And for some, their silence stems from a deeper, prejudiced view that sees Palestinians as an inherent ethno-religious threat to Western values and interests.

Only after the Nazis were defeated and WWII had ended did foreign governments and politicians suddenly all claim to be philo-Semites and champions of a new Jewish State. When Palestine and Palestinians finally gain release from Israeli hegemony, will that same class of Western leaders and politicians be true to form and suddenly proclaim they had been pro-Palestinian all along?

Some countries have already severed or downgraded diplomatic relations with Israel. Many more (147 out of 193 countries in the UN) now formally recognize Palestine as a state. Israel has isolated itself and created its own pariah status. Now more than ever the situation demands sustained diplomatic, economic, financial, trade, weaponry, travel and cultural sanctioning pressure, especially after Israel's pre-emptive military attacks on Iran beginning on June 13, 2025, cast attention away from its Gaza crimes.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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Latin America: A French Idea That Outlived Its Empire

Alfredo Toro Hardy
July 23, 2025

French Emperor Napoleon III launched a military campaign in Mexico in 1861 to extend French influence and construct a Pan-Latin

alliance that could counter Anglo-American power. France installed Maximilian of Habsburg as emperor in 1864, but Mexican resistance and US pressure forced a French withdrawal by 1867. The term “Latin America,” born from this failed imperial project, remains in use today as a marker of cultural identity shaped by European ambitions.

As a name and a concept, Latin America was a creation of the court of the former French Emperor Napoleon III. It was a notion linked to France's intent to conquer Mexico. A process that took place between 1861 and 1867.

On October 9, 1861, Napoleon III wrote to his Ambassador in London, Count Flahaut, that if Mexico could be regenerated under the influence of France, they would have erected an insurmountable barrier against the encroachments of the United States. On July 5, 1862, he wrote a letter to General Elie Frederic Forey, emphasizing that France had a historic mission to restore the strength and prestige of the Latin race that lived on the other side of the Atlantic.

Napoleon's Pan-Latin project

The aims, barriers and Latin strength mentioned earlier represented two sides of the same coin. They laid the groundwork for Napoleon's Pan-Latin project in the Americas. One aim was to counterbalance the rising Anglo-Protestant power by strengthening the influence of Latin Catholicism. A Latin power, of course, remained under the tutelage of France.

The nature of the Latin connection between France and the Hispanic part of the Americas

stemmed from their shared Roman heritage, a heritage also shared by Brazil. However, although Brazil is considered a fundamental part of “Latin America,” it represented a completely different proposition in terms of France’s imperial ambitions. With an Emperor from the Royal House of Braganza ruling that country and Great Britain leading its international trade, Brazil was beyond the reach of Napoleon’s grandiose plans.

Such a common heritage dates back to ancient times. The original Latins inhabited central Italy in what is now the region of Lazio. Through conquests led by their dominant city-state, Rome, the rest of Italy became “Latinized.” In other words, the term Latin lost its specific ethnic meaning and gained a political and cultural one. As Roman power expanded to what would later become France, Spain and Portugal (among others), these regions also became Latin spaces. Roman law, traditions, architecture and the Latin language were imposed upon them.

Circa 313 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine decriminalized Christianity, promoting its rise, which would shortly thereafter become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Thus, this marks the origins of the Roman-Catholic Church.

Vulgar Latin, in its context, was the language spoken by ordinary citizens of the Roman Empire, distinct from the cultivated form of Classical Latin. It encompassed the vernacular dialects that later evolved into the so-called Romance languages. These include languages like Italian, French, Spanish or Portuguese.

The Pan-Latin thesis that emerged during Napoleon III’s reign aimed to highlight the shared traits between the “Latin Race” of the Americas and Europe. Both groups, on either side of the Atlantic, shared religion, culture and Romance languages. As a result, the Latins of the Americas were encouraged to become natural allies of Latin

Europe in their cultural struggle not only against the Anglo-Saxon world but also against Teutonic and Slavic Europe.

Of course, Mexico was just the first step in Napoleon’s plan to establish other French satellite monarchies in the region. But how did Napoleon’s ambitions over Mexico materialize? To answer this, some background information is required.

How did Napoleon’s ambitions materialize?

Since its independence from Spain, Mexico’s Conservatives had always aspired to a monarchical system of government under a European prince of royal blood. Time and again, this idea tended to re-emerge among their most notorious representatives, particularly Lucas Alamán. This became more urgent for them after a weak Mexico faced the loss of half of its territory to a much stronger United States.

In the 1850s, however, the Liberals gained control of Mexico and began passing a series of reform laws aimed at reducing the power of the Church and the Army. This process culminated with the enactment of the 1857 Constitution, which triggered a military revolt by the increasingly marginalized Conservatives. It was known as the Reform War.

By December 1860, the Liberals had won this war, and in March 1861, Benito Juárez, who led this faction as Provisional President, was officially elected President of Mexico. The defeated Conservatives saw the possibility of a monarchical regime, under a European prince of royal blood, as the only remaining solution to their problems.

Thus, they proceeded to lobby (some of their members had been doing so since the beginning of the civil war) Emperor Napoleon III. Their objective was that a European prince, under his

stewardship and with military support, would become the monarch of Mexico.

This proposal was music to Napoleon's ears, who, after his country's military success in Indochina, aimed to expand his empire. Not surprisingly, he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his famous uncle of the same name, who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had controlled Europe for a decade and a half.

Significantly, the gates of Mexico and Hispanic America had just opened to European infiltration. Indeed, in January 1861, seven southern states seceded from the United States, forming a new country called the Confederate States of America. The war between the two parties resulted in a sudden halt to the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine. This doctrine, issued in 1823 by President James Monroe, formally warned European monarchies that the United States would not tolerate further colonization or the creation of tributary monarchies in the Americas.

Furthermore, Napoleon III believed that the South would win such a war, implying that Mexico's northern neighbor would not be a strong United States, but a weakened Confederate States of America. A new country in need of France's recognition and support. In other words, ambition and opportunity aligned perfectly. As a result, in 1861, France invaded Mexico.

Maximilian of Habsburg, brother of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph, was the designated French puppet to become the Emperor of Mexico. In Napoleon's words:

The Prince who may mount the Mexican throne will always be forced to act in the interests of France, not only from gratitude but even more because his country's interest will be in accordance with ours, and he will not be able to maintain himself without our influence.

After consolidating the conquest of most of the country by French troops and relegating President Benito Juarez to its fringes, the crown was offered to the Austrian prince on July 10, 1863. According to the Treaty of Miramar, signed between Maximilian and the French Empire, the future Mexican Empire was required to cover all military costs associated with the French invasion and presence in Mexico. Maximilian was finally enthroned in May 1864. However, it was to be a short-lived and tragic reign.

Surviving defeat

A combination of factors brought this adventure to an end. First, Napoleon III underestimated the stubborn resistance of the Mexican forces under Juarez. Second, choosing Maximilian was unsuitable, as his liberal ideas aligned more closely with those of Benito Juarez than with those of his Mexican Conservative allies. Third, the American Civil War ended with the Confederacy's defeat on June 2, 1865, which not only re-established the Monroe Doctrine but also created conditions for war with the United States, which began sending surplus weapons and ammunition to Juarez's troops. Fourth, France itself started to feel threatened by the rising power of Prussia under Bismarck's capable leadership. The 40,000 French troops stationed in Mexico became increasingly needed in France.

On February 5, 1867, the last French troops left Mexico City. Although Maximilian was advised to withdraw with them, he chose to stay in Mexico, supported by the Mexican Conservatives. However, this poorly matched alliance could not withstand the growing strength of Juarez's forces, now aided by American arms. On May 15 of that year, Emperor Maximilian was captured, and after a court-martial, he was executed on June 19. Two reasons motivated his execution: the atrocities committed by the French troops and a message to deter future invaders.

Maximilian's patron, Napoleon III, would also suffer a crushing defeat three years later. Overwhelmed by the strength of the Prussian military in a war between the two countries, and captured at the battlefield of Sedan, Napoleon's regime was overthrown by his own citizens on September 4, 1870.

Curiously, the term Latin America survived the defeats of the American Confederation, the Maximilian monarchy and the Napoleonic Empire itself. Furthermore, it was accepted as a sign of identity by the very people it was supposed to be imposed upon as an imperialistic project.

Given this final connotation, how can we explain the effortless adoption of the term by Hispanic and Portuguese (Iberian) Americans themselves?

How to explain the success of the term

An initial assumption might be that the Pan-Latin thesis is opposed to the US, especially since a few decades earlier, the United States had forcefully taken half of Mexico's territory. However, that was not the case, as admiration for the US political system and entrepreneurial ingenuity remained high among Iberian American elites of that time.

The answer lay in rejecting Spain and everything Spanish, which was common among Hispanic American Liberals and the so-called Positivists who gained power in most of the region after them. Although both Liberals and Positivists rejected the French invasion, they rejected even more the heritage left by Spain, which they saw as a heavy burden on their efforts to modernize their countries.

The answer could also be found in the fascination that the Iberian American elites of the time felt towards French culture and civilization. Indeed, once the invading troops had been forced to withdraw in humiliation, there was no reason to

reject the flattery of being considered the transatlantic cousins of the French.

