

US Foreign Policy, UN Reform, & A Rising China

2019 Fall, Volume II

VISION



Shifting Sands

VISION • Volume 2 • 2019 Fall • Shifting Sands

The front cover was designed by Elizabeth Metzger.

Foreword

Entering a more chaotic geopolitical environment, we have seen greater uncertainty and authoritarianism — and possibly a receding wave of democracy.

As we transitioned from 2018 to 2019, we have seen reversals in both internal and foreign policy by the United States, most notably its long-standing policy in Afghanistan. In this issue, we trace the evolution of the American strategy towards Afghanistan, which began with the ‘War on Terror’ after the 9/11 attacks, and outline the possible means of resolution.

While the US may be withdrawing from parts of the world, in some areas of the world, democratisation is possibly on the horizon. In Zimbabwe, dictator Robert Mugabe was overthrown and replaced by Emmerson Mnangagwa. While Mnangagwa has abolished the most hurtful and extractive of government policies, his human rights violations have nevertheless been blatant. The future of the country is unclear, and the fortune of the country is likely intertwined with the fortune of the economy.

Equally, the future of the mature democracies of the world has become uncertain. The painful issue of Brexit has yet to be resolved despite the ardent actions of prime minister Boris Johnson. The issue is poised to be the central issue of the elections in December 2019. Across in Europe, the *Mouvement des Gilets jaunes* is still ongoing, as it has been for nearly a year. The paralysis of democracy in the Western world may be a hallmark of the system, but it has been met with grave discontent. As a contributor from the Shanghai American School — the first school to join the *Vision* team — reminds us, the quandary that is fake news persists, and what matters is critical reading of media.

In the section *An Ascendant China*, the controversy surrounding Huawei is explored through a historical and geopolitical perspective. Huawei was founded in 1987 and, through research and development, has seen a phenomenal rise to becoming an industry leader in the telecommunications sector, a rise which reflects the economic ascendancy of China. Whether or not the allegations of tacit control of Huawei is true or not, it is undeniable that the world will need to reckon with the status of many of China’s increasingly influential companies.

Just as China has reasserted itself in the technological sphere, it has expressed a stronger desire to project its power. Most notably, this has taken the form of its approach to the South China Sea, which not only puts it in proximity to some of the most vibrant shipping channels in the world but may allow it to exploit natural resources in the area, as it would be part of its 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone.

When it comes to the litany of woes which spawn from the corners of the Earth, it has become evident that reform is necessary. One of our essayists argues that the United Nations is prime for a reinvigoration, expanding the Security Council and focussing on prevention and sustainability to pre-empt, as much as possible, unexpected events such as climate change, the effects of which can disrupt the lives of many. Already, climate change is threatening the low-lying country of the Netherlands. Moreover, significant human rights issues, from the Rohingya refugee crisis to the income inequality between genders to the issue of abortion, are ever present.

Here, in the next few pages, are a collection of essays we have written. Within each essay lay profound insights strengthened by research and astute observations. With great breadth and depth, is this not reassuring? This will serve to grant clarity to international affairs.

Welcome to *Vision*.

— Fredric Kong, Editor-in-chief

Focus: US Afghanistan Policy

Afghanistan and the War on Terror

Derek Fong

For more than 17 years, U.S. involvement in Afghanistan has failed to extricate itself from a conflict that has plagued three administrations, cost over \$743 billion in financial aid alone, and claimed the lives of over 38,000 civilians, making it the longest and costliest war in U.S. history. In 2017, President Trump unveiled his new military strategy for Afghanistan, marking an unprecedented foreign policy shift towards the region. Will President Trump's new policy finally secure a swift and comprehensive victory, and more importantly a just and lasting peace over what has been hailed by many as the "unwinnable war"? This essay will outline the historical progression of the War on Terror and analyze the policy of the current U.S. administration through this historical perspective.

1. Summary: Afghanistan since 2001

The September 11 attacks, conducted by militant jihadist group al-Qaeda, was the primary reason behind the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. The objective was to dismantle al-Qaeda and deny them a safe base of operations in Afghanistan by removing the Islamic fundamentalist group in power, the Taliban.

Before the invasion, President George W. Bush demanded the Taliban to deport Osama Bin Laden, leader of al-Qaeda. The Taliban declined, claiming that they needed clear evidence that Bin Laden orchestrated the terrorist attacks. The U.S. didn't view this as reasonable and launched the invasion, citing their policy of not negotiating with terrorists.