As the well-known Mexican intellectual Carlos Fuentes remarked:

Where could we have looked at in search of models and inspiration? Nineteenth-century Latin America found its immediate answer in France and in the city that Baudelaire called 'the capital of the XIX Century'. Parisian influence was felt everywhere from The Hague to Algiers, from St. Petersburg to Cairo. Nonetheless, in Mexico, Bogotá or Buenos Aires, it filled up the deep void left by Spain. Repudiating Spain meant accepting France as a new temple of freedom, good taste, romanticism, and all the good things that life had to offer.

Redeeming the Western credentials of the region while bypassing Spain was well-received by the elites of the day. Especially so, if the country they admired the most became their bridge to the Western world. It was thus that a notion born with imperialistic designs ended up being gladly accepted by those upon whom it was supposed to be imposed. Hence, the paradoxical nature of the notion of Latin America.

[The ideas expressed in this piece can also be found in Alfredo Toro Hardy's book "Understanding Latin America: A Decoding Guide"]

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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Trump's Gordian Knot: Brazil is Under Threat Thanks to Bolsonaro and Big Tech Lobbying

Luiz Cesar Pimentel
July 24, 2025

US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose a 50% tariff on Brazilian exports unless Brazil grants amnesty to former President Jair Bolsonaro, who faces serious criminal charges. The White House issued this ultimatum amid lobbying from Big Tech firms concerned about Brazil's state-run Pix payment system and as Trump confronts renewed scrutiny over his ties to Jeffrey Epstein. The Brazilian government now faces a choice between defending judicial independence or risking economic turmoil under US pressure.

The scene is worthy of a political thriller, but the threat is real and hangs over the Brazilian economy like a sword of Damocles. In the corridors of the White House and the corridors of power in Washington, a grim scenario is unfolding: US President Donald Trump is threatening a 50% tariff on Brazilian products if former President Jair Bolsonaro is not granted amnesty from the serious charges he faces in

Brazil. “Brazil needs to resolve this. There is a man being persecuted for his political beliefs, and this will have consequences,” Trump said in a recent interview with Fox News, leaving no room for interpretation.

The diplomatic blackmail is explicit. Bolsonaro is a central figure in investigations into an attempted coup d'état, the formation and leadership of a criminal organization and the massive dissemination of fake news. He has become the pivot of an unprecedented international crisis that mixes politics, economics and national sovereignty in a way never before seen in more than 200 years of diplomatic relations between the countries. However, behind Trump's inflammatory statements lies a complex web of economic and geopolitical interests, where tech giants emerge as crucial players, capitalizing on the instability to carve out their own paths.

Eduardo Bolsonaro's role and the shock of the threat

The news of Donald Trump's intention to impose a 50% surcharge on Brazil came as a surprise, just as it had with China earlier this year. The difference is that, in the Brazilian case, the justification presented was an arm-wrestling match against the Judiciary, represented by one of its 11 ministers, Alexandre de Moraes. To understand Trump's real motivations, it is necessary to take a step back in the chronology of the crisis and delve deeper into the murky waters from which the threat emerged.

In March of this year, the third of Jair Bolsonaro's five children, Eduardo Bolsonaro — who became the most active in the political arena and his father's defense — emigrated to the US, took a leave of absence from his position as a federal deputy and justified the trip and stay by claiming “political persecution.” In North America, he began lobbying the government to

secure amnesty for Jair, who was close to being arrested, for the crimes he was accused of.

However, he — nor the entire right-wing and far-right base that gained strength during Bolsonaro's term (2019-2022) — did not expect Trump to issue the economic threat letter three months later. Eduardo celebrated as if he had scored a goal in the World Cup final and felt as if he had held a knife to the Brazilian judiciary's throat, intensifying his threats against Supreme Court ministers and the Federal Police as a whole. The rest of the right-wing political group unanimously condemned Trump's threat, unwilling to associate themselves with a measure that was clearly detrimental to Brazil. However, the Supreme Court did not give in.

Days later, former President Bolsonaro's residence was searched and seized, and he was taken to the Federal Police, where he was fitted with an electronic ankle bracelet to monitor his movements and prevent his possible escape. He was ordered not to leave his home between 7:00 PM and 6:00 AM. He was also prohibited from communicating via social media with others under investigation in the operation, as well as with ambassadors and consular officials from other countries.

Pix, Big Tech and the economic motive behind the threat

From the US perspective, behind the superficial political justifications for the threat lies a lobby of major technology firms, especially regarding the Pix system, which has transformed electronic payments in Brazil since 2020 and has become a global success. In just five years, the Central Bank's system has reached more than 150 million users, surpassing other forms of payment due to its being free for individuals and its instantaneous nature.

This popularity, however, represents an obstacle for large technology companies (Big Techs) such as Google, Apple and Meta. They see Pix as a threat to their business models. Meta, for example, has already tried to launch payment solutions, such as WhatsApp Pay, that have been blocked in Brazil. By offering an efficient and free payment platform, Pix reduces the need for third-party services that monetize transactions and collect data.

Lobbyists for these Big Tech companies have been pressuring the Trump administration, arguing that Pix “limits the development of private solutions” and “prevents the full adoption of global digital wallets.” In fact, the “barrier to innovation” for these companies is the absence of a “toll” that they could charge in a market that Pix has made free and efficient.

“Pix is a disruption that big tech companies did not foresee and are not comfortable with,” commented a financial market analyst, who asked not to be identified. “For them, the widespread adoption of an efficient and free payment system, controlled by the Central Bank, reduces the need for their own solutions and prevents the collection of valuable data for monetization.”

Documents obtained by Brazilian media outlets reveal that lobby groups hired by these companies have been meeting frequently with Trump's advisers. “They want a bigger slice of the transaction pie. Pix takes that away from them,” explained a source in the payments industry who has been closely following these discussions.

Epstein scandal as a potential diversion

In addition, there is suspicion that Trump's statement is an attempt to create a smokescreen, as allegations about his connection to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who was arrested and committed suicide in 2019, have reached a peak of

controversy and investigation. During his 2024 campaign, Trump promised to reveal all classified documents related to the Epstein case. However, he has been criticized by part of his own base, which accuses him of covering up the case due to alleged involvement. Trump publicly rebukes his supporters for demanding the release of “Epstein files”, which he claims are fabricated by his Democratic opponents.

One of the first women to report Epstein for sexual abuse, Maria Farmer, reported that she alerted the FBI about Donald Trump as early as 1996. She described an episode in 1995 at Epstein's office where Trump was present and allegedly made a comment about her.

Lawrence Visoski, Epstein's longtime pilot, testified in 2021 that Trump flew on Epstein's private plane several times. Trump denies this. But the relationship between the two is longstanding, dating back to the 1990s, when both were part of elite social circles in New York and Florida. In 2002, Trump was quoted in a magazine describing Epstein as “fantastic” and “a lot of fun.”

The connection between Bolsonaro's legal situation and Trump's trade threats is not random, and he may be attempting to strategically remove three (or more) problems with one fell stroke. Sources close to the Trump campaign, who preferred anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue, revealed that Bolsonaro's defense has become a point of honor for the former US president. “Trump sees Bolsonaro as an ideological ally and a martyr of the political ‘persecution’ that he himself claims to suffer,” explained a Republican strategist. For Trump, Bolsonaro's amnesty would not only be a “trophy” for the global right, but a sign of strength and influence in his return to the international stage.

The damage of a “Tariff War”: A crisis scenario for both

The 50% tariffs would be a devastating blow to Brazil's trade balance, affecting vital sectors such as agribusiness and industry. In 2024, Brazil exported more than \$37 billion in goods to the US, becoming one of its main trading partners. The escalation of this rhetoric has already sent shivers through the Ministry of Finance in Brasilia and among exporters. “This is a very serious situation that requires caution and diplomatic firmness. We cannot give in to external pressures that violate our sovereignty and our judicial system,” said a senior official at the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

If Donald Trump's threats materialize and the 50% tariff is imposed, the scenario for the economies and populations of both countries is one of severe instability and significant losses. A trade war of this magnitude has no winners, creating a wave of shocks that spreads globally.

Negative impacts on Brazil

For Brazil, the effects would be immediate and profound, striking at the heart of its export economy and the daily lives of its population.

Agribusiness in Crisis: The US is one of the largest importers of Brazilian agricultural products, including coffee, meat (beef, pork, and poultry), forest products, orange juice and ethanol. With a 50% tariff, these products would be unviable in the US market, resulting in a decline in exports. We already have concrete examples: meatpacking plants are reporting order cancellations and shipment suspensions, and companies such as BrasPine, in Paraná, have already granted collective vacations to 700 employees due to the downturn.

Manufacturing Industry Impacted: Sectors such as steel (iron and steel), oil and derivatives and aircraft would be hit hard. Furniture companies and the fish sector (which has the US as

its main destination, absorbing about 70% of exports) would face downturn and uncertainty.

Mass Unemployment: The drastic drop in exports would result in the closure of industries and farms, leading to large-scale layoffs in various sectors. The National Confederation of Industry (CNI) has already warned that the “tarifaço” would directly compromise job creation.

Devaluation of the Real: Economic uncertainty and the outflow of foreign investment would lead to a sharp devaluation of the Real against the US Dollar.

Increased Import Costs: With a more expensive dollar, the importation of essential goods, industrial inputs and even some foods would become more costly. This increase would be passed on to the end consumer, raising inflation and eroding the purchasing power of families.

A survey by Atlas Intel already indicated that 70% of Brazilians believe that Trump's tariffs will raise inflation in Brazil, and more than 70% believe that economic growth will slow down. Additionally, XP analysts project that US tariffs could reduce Brazilian GDP growth by 0.30 percentage points in 2025 and up to 0.50 percentage points in 2026, if the measures are implemented. The perception of risk for foreign investors would increase dramatically, leading to capital flight, which would weaken the country's national financial system and hinder new investments.

Although Brazil may seek other markets, the volume and absorption capacity of a partner like the US are difficult to replace in the short and medium terms. Diversification requires time and adaptation of production.

Negative impacts in the US

Although tariffs are designed to “protect” the US economy, they would also have adverse effects in the United States.

More expensive products: US importers would have to pay 50% more for Brazilian products, and this additional cost would be passed on directly to the end consumer. Items such as coffee, beef, orange juice and other food products, as well as footwear and everyday industrial goods, would become significantly more expensive on US shelves, contributing to domestic inflation and reducing purchasing power. Marcos Matos, director-general of the Brazilian Coffee Exporters Council (Cecafé), has already pointed out that US coffee consumers would be burdened.

Affected Supply Chains: Many American industries depend on inputs and raw materials from Brazil. The increased cost of these products could raise production costs in the US, hurting competitiveness and, in some cases, leading to job cuts.

Retaliation and Market Loss: If Brazil retaliates with tariffs on US products, US exports to Brazil would also be affected, hurting US export sectors and their workers. Although Brazil has had a trade deficit with the US since 2009, the impact would be felt.

The unilateral measure could generate tension in international relations and trigger a series of trade retaliations from other countries. This would, in turn, destabilize global trade and harm American companies that rely on international trade.

Brazil's dilemma: sovereignty or economy?

Brazil is at a crossroads. Granting amnesty to Bolsonaro, who is involved in grave accusations, would set a dangerous precedent for democracy and the rule of law. On the other hand, Trump's

50% tariff could plunge the country into an economic crisis, with a direct impact on employment and inflation.

The Brazilian government has so far maintained a firm stance on legal sovereignty. In a statement to the press, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva reiterated: “Our institutions work, and justice will take its course, regardless of external pressures. Brazil is a sovereign nation.”

The outcome of this saga is uncertain. Will Brazil maintain its legal integrity, bearing the brunt of possible economic retaliation? Or will Trump's pressure, orchestrated in part by the tech lobby, be too much to bear, forcing concessions in the name of financial stability? The answer lies in the next moves of a geopolitical chess game where the board is the fate of a nation and the pieces are the sovereignty and prosperity of its people.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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The One Big Beautiful Bill: Trumpism in Legislative Form

Alex Gloy
July 24, 2025

US President Donald Trump returned to the White House with a Republican majority eager to codify his vision. On July 4, 2025, Trump signed the “One Big Beautiful Bill” into law, delivering sweeping tax cuts, deep safety net reductions and major boosts to immigration enforcement and defense spending. The bill solidifies Trumpism as the prevailing doctrine and signals a lasting shift in American political priorities.

On July 4, 2025, amid fireworks and fanfare, US President Donald Trump signed what he called the “One Big Beautiful Bill” (BBB), officially known as H.R.1, into law.

“H.R.” stands for “House of Representatives”, with “1” being the bill number. The number “1” is reserved for a top legislative priority of the majority party in the House. Each new Congress gets a new H.R.1 — so “H.R.1” is not a permanent bill title; it changes every session.

The branding was classic Trump: grandiose, vague and built for cable news. But unlike many of his other rhetorical flourishes, this one came with substance — roughly 800 pages of it. In sheer scope, cost and political ambition, the bill is arguably the defining legislative achievement of Trump's second term. It is also a window into the soul of contemporary Trumpism: populist rhetoric married to plutocratic policy, an iron fist for immigration and a velvet glove for capital gains.

Play it again, Sam

The “Big Beautiful Bill” is a rhetorical phrase frequently used by Donald Trump to describe his administration’s planned legislation, particularly regarding immigration and border security. Trump often spoke about a “Big Beautiful Wall” during his 2016 campaign, referring to a physical barrier on the US–Mexico border. The phrase “Big Beautiful Bill” originated from the same rhetorical style, typically employed in speeches or interviews to promote pending legislation, portray the bill as comprehensive, effective and patriotic and position Democrats as obstructionists for not supporting it. “Big Beautiful Bill” is a branding device to sell policy to the public in simplified, catchy terms.

So, what’s in the Big Beautiful Bill?

While the bill touches everything from taxes to border security to Medicaid, its central thesis is clear: reward work (as narrowly defined by Republicans), punish dependency (as broadly defined by Republicans) and cement Trumpism as a long-term governing framework.

Tax cuts dressed as working-class relief

At the heart of the BBB is a permanent extension of the 2017 Trump tax cuts. But to rebrand those widely criticized, high-end giveaways as pro-worker, the bill adds a populist gloss. Tips and overtime pay are now tax-exempt for anyone earning under \$150,000. Trump declared it a “tax cut for waitresses and truckers,” though the real dollars still flow to the top. The Child Tax Credit was modestly increased to \$2,200 per child and indexed to inflation. Auto loan interest is now deductible, a peculiar throwback to the 1980s. Perhaps the most on-brand feature is a \$1,000 deposit in “Trump Accounts” for every baby born between 2025 and 2028, a gimmick aimed at boosting both birthrates and brand loyalty.

Critics argue these giveaways do little to help the poor and disproportionately benefit those already earning enough to pay income taxes. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates the tax portions of the bill will, over the next 10 years, reduce federal government spending by \$1.25 trillion while reducing revenues by \$3.67 trillion, adding a whopping \$2.4 trillion to the deficit.

Russell Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), labeled the CBO’s score of the “One Big Beautiful Bill” as “fundamentally wrong”, arguing it wrongly assumed Congress wouldn’t extend 2017 tax cuts. This argumentation adds insult to injury, as sunset clauses in the 2017 tax cuts were introduced to limit the amount of damage to federal finances. It is indisputable that tax cuts increase deficits — anyone insisting the opposite is gaslighting.

Carve Up the Safety Net

To offset some of that cost — on paper, at least — the bill makes deep cuts to Medicaid and SNAP (food stamps). Medicaid faces \$1.2 trillion in reductions over a decade, accompanied by new work requirements and enrollment caps that could result in 10 million Americans being removed from the rolls. SNAP gets a \$186 billion haircut, with stricter work mandates and a requirement for states to cover a portion of benefits.

These provisions were sold as “promoting dignity and work,” but for many families, they translate to lost coverage and empty pantries. The bill doubles down on the idea that if you’re poor, it’s probably your fault, and if you’re rich, it’s probably because you worked harder.

Border security on steroids

BBB sets aside between \$150 and \$170 billion for immigration enforcement, wall construction and surveillance technology. Immigration and Customs

Enforcement (ICE) gets a massive funding boost. A new \$100 annual fee is slapped on asylum seekers. The number of border patrol agents is expected to increase by over 25%, and construction will resume on segments of the border wall that had previously been halted.

This is the materialization of Trump's long-running campaign promise. But beyond the headline-grabbing wall, the bill institutionalizes a more militarized, punitive approach to immigration — an approach designed not just to stop unlawful border crossings but to make asylum itself a more burdensome, bureaucratic ordeal.

Defense budget: Bigger and more beautiful

Not to be outdone, the Pentagon gets another \$150 billion infusion. Some of this goes to traditional hardware: destroyers, drones and missile defense systems. However, a surprising portion is earmarked for Arctic icebreakers and undersea surveillance areas where China and Russia have intensified their activity.

This segment of the bill garnered relatively little attention but represents a quiet militarization of climate-impacted geographies. Trump may not believe in global warming, but he's betting on a hotter Arctic.

Never mind Trump, only a few months ago, told Financial Times he would “check the military” for waste, with the aim of uncovering “billions, hundreds of billions of dollars of fraud and abuse” in the ~\$800 billion-plus Pentagon budget. At a press briefing in February, Trump vowed to cut military spending “in half”.

Killing clean energy with bureaucracy

In perhaps the most ideologically revealing section, the BBB guts clean energy tax credits. Solar, wind and electric vehicle incentives are

phased out. The argument? These subsidies distort markets and burden taxpayers. However, energy economists warn that the rollback could stall or reverse progress toward decarbonization and put tens of thousands of jobs at risk.

In Texas, where renewables have quietly boomed, the backlash has already begun. Energy CEOs who once supported Trump now warn the bill could cost the state billions and undercut energy independence. Meanwhile, coal and natural gas receive new tax preferences — a sop to legacy producers.

While China presses ahead with investments in clean energy technology, the US remains ideologically trapped in its love for fossil fuels.

The deficit grows, but that's not the point

Despite cuts to Medicaid and food aid, the BBB is a fiscal time bomb. Trump shrugged this off as “a good investment in America,” the same way he might describe a failed casino.

Republican leadership is split. Fiscal conservatives hate the cost. Populists love the optics. Democrats, for their part, have found an attack line: this is a “Robin Hood in reverse” bill, taking from the poor to give to the rich.

But here's the real twist: Trump doesn't care. The BBB was never about fiscal responsibility. It was about visibility. It consolidates Trump-era themes into a single, on-brand document: anti-immigration, anti-welfare, pro-business and performatively pro-worker. It's not so much a policy as a political identity made into law.

Public opinion: Lukewarm at best

Polls show the public is skeptical. A CNN survey conducted days after passage found 61% of Americans opposed the bill, with only 29% in

favor. Among independents, support was under 20%. Even some Trump voters expressed concern over the cuts to Medicaid and SNAP. However, in a fragmented media landscape, disapproval doesn't always translate into a political cost.