2. Bush's Administration (2001 - 2008)

President Bush's guiding principle for foreign policy was called the Bush Doctrine. This doctrine contained two main elements: Firstly, the U.S. would make no distinction between terrorists and the nations that harbored them, and as the president put it: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Secondly, the U.S. would claim the right to secure itself against such nations like Afghanistan by performing preventative military strikes against them as a form of active defense. The reasoning behind this was that it was better to neutralize a threat before it materialized, as opposed to allowing it to proliferate and defending against it once it arrived.

The initial stages of the invasion were tremendously successful – in just a few months, U.S. forces captured Kabul, the capital. The Taliban were removed from power and fled to remote mountainous regions and neighboring Pakistan. With Afghanistan under control, the central strategy shifted from combat to rebuilding and stabilizing the region.

Due to Afghanistan's complex, mountainous terrain, many communities remained isolated, and because of this, the U.S. decided to rebuild the Ring Road, a massive circular road system that connected Kabul, Kandahar, and other major cities throughout Afghanistan. The U.S., along with several other nations, committed \$1.5 billion to the project in 2003 (Vox). Soon after, however, the U.S. invaded Iraq, and funding for the project was drastically cut and reallocated to the Iraq war effort. In early 2006, funding for the Ring Road dropped by \$1.2 billion (Vox), and the Taliban made a resurgence and waged war against the occupying U.S. and NATO forces. They concentrated most of their attacks around the vulnerable and rapidly deteriorating Ring Road, and from 2006 to 2009 they conducted more than 7,500 IED (improvised explosive device) bombings (Walsh). From 2001 to 2005, there were less than 1,000. The Taliban terrorized both soldiers and civilians through surprise ambushes and raids, and in that period, suicide bombings more than doubled (Walsh). By the end of 2012, the Ring Road had become an unviable, unproductive project.

Considering Bush's policy as a whole, its major advantages were derived from the speed at which the military captured territory and stabilized the region, as well as the initial success that they had in building the Ring Road, committing not only to combat but also to humanitarian aid. This was an essential first

step in decreasing the Afghan government's dependence on the U.S. military to repel the Taliban, and it also set the groundwork for a potential restructuring of the nation and reliance on a stronger, central Afghan government with its own capable military.

However, this policy was not sustainable. When Bush's term ended in 2009, the Taliban had gained twice as much territory than it previously controlled in 2001. Committing to the war in Iraq was the primary reason for the resurgence of the Taliban, as an unfinished Ring Road meant less trade between Afghanistan's key economic regions; at the same time, U.S. reinforcements could not be transported fast enough to respond to Taliban attacks. Finally, Afghan forces were inadequately trained as most of the aid was spent on the Ring Road, meaning that once the Taliban returned it was much harder for them to regain territory.

3. Obama's Administration (2009 - 2014)

In 2009, Obama sent 70,000 additional troops to Afghanistan (Frostenson). This was mostly ineffective, as the Taliban directly responded by rapidly increasing frequency of their bombings and their attacks on road construction crews (Madrigal). In 2010, fatalities increased by more than 200, and the Taliban conducted more than 550 attacks per week (Frostenson). Despite this military commitment, Obama's administration withdrew all funding for the infrastructural Ring Road in 2012 (Sieff). The burden of the defense of Afghanistan and overseeing the construction of the Ring Road was then given to the Afghan government, which they were unable to manage due to widespread corruption.

A large part of Obama's strategy was centered around "counter-insurgency", or COIN. The philosophy behind COIN requires soldiers to be natural diplomats; they should protect and serve the local civilian population to an extreme degree in order to "win over hearts and minds". Unfortunately, in a situation where one cannot easily distinguish between Taliban fighter and civilian, the additional burden imposed on soldiers decreased the effectiveness of the armed forces. Since the implementation of the COIN policy, the Taliban has expanded its control over Afghan territory to over half the territory of the state, and their influence expanding at an alarming rate (Svet). Obama's policies had good intentions, but ultimately, they failed to improve the situation and had little tangible results.

4. Trump's Administration (2017 - present)

When we view Trump's policy through a historical perspective, we find many prominent parallelisms between the policies of the previous two administrations. Firstly, like the two administrations before him, Trump is continuing the policy goal of building up the Afghan military. Secondly, like Obama, Trump has pledged another surge of 3,500 additional soldiers (Frostenson). Finally, like Bush, Trump is seeking to pressure Pakistan into cutting off their support of the Taliban.