The White House counters that Americans “will come around” once they see bigger paychecks and feel the patriotic pull of new border infrastructure. Whether that happens before the 2026 midterms remains to be seen.

The takeaway: Trumpism, codified

The One Big Beautiful Bill is not just a law — it's a worldview. It assumes the poor need discipline, the rich need incentives and the nation needs walls more than social workers. It is trickle-down populism wrapped in a red, white and blue bow. And though its long-term economic impacts are murky, its political message is crystal clear.

Trump has often been accused of lacking policy depth. The BBB proves he doesn't need it. All he needs is a slogan, a spectacle and a signed piece of legislation large enough to read as destiny. And in that sense, the One Big Beautiful Bill may be the most Trumpian thing ever written into law.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat: Jazz and International Politics in Léopoldville

Mario Zamponi
July 27, 2025

Soundtrack to a Coup d'État explores the assassination of Patrice Lumumba through the perspective of Cold War politics and jazz diplomacy. Director Johan Grimonprez combines archival footage, music and political history to reveal cultural imperialism. The film shows how art, power and decolonization clashed on the global stage.

Belgian director Johan Grimonprez reconstructs the 1961 assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the Prime Minister of the former Belgian Congo, in a jazz-infused documentary that received an Oscar nomination in the documentary category. He combines rare archive material with contributions from some of the era's greatest jazz musicians. The result is extraordinary.

Jazz, empire and the Cold War

To protest Lumumba's assassination, jazz drummer Max Roach and his wife, singer Abbey Lincoln, participated in a demonstration at the United Nations in New York. Soundtrack reaches

its crescendo when Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln perform “Freedom,” as protesters storm the United Nations Palace shortly after news of Lumumba’s assassination breaks.

Soundtrack to a Coup d’État brilliantly examines how jazz artists became involved in the Cold War and the CIA’s geopolitical agendas. Grimonprez’s captivating documentary uses Patrice Lumumba’s assassination as a starting point for an electrifying exploration of jazz politics in the 1950s and 1960s — a vital chapter in history: the process of decolonization. It offers a dynamic account of jazz, colonialism and the larger Afro-Asian anti-imperialist struggles of the era.

The film presents a breathtaking, idea-packed journey that links American jazz to the complexities of geopolitical scheming. This is more than just a music documentary — it exposes the Cold War and the brutal legacy of African colonialism.

The film explicitly shows how the CIA used unwitting jazz musicians as distractions to obscure political meddling in countries around the globe — including legends like Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie and Nina Simone. It also tells the remarkable story of Andrée Blouin — Lumumba’s adviser, speechwriter and a women’s rights activist. The Italian newspaper L’Avvenire recently published an article remembering how Lumumba appointed Blouin as his top adviser when he formed his short-lived post-independence government in 1960.

To Western diplomats and journalists, her presence in the government signaled Congo’s alleged turn toward communism. A few years earlier, she had worked with the leader of the Guinean Democratic Party, Ahmed Sékou Touré’s, independence movement from France. At the time, she was seen as “a beautiful but also dangerous

woman, perhaps the most dangerous woman in all of Africa,” as The New York Times described, quoting a Belgian official. The international press even suggested she was “the courtesan of African heads of state.”

Grimonprez adopts a frenetic editing style, presenting history as a scribbled manuscript filled with footnotes and quotations, lending the film a satisfying visual and stylistic eccentricity. In tackling such a delicate subject, he makes a brilliant choice: he intertwines history with the story of jazz, starting with two equally important elements — the United States’ use of jazz as an ambassador of American culture (sending musicians like Louis Armstrong to perform abroad, including in Congo during that time), and jazz’s role in the Afro-American civil rights movement and its support for African liberation. Through this evocative framing device, Grimonprez constructs a fascinating Soundtrack to a Coup d’État, telling a story through music that must not be forgotten.

Lumumba, Congo and the global stakes of decolonization

Indeed, one of the film’s central themes is the strategic deployment of jazz and Black American jazz musicians as instruments in the US imperial arsenal. Dizzy Gillespie toured the Middle East in 1956 to honor the Shah of Iran. He remarked, “I would be a better emissary than Kissinger.” Later, Louis Armstrong traveled to the Congo to perform for thousands — a concert that served as a smokescreen while the CIA plotted Lumumba’s assassination.

Soundtrack addresses decolonization, neo-imperialism, cultural and economic exploitation and political murder. Centered on the former Belgian Congo, the film blends news clips, TV broadcasts, home movies and headlines into a dense collage, with jazz — both American and

African alike — providing the tempo. This gloomy yet exhilarating history lesson opens with the percussive fanfare of legendary bebop pioneer and bandleader Max Roach.

Its chronology begins with the Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in 1955. That event brought together leaders of newly independent nations from Africa and Asia — including Egypt’s Nasser, India’s Nehru, Indonesia’s Sukarno and China’s Zhou Enlai — and established a new international order of non-aligned countries.

In an interview, Grimonprez states, “This took four or five years of research, and the editing was four years.” He recounts several unexpected findings, such as the role of William Burden, whom the US appointed as ambassador to Brussels shortly before Congo’s independence. Burden had close ties with CIA Director Allen Dulles. In audio memoirs featured in the film, Burden says, “Belgium is toying with the idea of assassinating Lumumba, and I think it wouldn’t be a bad idea either.” He continues, “Patrice Lumumba was such a damn nuisance, it was pretty obvious to go for a political assassination.”

The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in the US at the beginning of 2024, sparking growing interest. Grimonprez compiles a remarkable archive of Cold War-era documents. His documentary features figures like Patrice Lumumba — Congo’s independence leader — and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who championed a United States of Africa alongside leaders like Nasser, Nehru and other voices from the non-aligned movement.

The film alternates their voices with those of Western and Eastern leaders, prominently featuring Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. One scene shows Khrushchev pounding his shoe on the UN desk, seizing global attention. During those UN sessions, Africa took center stage alongside

debates about the roles of international powers and major mining companies, which were determined to block Congo’s independence and Lumumba’s nationalist vision.

As the film reminds us, Congo supplied the uranium used for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. The US had no intention of letting this strategic resource fall into Soviet hands. Today, Congo remains rich in cobalt, coltan and other minerals essential for electronics, electric vehicles and the global energy transition.

In discussing the UN, Grimonprez revisits the story of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. “He’s a person who is suffering, and you can read it in his face. In the General Assembly, the Global South community was pushing for a United Nations force against the colonial powers. Hammarskjöld was siding with the Global South. But he had his back against the wall. And the United Kingdom and the United States were both threatening to withdraw their funding.” He continues, “An important source for the film was Ludo De Witte’s book *The Assassination of Patrice Lumumba*, published in 1999. He was able to gather a lot of evidence in United Nations cables and Belgian correspondence that pointed to the fact that, indeed, Dag Hammarskjöld was complicit and involved in the downfall of Lumumba, as was the Belgian monarchy.”

The legacy of a revolution — and its soundtrack

In 1960, when Belgian authorities held a roundtable on Congo’s decolonization in Brussels, Congolese politicians demanded Lumumba’s release before independence. Congolese musicians celebrated this moment. While staying at the Plaza Hotel, they composed “Independence Cha Cha” — a song that quickly became an anthem of liberation across Africa.

On June 30, 1960, Congo declared independence. Lumumba challenged colonial and Western interests, sealing his fate and that of the nation. At Léopoldville's Palais des Nations, a packed hall of Congolese and foreign dignitaries listened first to King Baudouin, who paternalistically recalled Leopold II's colonization of Congo. Next up was Joseph Kasa-Vubu — the first president of an independent Congo — who spoke calmly, and then Lumumba took the stage.

Facing Belgium's king, Lumumba proclaimed, "Our wounds are still too fresh and too painful to be driven from our memory. We have known sarcasm and insults, endured suffering and torture. We are proud of the struggle that led us to this moment." He reminded the world that the Congolese did not receive freedom as a gift — they fought for it.

Lumumba's bold speech accused Belgians of racism, theft and oppression. Days later, the army mutinied, Belgian settlers fled, Katanga seceded and Lumumba traveled to New York to address the UN. US President Eisenhower refused to meet him. Instead, through Ambassador William Burden, he gave tacit approval to act against Lumumba. In early September, Lumumba dismissed Kasa-Vubu, who had just fired him. UN troops arrived, and Army Chief of Staff Joseph Mobutu seized power, dissolved the government and placed Lumumba under house arrest — leading to his eventual assassination.

Soundtrack to a Coup d'État offers a powerful historical analysis of the early years of African independence and the brutal machinery of Western imperialism. America's interest in the Global South during the Cold War needs little explanation. What makes Grimonprez's work so compelling is how it shows that American emissaries of art and culture acted as influential tools of empire, as effective as any spy network or military intervention.

"While most of the film takes place in the halls of power and explores covert espionage against the newly independent Congo, Soundtrack's final message functions as a rallying call for global mass mobilization. Better late than never."

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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Japan's 2025 Upper House Election: Fiscal Reckoning, Market Jitters and the Waning Patience of the Middle Class

Masaaki Yoshimori
July 27, 2025

Thanks to rising prices and cost-of-living crisis, right-wing populists have broken through in the election for the upper house of the Japanese parliament. This weakens the long-dominant

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which is running a coalition government with the Komeito Party. Populists want tax cuts and increased public spending, raising concerns about Japan's fiscal sustainability and roiling financial markets.

As Japan concluded its upper house election to the upper house of its parliament on July 20, the results stunned observers. The long-dominant ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior partner Komeito fell short of securing the 50 seats required to maintain their majority in the House of Councillors. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, already struggling to command confidence amid economic malaise and a cost-of-living crisis, now faces a divided House of Councillors in the National Diet of Japan and calls for resignation from within his own party.

The LDP's losses, while not catastrophic, have real consequences: Ishiba's coalition now lacks a majority in both chambers of the National Diet. Meanwhile, traditional opposition parties such as the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) failed to capitalize on public discontent, making no net gains. Instead, the momentum was seized by the populist and nationalist right, with the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP) and Sanseitō emerging as the surprise victors of the night. The DPFP gained 13 seats, becoming the third-largest party in the upper house, while Sanseitō surged from one to 14 seats, riding a wave of anti-establishment frustration.

During the election period, the yen's brief rally to ¥146.92 per dollar — sparked by unfounded speculation over US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell's dismissal — quickly reversed as investor focus shifted back to Japan's escalating political risks. By July 17, the currency had

weakened to ¥148.48 per dollar, reflecting mounting expectations that Ishiba's ruling coalition would lose its majority in the upper house in the July 20 election.

Simultaneously, bond markets flashed warning signs: the 20-year Japanese Government Bond (JGB) yield surged 4.5 basis points to 2.650%, its highest since November 1999, while the 10-year yield climbed to 1.595%, the highest since October 2008. These moves signaled rising concern that the post-election government — potentially fragmented and under populist pressure — might turn to expansionary fiscal measures financed by increased bond issuance, reigniting doubts about Japan's debt sustainability.

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) intervention highlights just how precarious the fiscal landscape has become. In a post-election environment marked by political fragmentation and heightened investor sensitivity, the IMF's Director of the Communications Department, Julie Kozack's, remarks serve as a warning shot. The IMF's message is clear: Japan can no longer defer tough fiscal choices. With public debt already exceeding 250% of GDP, rising interest payments threaten to crowd out essential spending unless a credible consolidation path is laid out. The next government, regardless of its composition, will need to reconcile competing demands — supporting vulnerable households amid anemic growth while restoring medium-term fiscal discipline. Temporary, targeted stimulus may remain justifiable in the face of economic shocks, but the era of open-ended fiscal drift is drawing to a close.

“The risk of a sovereign downgrade is now quite high,” warned Mark Nash of Jupiter Asset Management, pointing to the projected jump in Japan's interest payments as a share of revenues — from 9.9% last year to 12.2% this year. “If this is paired with aggressive tax cuts and little spending

reform, we're staring down the barrel of a ratings event."

This election, long expected to be a routine midterm test, has instead triggered a reckoning across multiple fronts: fiscal credibility, central bank independence, voter discontent and sovereign creditworthiness. Japan's 2025 upper house election has major financial implications, as forces driving political change sharpen the fiscal policy dilemmas that the country's fractured leadership.

Credit ratings, fiscal strain and the waning deflation buffer

Japan's sovereign credit ratings remain officially "stable" across all three major agencies — Moody's, S&P and Fitch — but the rhetoric surrounding them has turned increasingly cautionary. For example, Fitch's Krisjanis Krustins has gone further. In public comments, he warned that "if Japan adopts tax cuts that are not offset by other policy measures and that don't lead to much higher growth, basically that leads to higher fiscal deficits and an accelerated debt trajectory. That could certainly put pressure on the rating." He specifically cited opposition-led proposals to permanently reduce or abolish the 10% consumption tax as particularly risky — policies that have become central to many populist platforms during the 2025 campaign cycle.

Although Krustins acknowledged that implementation would likely be tempered by institutional resistance within a divided Diet, he emphasized the material risks posed by any fiscal loosening without clear productivity offsets. Fitch currently assigns Japan an "A" rating — five notches below AAA — with a stable outlook, citing the country's debt load, now approaching 250% of GDP, as the highest in the advanced world.

Moody's Ratings said the potential impact of a consumption tax cut on Japan's sovereign credit rating would depend on its "scope, magnitude and permanence." Christian de Guzman, a senior vice president at Moody's, noted that the ruling coalition's weakened position may increase the likelihood of fiscal expansion. Still, it remains "sufficiently strong" to preempt sweeping tax changes. Ishiba has also reiterated his caution, warning that cutting the consumption tax could jeopardize funding for Japan's rising social welfare costs. Japan's A1 rating with a stable outlook has held since 2014, though Moody's has warned that a sustained widening of fiscal deficits could lead to a downgrade.

This mounting concern reflects not merely headline fiscal aggregates but a deeper structural evolution in Japan's macro-financial architecture. For decades, chronic deflation and near-zero interest rates allowed the Bank of Japan (BoJ) to absorb vast amounts of government debt with minimal market reprisal. That era is now receding. Core inflation has remained above 3% for more than six consecutive months. While it eased slightly to 3.3% in June from a 29-month high of 3.7% in May, largely due to the stabilization of rice prices following government stockpile releases, the persistence of elevated prices underscores a regime shift.

Significantly, the so-called "core-core" inflation rate — excluding both fresh food and energy — rose to 3.4%, its highest level since early 2023. The BoJ closely monitors this measure as a proxy for underlying demand-side inflation. Wage settlements have also reached their strongest levels in decades, and household inflation expectations have firmed — suggesting that the deflationary psychology that once dominated consumer and corporate behavior may be breaking down.

In response, BoJ's exit from its long-standing regime of ultra-accommodative monetary policy

has unfolded with measured precision. In March 2024, the BoJ formally ended its negative interest rate policy, raising the short-term policy rate to 0.0–0.1%, its first increase in 17 years. This move made it the final major central bank to abandon sub-zero rates. The decision marked a pivotal shift, not only in policy settings but also in the broader strategic posture of a central bank that had long been synonymous with aggressive easing.

July 2024 brought a second-rate hike, lifting the policy rate to 0.25%, the highest since 2008. This was followed by a third increase in January 2025 to 0.50%, a 17-year high. These steps reflected growing confidence among policymakers that Japan was nearing a durable exit from deflation, underpinned by accelerating wage growth, shifting corporate price-setting behavior and inflation that had persistently exceeded the BoJ's 2% target for over three years.

Yet despite this momentum, the BoJ has since tempered its pace. At both the March and June 2025 policy meetings, the central bank opted to hold the rate steady at 0.50%, citing a confluence of downside risks. Chief among them: escalating US tariff measures, the uncertain trajectory of global trade negotiations and weakening external demand. These external headwinds, policymakers argue, complicate the domestic inflation picture — particularly as the BoJ continues to distinguish between headline inflation and underlying demand-driven pressures, which it still views as insufficiently robust.

This cautious recalibration has been reinforced by recent changes to the BoJ's governing board. Kazuyuki Masu, newly appointed in July 2025, has advocated for restraint in the face of mounting geopolitical and macroeconomic uncertainties. At his inaugural press conference, he emphasized that while inflation expectations have risen, “real interest rates remain negative,” and “the BoJ shouldn't be in a rush to

raise rates.” He underscored concerns about unresolved trade tensions with the US — particularly around auto exports — and the unpredictable implications for Japan's external sector.

Masu's entry comes at a delicate juncture. The headline core consumer price index (CPI) has cooled to 3.3% in June, down from a peak of 3.7% in May. This appears to have eased supply-side price pressures, such as elevated rice costs, though they remain well above historical norms. Meanwhile, core-core inflation, excluding both food and energy, edged up to 3.4%, suggesting that underlying inflation momentum is still present. The BoJ has signaled that further tightening remains on the table. Still, Governor Kazuo Ueda has indicated that any additional rate hikes will be contingent on sustained real wage growth and improved visibility around global demand conditions.

Together, these developments signal a central bank navigating a narrow path — balancing normalization against fragility, and inflation control against financial and geopolitical uncertainty. For now, the BoJ remains in wait-and-see mode, its forward guidance conditioned by a complex and evolving macroeconomic landscape.

Tariffs, the BoJ and the future of Japan's fiscal path

The new US–Japan trade agreement marks a significant shift in the external pressures shaping Japan's macroeconomic policy. By agreeing to a unified 15% tariff ceiling on automobiles, parts and selected industrial goods — down from the threatened 25% — Ishiba has temporarily averted a sharper shock to Japan's export competitiveness. Yet the deal comes at a steep price: a promise of \$550 billion in Japanese investment into the US economy, including increased purchases of

American agricultural products, aircraft and defense equipment.

While the Trump administration hails the agreement as a historic win, Japanese policymakers now face a complex trade-off. The concessions may reduce bilateral tensions, but they also raise new questions about fiscal sustainability, particularly as defense outlays and import spending increase in yen terms.

For the Bank of Japan, the deal complicates an already delicate normalization path. The central bank has signaled a cautious exit from yield curve control, but renewed import-driven inflation and potentially weaker external demand from tariff-altered supply chains could stall further tightening. Meanwhile, the political appetite for fiscal stimulus remains strong. With the ruling coalition weakened in the upper house and under pressure to respond to voter demands for relief, calls for consumption tax cuts and increased public spending are intensifying.

However, as Moody's and the IMF have recently warned, any sustained widening of deficits without credible fiscal consolidation risks a ratings downgrade. The post-election fiscal debate, now unfolding in the shadow of this US deal, will be a litmus test for Japan's ability to balance geopolitical accommodation with macroeconomic discipline.