However, there are some major differences between Trump's policy and that of his predecessors. Early on in the announcement of his new Afghanistan policy, Trump proclaimed: "We are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists." (Ewing) This is a significantly different approach to the previous two policies, which emphasized the importance of foreign aid and development, albeit to varying degrees. Secondly, Trump decided to abandon the traditional, strict timelines for troop withdrawal set under Obama's administration. Finally, Trump stated that he wished to negotiate terms for the conclusion of the war with the Taliban.

Trump's policy does have its merits. Firstly, placing a greater emphasis on training the military will yield greater long-term benefits. Recapturing occupied territory helps bolster morale, damage Taliban operations, and weaken Taliban propaganda. Abandoning timelines prevents the Taliban from preparing massive counterattacks once the U.S. completely withdraws and leaves the Afghan military vulnerable and without air support (Frostenson; Council on Foreign Affairs).

Trump's military policy

At its peak under the Obama administration, there were more than 100,000 U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, and yet they still failed to defeat the Taliban. The main reason why Bush's initial invasion succeeded was due to the fact that it caught the enemy by surprise, and so the coalition forces easily overpowered their outdated air and missile defenses with overwhelming air superiority. Today, guerilla tactics and ambushes propagate a deep sense of fear and distrust from the coalition forces towards the local Afghan people. This is because like many insurgencies, guerilla fighters do not wear uniform and

are therefore indistinguishable from unarmed civilians. This has decreased the morale of the American troops and impaired their ability to undertake their operations in Afghanistan.

For every civilian casualty, the U.S. faced a surge of international backlash, but hesitance to kill on the battlefield is costly and leads to more military casualties. This exact situation was repeated once before in U.S. history during the Vietnam War, another costly and ultimately unsuccessful war that the U.S. lost due to the enemy's superior guerilla tactics. The Taliban have re-emerged as a formidable fighting force, capable of inflicting massive amounts of damage. Because of this, coalition nations have become much more reluctant to send troops, which also strikes out the revival of Obama's military strategy of crushing the Taliban with overwhelming manpower. This disrupts the U.S.' military efforts and also proves to the Taliban that while they are determined and committed to win, other foreign nations with little stake in the situation do not.

Ultimately, the U.S. must withdraw from Afghanistan and grant it the freedom to act as an autonomous, secure, and capable nation; otherwise, the U.S. would have to remain in Afghanistan indefinitely to prevent it from falling under complete control of the Taliban. The continuation and conclusion of the war must remain the responsibility of the Afghan military.

Now, there are less than 20,000 troops in Afghanistan, so Trump's troop surge is unlikely to have any meaningful effect. However, Trump is also carrying out several new policies in an attempt to repel the Taliban. Drone strikes, which started during Obama's administration and had no major effect, has increased at 5 times the original pace under Trump's command. In April 2017, the 21,600-pound GBU-43/B MOAB, nicknamed the "mother of all bombs", was dropped on a terrorist tunnel complex in Afghanistan, killing at least 94 fighters. Trump's military policy marks a significant shift from Obama's due to the massive amount of air power used, but ultimately, it has proven only to be marginally more effective than the strategy of the preceding Obama administration. Drone strikes have proven to be useful in targeted, surgical strikes, but the civilian casualties they cause, as well as the subsequent uptick in retaliatory suicide attacks by the Taliban, make this policy more detrimental than useful. The only benefits from this policy are short-term and are quickly

negated by their harm long-term effects, which deepens the tensions in the already deteriorating relations between civilians and foreign soldiers.

Both Bush and Obama tried to strengthen the Afghan military through training and aid, but Trump is the first to truly commit to this. However, the Afghan military's most urgent and deep-rooted problems have yet to be addressed. Most Afghan soldiers do not know how to handle basic weapons inspections, and there is also widespread use of hashish (cannabis resin), which impairs their operational ability. To counteract this, Trump has promoted the bombing of Taliban drug labs, a policy which Obama previously abandoned in 2009 due to its ineffectiveness. It has proven again to be ineffective, and furthermore, it destroys a major source of income for the locals who live in a climate that allows for few marketable crops to grow, increasing their resentment against foreign nations. The lack of strong central government control is the main reason that the Taliban can continue their narcotics operations, but Trump has largely failed to improve Afghanistan's military, so the government will continue to experience these shortfalls.

Trump's diplomatic policy

Negotiating reasonable peace terms with the Taliban is not necessarily the best course of action. The Taliban enjoys a significant amount of influence in Afghanistan and their resilience means that they have more negotiating power, because unlike the U.S. they can commit to this war practically forever. Furthermore, actively seeking negotiations makes the U.S. seem too willing to concede to the Taliban's demands, so the Taliban could force more concessions in the future. Obama's massive commitment of U.S. troops to Afghanistan should have put tremendous pressure on the Taliban to negotiate for peace, but it didn't. Now, Trump's best course of action is to abandon negotiations and prove his solemn commitment to the war.

Trump's administration has recently withheld \$300 million of aid from Pakistan in order to pressure them into relinquishing their support for the Taliban (Felbab-Brown). Pakistan's faltering economy gives their government an incentive to give in to Trump's demands, but between from 2010 to the end of his term Obama also tried a similar strategy of cutting military aid with little effect. Pakistan has a much stronger incentive to keep supporting the

Taliban because they want to disrupt India's influence in Afghanistan, and they also fear that if they remove their support, anti-Pakistan militant groups will form in the region. Pakistan also has a prevailing counterstrategy, which is to retaliate with threats such as shutting down the Afghanistan-Pakistan border for U.S. troops. Therefore, Trump's negotiation strategy is most likely going to fail.

Trump's foreign aid policy

While Trump's dramatic reduction of foreign aid is understandable, as it was a costly policy that failed in the past, it is still unsustainable to focus solely on military expenditure.

As of 2019, more than \$3 billion has been spent on the Ring Road (Vox), and at this stage, it seems too large of an investment to default on. The Ring Road helps bring legitimacy and strength to an otherwise overly dependent and corrupt government. However, the "sunk costs" that have been irretrievably lost in building the road will invariably be repeated if the U.S. attempts to rebuild the road today. As demonstrated by the F-35 Lightning fighter jet, another massive project conducted through the joint efforts the U.S. government and the military-industrial complex, sometimes giving up is the best option, especially if there is no feasible future solution. The F-35 Lightning has cost the U.S. government more than \$406 billion (Roblin), and Trump, like with the Ring Road, has expressed his desire to withdraw.

Although military strikes work well in the short-term, as demonstrated by Bush, the efforts and resources of the whole nation of Afghanistan must be utilized in order to defend against the monolithic influence of the Taliban. Unless the U.S. wants a repeat of the horrific events and military casualties of the past decade, action must be taken to help rebuild Afghanistan.

COIN as a strategy failed under Obama's administration because it mimicked his strategy for the Iraq War. Firstly, Iraq had more than double the amount of security forces that Afghanistan had in 2008, with 400,000 compared to Afghanistan's 150,000. Iraq's oil resources and stable economy means that less aid is required, while Afghanistan today is among the top 30 poorest nations in the world. Cutting aid under Obama's administration proved catastrophic, and Trump's complete withdrawal of

financial aid will most likely have the same detrimental effect.

Conclusion

History – past, present, and future – is written by the victors. While Trump's policy has some potential to succeed, it repeats far too many of the mistakes of the previous administrations, such as a reduction in foreign aid and the decrease in military support, and will require much more time, resources, and commitment in order for the policy to succeed. The historic cycle of U.S. counter-insurgency strategy has been marked by its failure in counteracting guerilla tactics, its failure in promoting strong governance, and its failure in winning over the hearts and minds of the people, a mistake that Trump's policy deeply echoes. It is unlikely that Trump's new policy will gain a decisive advantage over the Taliban and rewrite history by finally securing a victory.

Works Cited

"A Timeline of the U.S. War in Afghanistan." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan.

"Agonizing Over Afghanistan." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/article/agonizing-over-afghanistan.

Bandow, Doug. "The Nation-Building Experiment That Failed: Time For U.S. To Leave Afghanistan." *Forbes.com*, Forbes, 1 Mar. 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/doug-bandow/2017/03/01/the-nation-building-experiment-that-failed-time-for-u-s-to-leave-afghanistan/#757e04c465b2>.

Business, Fox. "Why the US Is Losing the War in Afghanistan: Gen. Keane." YouTube, YouTube, 3 Aug. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-qrGk7HIQ.

Byman, Daniel, and Steven Simon. "Trump's Surge in Afghanistan." *American Foreign Policy*, 18 Sept. 2017, www.longwood.edu/staff/harbourwr/bh343s2018.htm.