Populist economics and the erosion of orthodoxy

The economic grievances of Japan's "working poor middle" (*chūryū hinmin*) — a class increasingly burdened by stagnant real wages, rising costs of living and thinning social protections — have reshaped the nation's political discourse. Amid this pressure, populist economic appeals have gained traction across party lines, with tax cuts becoming the unifying banner. NHK

polling reveals that ten of Japan's 14 major political parties proposed some form of consumption tax reduction ahead of the 2024 general election. For a political system long dominated by technocratic moderation, this marked a populist inflection point.

This new popular ethos is captured in the voice of Noriyuki Hasegawa, a small business owner in Saitama: "We raised wages three times in two years, but raw materials and packaging costs are still eating our margins. We're squeezed from all sides, and government support is just not reaching us." His frustrations echo widely across Japan's Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which employ over 70% of the workforce yet remain underrepresented in policy design.

Perhaps most strikingly, this populist shift has placed Japan's fiscal and monetary authorities under unprecedented scrutiny. The Ministry of Finance (MOF), long the bastion of budgetary orthodoxy, has become a public target. Demonstrators have gathered outside MOF headquarters to denounce what they call "bureaucratic austerity," citing policies such as the "103 万円の壁" (spousal tax deduction cap) as symbols of outdated governance. Viral campaigns depict the ministry as a cloistered institution prioritizing balance sheets over livelihoods. It describes this movement as a form of "material populism" — non-ideological but rooted in pervasive financial anxiety.

These fiscal pressures have begun to spill into the monetary domain. In the LDP's September 2024 leadership race, Sanae Takaichi — a leading candidate and Minister for Economic Security — directly challenged the BoJ's policy normalization. "Frankly, it was too early," she said at a televised debate, criticizing the BoJ's July rate hike to 0.25%. On her personal YouTube channel, she went further, arguing that ultra-low interest rates must be maintained to support a fragile recovery.

“Interest rates ought to be kept low,” she declared, signaling a growing willingness among politicians to challenge central bank autonomy in the name of growth and electoral responsiveness.

Ueda, by contrast, has signaled a cautious commitment to further tightening if Japan sustains 2% inflation alongside real wage growth. Yet that technocratic stance may prove politically untenable. If Takaichi — or another pro-stimulus leader — ascends to power, Japan could see monetary policy increasingly subordinated to political will. In that scenario, central bank independence, once a cornerstone of Japan’s post-bubble policy credibility, may quietly erode under the weight of populist economic realignment.

Enter Sanseitō and the rise of the online populist right

No party embodied the populist wave more than Sanseitō. Founded during the pandemic with a fringe anti-vaccine message, the party won a stunning 14 seats in the upper house, up from just one. It did so with a mix of nationalist rhetoric, savvy social media mobilization and economic promises tailored to working-class voters: consumption tax cuts, child benefits and “Japanese First” policies opposing immigration.

Its leader, Sohei Kamiya — a former LDP candidate — has emerged as a charismatic (if polarizing) political force. Like many populists, Kamiya thrives on outrage. He has decried globalism, gender equality and foreign investment in Japanese land. Yet his message resonates, particularly among men aged 20 to 50.

Sanseitō's rise has already forced policy recalibrations. Days before the election, the LDP rushed to establish a new committee on immigration — a tacit acknowledgement of the party’s vulnerability on that front. And while Sanseitō still lacks the seats to influence budget

legislation, its presence will shape the rhetorical and ideological contours of future debates.

Sanseitō, a relatively new but vocal populist party, has positioned itself as a critic of both fiscal orthodoxy and elite policymaking. Its budget policy emphasizes aggressive fiscal expansion — calling for the abolition of the consumption tax, large-scale direct transfers to households and increased domestic investment without regard to debt sustainability.

Rejecting the Ministry of Finance’s long-standing emphasis on fiscal discipline, Sanseitō argues that Japan’s monetary sovereignty allows for expansive deficit financing under a “national interest first” paradigm. Critics warn that such proposals risk undermining long-term fiscal stability, but the party’s message resonates with segments of the electorate who feel excluded from Japan’s post-COVID recovery and disillusioned with technocratic governance.

Takaichi’s fiscal vision: Proactive stimulus in an era of constraint

Among Japan’s leading political figures, Takaichi has consistently advocated for proactive fiscal stimulus, arguing that Japan’s persistent output gap and demographic headwinds require bold public investment rather than premature consolidation. While critics warn of mounting debt sustainability risks, Takaichi frames fiscal expansion not as a reckless departure from orthodoxy, but as a necessary adaptation to Japan’s unique macroeconomic conditions — namely, subdued private demand, structurally low inflation and an aging society that demands both care infrastructure and economic revitalization.

Her policy proposals include large-scale infrastructure programs, enhanced child and family support and strategic reindustrialization measures — all underpinned by the view that public

spending can crowd in private investment if deployed effectively. In the post-election policy vacuum, her stance is gaining renewed attention, especially as voters demand economic relief and the US trade deal adds new spending pressures.

Whether her fiscal philosophy will gain institutional traction remains to be seen, but it now shapes a key axis of debate within Japan's shifting political economy. While Takaichi's approach offers short-term political and economic relief, it raises profound questions about the timing, credibility and coordination of Japan's return to fiscal sustainability.

The global reverberations of Japan's macro shift

Japan's monetary inflection point is sending ripples far beyond its archipelago. As the single largest foreign holder of US Treasury securities — owning over \$1.3 trillion as of mid-2025, according to US Treasury data — Japanese institutional investors wield significant influence over global capital flows. The BoJ's gradual retreat from yield curve control (YCC) and the normalization of its monetary stance have intensified linkages between Japanese Government Bond (JGB) yields and US Treasury rates. Analysts at Bloomberg have documented a marked rise in cross-border yield correlations, signaling a deeper integration of Japan's bond market into global financial dynamics.

Should the JGB market come under sustained selling pressure — as investors price in higher domestic yields and a steeper curve — Japanese insurers, banks and pension funds may face strong incentives to reduce their exposure to foreign debt and repatriate funds. This capital rotation would exert upward pressure on US long-end yields at a delicate moment for the Federal Reserve, which is navigating disinflation, elevated deficits and tightening financial conditions. Even modest shifts

in Japanese allocation preferences can affect global term premia (the additional compensation investors demand for holding longer-term bonds compared to shorter-term bonds), particularly given the scale of Japanese holdings in global fixed income markets.

The broader implication is clear: Japan's internal policy debate — once a technocratic affair insulated from global attention — has become a key driver of international market volatility. As populist forces like Sanseitō call for aggressive fiscal expansion and challenge long-standing economic orthodoxy, political pressure on the BoJ is intensifying.

Even within the ruling coalition, figures such as Sanae Takaichi have openly criticized the BoJ's rate hikes, signaling a growing willingness to subordinate monetary policy to political imperatives. This erosion of central bank independence raises serious concerns for investors, who are increasingly demanding a risk premium on JGBs. As the BoJ navigates its exit from ultra-accommodation, it is no longer just resetting domestic conditions — it is exporting uncertainty through bond markets, currency channels and global rate correlations.

Populism or prudence

Japan's 2025 upper house election has reshuffled the political deck — but not resolved the underlying tensions. Voters delivered a clear message: they want relief from economic hardship, skepticism toward the establishment and new voices in the policymaking arena. But translating that message into coherent governance will be difficult.

It might also accelerate the drift toward fiscal populism. Tax cuts, expanded social spending, and delayed reforms are politically seductive but economically perilous.

The most dangerous outcome is fiscal dominance: a regime in which public debt constraints dictate monetary policy, undermining inflation control and financial stability. Reinhart and Rogoff warned of this in their post-crisis research. Japan avoided it for decades. It may not be so lucky this time.

For now, the bond market is issuing a warning, not a verdict. But the window for credible policy response is narrowing. To restore confidence, Japan's next government must articulate a clear fiscal roadmap — one that addresses legitimate, popular concerns without sacrificing macroeconomic discipline. That is a tall order, but the alternative is far worse.

[Kaitlyn Diana edited this piece]



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The Cost of Silence: Why Global Inaction Is Betraying the People of Sudan

Fernando Carvajal
July 28, 2025

After three years of civil war in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces military groups, with both vying for their own kind of government control, peace talks still appear unlikely. The international community, therefore, must use more than sanctions and donations to express its support for the Sudanese people. Allied powers of diplomacy must bring these rivals together before they damage the country beyond repair.

Growing instability and conflict pivots continue to exacerbate catastrophe across Sudan. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) remain uninterested in negotiating after three years of fighting, despite influencing “the largest displacement crisis in the world” as well as extensive famine. Whether a peaceful transition to a civilian government is the best course remains unclear, but the Sudanese people still deserve more solutions during this period of struggle.

Following the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir's government in 2019, SAF General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his followers claimed that Sudanese Prime Minister Khamil al-Taib Idris had a constitutional right to lead in Bashir's place, allied with the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated National Congress Party (NCP). As of 2023, the US has sanctioned the SAF for detainee torture,

humanitarian aid interference, civilian mistreatment, starvation and chemical weapon proliferation. RFS leader Mohamed “Hamedti” Hamdan Daglo, considering these ongoing abuses, has emphasized that Sudan deserves its own civil administration, as life there is becoming increasingly difficult.

This infighting has gone on to displace over 14 million people, 3.3 million of whom have inadvertently threatened neighboring country stability by fleeing across the Sudanese tri-border region into Libya, Chad and Egypt. While RSF elements have recently taken partial control of the Libya-Sudan boundary, eager to stop illicit trafficking via its roots, worsening tensions between Israel and Iran only further complicate their effort. If Sudanese allies go on ignoring ties between the SAF and Tehran, bloodshed from all parties could extend as far as the Red Sea, leaving every nation in the Horn of Africa a victim to violence.

Additional donations or sanctions alone, therefore, may not deliver Sudan what peace it deserves. The African Union, US and UK must use more active diplomatic measures to bring al-Burham and Hamedti together as soon as possible. If these leaders cannot find common ground soon, hope for the Sudanese is all but uncertain.

[Nick St. Sauveur edited this piece.]



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Genocide... and Then Some!

Peter Isackson
July 30, 2025

Most people, though clearly not all, believe that genocide is just about the most extreme of collective crimes and should at all costs be prevented and shut down as soon as it begins to play out. Caitlin Johnstone, the closest thing we have to a journalistic prophet, recently reminded us that there's more to think about than just the human and material horror. The world needs more of Johnstone's prophetic, unflinching journalism and less of the pathological timidity (if not outright complicity) of our corporate media.

The first stanza of the English version of French composer Charles Trenet's celebrated song, “Que reste-t-il de nos amours ?” reads:

I wish you bluebirds in the spring
To give your heart a song to sing
And then a kiss, but more than this
I wish you love.

These lyrics (by the way, very different from the untranslatable French original) imply an interesting hierarchy of romantic values. The “kiss” is already an important gesture indicating a desire for intimacy. But beyond it, and far more important, is “love.” It's the difference between a fleeting and ephemeral moment and the enduring state. A kiss is a brief, thrilling, possibly unforgettable moment, but love defines a lasting relationship and ultimately a form of sustainable communion.

In a radically different context, Australian journalist and Fair Observer contributor Caitlin Johnstone employed similar logic in the title of a newsletter she circulated last week: “It’s A Genocide, But It’s Also So Much More Than That.”

Today’s **Weekly Devil’s Dictionary** definition:

But more than this (or that):

A common rhetorical device, with an effect similar to hyperbole, used to introduce a degree of extremity that goes beyond the scope of a value presented as a threshold. The expression is rarely encountered in the context of already extreme phenomena such as genocide, but contemporary history in the Middle East offers exceptional cases in which standard hyperbole proves radically insufficient.

Contextual note

Johnstone’s message begins with the mention of genocide, increasingly accepted as applicable to the situation in Gaza even by commentators who formerly denied the equivalence. Even for those who quibble about precise meanings of the 20th century neologism have in recent months found it problematic to deny the accuracy of the claim that Israel is carrying out a genocide. After all, if English media personality Piers Morgan has come around to using the G-word, there must be something to it. And if that isn’t enough, two Israeli humanitarian organizations, B’Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights Israel, have called “on Israelis and the international community to take immediate action to stop the genocide.”

But Johnstone doesn’t stop at acknowledging the reality. She sees “more than” the word or the legal formulation that justifies invoking it. The full text of her tirade is well worth reproducing here:

“The mass atrocity in Gaz is a genocide, obviously, and is an undisguised ethnic cleansing operation.

But it’s also a lot more than that.

It’s an experiment—to see what kinds of abuses the public will accept without causing significant disruption to the imperial status quo.

It’s a psychological operation—to push out the boundaries of what’s normal and acceptable in our minds so that we will consent to even more horrific abuses in the future.

It’s a symptom—of Zionism, of colonialism, of militarism, of capitalism, of western supremacism, of empire-building, of propaganda, of ignorance, of apathy, of delusion, of ego.

It’s a manifestation—of violent racist, supremacist and xenophobic belief systems that have always been there but were previously restrained, meeting with the unwholesome nature of alliances that have long been in place but have been aggressively normalized.

It’s a mirror—showing us accurately and impartially who we currently are as a civilization.

It’s a disclosure—showing us what the western empire we live under really is underneath its fake plastic mask of liberal democracy and righteous humanitarianism.

It’s a revelation—showing us who among us really stands for truth and justice and who has been deceiving us about themselves and their motives this entire time.

It’s a catalyst—a galvanizing force and a rallying cry for all who realize that the murderous power structures we live under can no longer be allowed to stand, and a blaring alarm clock opening more

and more snoozing eyes to the need for revolutionary change.

It's a test—of who we are as a species and what we are made of, and of whether we can transcend the destructive patterning that is driving humanity to its doom.

It's a question—asking us what kind of world we want to live in going forward, and what kind of people we want to be.

It's an invitation—to become something better than what we are now.”

This list takes us well beyond the boring and largely hypocritical debate about the contested meaning of a simple word like genocide. Pondering these implications may help us to understand who we are as global citizens. By that I mean, in particular, those of us who live under governments that continue to support a nation engaged in genocide.

One prominent global citizen describes the context in detail. In this video, the former chief spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, Chris Gunness, wonders why we are allowing this to happen. He sums it up in a single sentence: “Western governments in particular have simply buckled.”

Historical note

Johnstone is a prolific and passionate commentator on international reality, not only on Israel and Gaza, although that has clearly become her major preoccupation over the past two years. She's an observer and interpreter of the news, but she's literally “more than that.” Her plethoric commentary on international events, political culture, ethical issues and foreign relations belongs

to the now largely abandoned tradition of prophetic journalism.

African American philosopher Cornel West has called for a revival of the black prophetic tradition spawned by post-civil war charismatic preachers in black churches in the United States, who used their pulpits to draw attention to a system of oppression. It produced influential voices such as former slave Frederick Douglass, journalist Ida B. Wells and scholar, activist and journalist W.E.B. Du Bois. Johnstone's prophetic style is secular and has no link with racial identity. But it echoes that tradition. What the two have in common, however, is a focus on ethics and recognition of issues in which justice is denied.

In our age of propaganda, what Johnstone writes should be read as an antidote to the heavily filtered messaging our legacy media heaps upon us. What better example of linguistic filtering than the kind of control over language practiced by major news outlets, such as The New York Times? After more than 20 months of resistance (some call it censorship), on July 20, the Gray Lady for the first time shockingly allowed an editorialist to use the word in an “opinion guest essay.” The writer, Omer Bartov, is an Israeli-American historian, known as a “scholar of genocide.” That being the case, the NYT obviously would have been hard pressed to require of him what they require of all their journalists: to reserve the word “genocide” exclusively for historical reference to Adolf Hitler's policy as the dictator of Nazi Germany, or exceptionally to the Turkish slaughter of Armenians in the early 20th century.

In its unqualified conformity with Washington's ironclad support of Israel's “right to self-defense” — however genocidally offensive that turns out to be — the NYT has nevertheless been known to concede that the Israel Defense Forces may occasionally commit war crimes. But invoking genocide had been deemed a bridge too

far. Publishing Bartov's article was a daring move. It led some people to believe that the NYT's editorial team had finally accepted to look at the world as it really is, unfiltered by dogmas spread by either the US or Israeli intelligence community.

It only took a few days for the "newspaper of record" to backtrack and correct the record when it posted four letters to the editor, three of which rejected the accusation of genocide. The first explained that "equating this war — however devastating — with genocide oversimplifies a tragic, complex conflict. Israel has issued warnings, created evacuation routes and urged civilians to flee. These are not the actions of a genocidal regime."

This reader offers some valuable advice to future genocidal regimes. If you offer warnings and provide evacuation routes before pursuing the targeted population with the intention of slaughtering them as they flee, you can avoid being accused of whatever you are actually intending. The Nazis made no specific attempt to permanently terrorize their targeted victims other than transporting the ones they could capture to death camps. Israel is committing genocide, but "more than that" it has invented new methods of state terrorism.

But let's give Johnstone the last word. In yesterday's edition of her newsletter she wrote this: "I also think we need to take a very hard, very uncomfortable look at ourselves as a society right now. If all those monstrous abuses were tolerable for us over these last two years, there's something deeply and profoundly sick about our civilization." Are we the Nazis?

[In the age of Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain, another American wit, the journalist Ambrose Bierce produced a series of satirical definitions of commonly used terms, throwing light on their hidden meanings in real discourse. Bierce

eventually collected and published them as a book, *The Devil's Dictionary*, in 1911. We have shamelessly appropriated his title in the interest of continuing his wholesome pedagogical effort to enlighten generations of readers of the news. Read more of *Fair Observer Devil's Dictionary*.]

[Lee Thompson-Kolar edited this piece.]



Peter is Fair Observer's chief strategy officer. He is an author and media producer who has worked on ground-breaking projects focused on innovative learning technology. For more than 30 years, Peter has dedicated himself to innovative publishing, coaching, consulting and learning management. As a publisher, he has developed collaborative methods and revolutionary software tools based on non-linear logic for soft skills training. He has authored, produced and published numerous multimedia and e-learning products and partnered with major organizations such as the BBC, Heinemann and Macmillan. Peter has published books and articles in English and on intercultural management, language learning, technology and politics. Educated at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Oxford, Peter resides in France and shares US and French nationality. His Fair Observer column, *The Daily Devil's Dictionary* created in 2017, which now appears in a weekly format, provides ironic perspectives on the news, and has attracted fans across the world.

Crackdown Against Protesters Quickly Reveals Old Wounds In Serbia

Harrison Budak
July 30, 2025

Students march in Belgrade in the wake of a tragedy that killed 16 people, even as police crack down against the activists. These protests are fueled by anger at corruption that allows politicians to be bought by foreign interests. The EU's apathy towards the protests, driven by economic interests, further disillusion the Serbian public.

Protestors in Serbia have faced increasing use of force by the police as they've incorporated increasing civil disobedience into their tactics. The students, who had been leading rallies until recently, issued a deadline for the government to set a date for snap elections. Once it had come and gone, they began to set up roadblocks in major cities. Despite most being dismantled by the police, protesters create another as soon as one is overturned, drawing the frustration of the authorities.

After claiming in March that "We got the message", Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has continued to demonize and intimidate protesters by accusing them of "being paid by foreign intelligence agencies", assaults by government-sponsored thugs and the use of a sonic weapon during a rally.

The protests were a response to a train station canopy collapse that killed 16 people, including several children, in the city of Novi Sad last

November. The renovation was part of Serbia's railway system revitalization along the Belgrade-Budapest line. Chinese construction companies undertook the work as part of the Belt and Road initiative and formed secret contracts with leaders in Serbia.

Following the tragedy, government officials claimed the canopy was untouched during the renovation. However, Zoran Đajić, a geological engineer who consulted on stonework, said it was clear the additional weight added during construction caused the collapse. He cited aggravating factors, including workers lacking proper professional training and the omission of a public tender for the project.

Vučić hasn't given in to any of the students' demands and has doubled down on his usage of political figureheads to create the appearance of change. He received flak for the rushed approval of several infrastructure projects that would run contrary to the interests of Serbian citizens and ignored the warnings of EU officials by attending Russia's annual Victory Day parade in May.

Notably absent at the protests are European Union flags, an odd contrast considering their use at similar protest movements, such as those in Georgia or Moldova. Aside from the lack of support for the protest movement, the students' frosty attitude towards Brussels has been shaped by an apparent EU policy of prioritizing economic opportunity and alliance enlargement over democracy.

The development of a lithium mine in Western Serbia and the deal to transform a conflict memorial into a luxury hotel and residential complex have weakened citizens' trust in the EU and the US. As reform efforts stall, the situation necessitates tactful intervention that prioritizes long-term democratic stability.

Out with the old, in with the ... old?

Serbian Prime Minister Miloš Vučević reluctantly resigned a few months after the canopy tragedy as protests intensified. His replacement, Đuro Macut, is seen by many as another placeholder for a largely ceremonial role that Vučić will continue to exert control over. The investigative media outlet KRIK revealed that the day before his appointment, Macut acquired a villa worth more than one million dollars from the director of a public road construction company. This was in addition to the four other apartments he already owned.

Vučić's political career began as a spokesperson for Vojislav Šešelj, who founded the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and is a proponent of a greater Serbia. Šešelj was convicted of crimes against humanity and served ten years for the hate speech he gave in Hrtkovci, an ethnically mixed village in the northern autonomous province of Vojvodina.

The speech consisted of reading a list of names of Croat residents that needed to leave and was followed by a campaign of ethnic cleansing that included harassment, intimidation and, in several cases, violent behaviour towards non-Serb civilians. He made similar statements against Kosovar Albanians while part of the government of Slobodan Milošević, which planned to ethnically cleanse Kosovo.

In addition to campaigning for the release of Šešelj, Vučić defended Radovan Karadzic, the former president of the Serb Republic of Bosnia. During the Bosnian War, Karadzic, with support from Milošević, instituted near-constant violence against the Bosnian Muslim population and, to a lesser extent, other ethnic minorities. The genocide in Srebrenica, where over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men were brutally executed, is not accepted by those in Belgrade.

Serbian governments have historically downplayed and denied the genocide. Vučić himself pushed back against the UN on the subject as recently as 2024. The government and the media, monopolized by Vučić's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), focus on a 2015 incident where Vučić made a surprise appearance at the annual commemoration. His stunt was brief, as locals hounded him out of the town with bottles and rocks. The anger towards Vučić stemmed from his statement in parliament only days after the genocide occurred: "You kill one Serb, and we will kill 100 Muslims."

Since becoming president, Vučić has claimed to have reformed his previously hardline views and has worked to develop a foreign policy that envisions Serbia coexisting independently of global alliances. Allowing the most powerful leader in Southeastern Europe to repeatedly violate democratic rights, as long as he peddles the language of European integration, sets a dangerous precedent.

No to authoritarians and no to the EU

Serbia has attempted to play adversaries against each other. Despite advocating for future EU accession, they've broken with common policy numerous times. They've actively ruled out imposing sanctions on Russia following their invasion of Ukraine and have been attempting to persuade countries to withdraw recognition of Kosovo.

The EU's neutral stance on the matter is viewed as complicit by some protesters. Marta Kos, the EU's enlargement commissioner, commented in response to a lack of progress on reforms in Serbia, "We are now assessing whether to distribute them [EU growth funds] or not."

The EU's hesitancy to castigate the Serbian leadership resides in its intention to open a lithium

mine in the Jadar Valley. The mine would provide Europe with a major rare earth mineral supply as the demand for rechargeable batteries explodes globally. Locals have expressed concern that the proposed mine, a venture by British–Australian giant Rio Tinto, will cause irreversible damage to nearby water sources and farmland.

On Rio Tinto’s website, they have a page specifically for all the concerns surrounding the mine. Brief references to the potential loss of economic opportunity provide dim encouragement that agricultural production won’t be affected. Instead, the text is directed at promoting the tax and royalty contributions the mine could generate for local government and the state.

Citizens are acutely aware of the effects of allowing foreign governments to dictate mineral policy and preservation standards after the Chinese-majority-owned copper mine opened in Bor, a town in Eastern Serbia. The mine’s industrial pollution has harmed nearby crop production and has not produced the economic benefits promised to taxpayers by the state.

Across the Atlantic, the US President Donald Trump’s Administration has been equally admonished for seemingly ignoring continual anti-democratic abuses against Serbian citizens. A protest followed the revelation that Jared Kushner’s investment firm, Affinity Partners, had acquired the Ministry of Defense buildings that had previously been damaged during NATO’s bombing raid against Yugoslavia in 1999.

The firm had intended to turn the site, considered a memorial by some Serbian citizens, into a luxury hotel and apartment complex complete with shops and office space. Last month, the process encountered a snag when it was revealed that the “expert opinion” that facilitated the removal of the heritage designation for the buildings was forged by Goran Vasić, the acting

director of the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments. The future of the project currently remains uncertain.

Chasing Kremlin windmills

There’s a lot of publicity surrounding the connection between Russia and Serbia. The major media outlets wax lyrical about how Orthodox roots, antagonistic politicians and football hooligan friendships are the perfect mesh. The reality, however, reveals an exchange that is more suited to each nation’s individual interests.

The myth of friendship gained full traction as Serbia sought Russia’s support to veto any resolution that came before the UN’s Security Council regarding Kosovo. The move was costly as Serbia sold the majority control of its gas company, NIS, to Russia’s Gazprom. Moscow intended to capitalize on the gas shortage in Serbia and utilize the country as an entry point to the Central European energy market.

In the November–December issue of *New Eastern Europe*, Natasza Styczyńska outlined how poorly constructed Western reporting helped breed acceptance of this narrative. She cited the concept of “systematic forgetting,” the idea that, despite knowing the EU was the largest provider of aid to Serbia, the media portrayed Russia as its dearest ally.

Reciprocity has been extended regarding the fast-tracking of Serbian citizenship for well-to-do members of Russia’s elite. The relationship remains useful for Russia as a means of working around ongoing EU–US sanctions. Serbia’s government will continue to eagerly accept support from Russia and China as it engages in state-capture at home, while Eastern powers have capitalized on the EU’s inability to respond promptly to faux reformers.

The stability of the soft alliance has been tested once or twice. Most recently, Vučić was on the receiving end of some hostility from Putin's government after being accused of supplying Ukraine with war munitions through intermediary countries.

A journey marred by uncertainty

The student's task is enormous — they aim to oust an entire political class and remain unscathed while doing so. Reprisals have already started against academic staff members who joined the protests: a government decree implemented in March cut the number of hours academics are allowed to dedicate to research per week from twenty to five.

Without enforcement mechanisms, don't expect pro-European rhetoric alone to threaten the stability of Vučić's regime. Although excluding them from membership discussions is unlikely, the economic potential of Serbia cannot take priority over protecting the rights of citizens. Each day of inaction equates to another individual who questions where true leadership lies.

Messaging that pledges to "listen to the students" has gotten tiresome. Using it as a tactic to stall the implementation of a comprehensive policy towards authoritarians that operate within Europe's reach is cheap and evasive. Sole MEPs and smaller ideological collectives that don't possess voting power have been made opaque throughout this crisis.

Civil disobedience should only be fashioned as a means to urge any semblance of accountability and not the general destruction of property. To this point, it has largely remained that way. However, the situation will need to be monitored both locally and externally.

While Vučić fashions himself as wholly reformed and continues to pack his cabinet full of corrupt undesirables, those in Brussels, Strasbourg and Washington must bid him adieu. It's already shameful to have provided this much leeway. Ignoring willful abuses in governance so long as rare earth minerals and private real estate deals can be secured violates every promise they've ever made to safeguard democracy.

Gaining back the trust of the citizens they took for granted should be their sole priority.

[Casey Herrmann edited this piece]



Harrison Budak is a freelancer specializing in impact investing, exploring the legacies of corruption within a communist context and

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