- Ewing, Philip, and Brian Naylor. "We Are Not Nation-Building Again,' Trump Says While Unveiling Afghanistan Strategy." NPR, NPR, 21 Aug. 2017, www.npr.org/2017/08/21/545044232/trump-expected-to-order-4-000-more-troops-to-afghanistan.
- Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "Why Pakistan Supports Terrorist Groups, and Why the US Finds It so Hard to Induce Change." Brookings, Brookings, 5 Jan. 2018, www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/05/why-pakistan-supports-terrorist-groups-and-why-the-us-finds-it-so-hard-to-induce-change/.
- Frostenson, Sarah, and Jeremy C.F. Lin. "Trump Will Increase Troops in Afghanistan." POLITICO, www.politico.com/interactives/2017/timeline-troops-afghanistan-trump/
- Roblin, Sebastien. "Is the F-35 Really Worth the \$1,500,000,000,000 Price Tag?" The National Interest, The Center for the National Interest, 21 Apr. 2018, nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-f-35-really-worth-the-1500000000000-price-tag-25487.
- Roggio, Bill. "Taliban Contest or Control Large Areas of Afghanistan." FDD's Long War Journal, FDD's Long War Journal, 2 Dec. 2009, www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/12/talibancontestorc.php.
- Rubin, Barnett R. "Is Afghanistan Ready for Peace?" Foreign Affairs, Foreign Affairs Magazine, 6 Aug. 2018, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2018-07-30/afghanistan-ready-peace?cid=sso-link.
- Shaver, Andrew, and Joshua Madrigal. "Losing in Afghanistan." Foreign Affairs, Foreign Affairs Magazine, 1 June 2017, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/
- Sieff, Kevin. "After Billions in U.S. Investment, Afghan Roads Are Falling Apart." The Washington Post, WP Company, 30 Jan. 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/world/asiapacific/after-billions-in-us-investment-afghan-roads-are-falling-apart/2014/01/30/9bd07764-7986-11e3-b1c5-739e63e9c9a7story.html.
- Stewart, Phil. "Exclusive: Pentagon Cancels Aid to Pakistan over Record on Militants." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 2 Sept. 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pakistan-military-exclusive/exclusive-pentagon-cancels-aid-to-pakistan-over-record-on-militants-idUSKCN1LH3TA.
- Svet, Oleg. "COIN's Failure in Afghanistan." The National Interest, The Center for the National Interest, 5 Sept. 2012, nationalinterest.org/commentary/coins-failure-afghanistan-7409.
- Vox. "How the US Failed to Rebuild Afghanistan." YouTube, Vox Media, 11 Jan. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKVDXbIpW9Q.
- Walsh, Declan, et al. "Wikileaks Afghanistan Files: Every IED Attack, with Co-Ordinates. Spreadsheet and Visualised." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 26 July 2010, www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2010/jul/26/wikileaks-afghanistan-ied-attacks.

Negotiating with the Taliban

Derek Fong

Introduction

In late 1994, Pakistan was seeking a third-party military group to secure their interests in their neighbor, Afghanistan, to serve as a defensive and strategic buffer against India. The Islamic fundamentalist group, the Taliban, had just emerged as a leading faction from the Afghan Civil War and quickly received support and funding from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. In a series of lightning-fast, well-timed surprise attacks, the Taliban took over the city of Kandahar and its neighboring regions.

Continuous shelling of the capital, Kabul, by the Taliban forced government personnel to retreat north into the mountains, and just four years after their formation, in 1998, the Taliban controlled over 98% of the entire country and had assumed total effective control. While the Taliban were quickly driven back to the countryside by the U.S. during their 2001 invasion, they quickly made a resurgence in 2006. Now, they control or contest more than 50% of the country's territory. The U.S. is now actively engaged in a negotiation with the Taliban in order to bring the War in Afghanistan to a swift conclusion - but will this bring a peace that is welcomed by the Afghan people, or is it simply a tactic to pressure the U.S. into submission?

U.S. interests

The War in Afghanistan costs American taxpayers around \$45 billion a year (Pennington), and because of this, the President and his administration face enormous pressures to end the war swiftly and withdraw their troops. While Donald Trump has permitted a small troop deployment increase of around 8,500 additional personnel (Byman), these consist mostly of advisors. The aim of this is to shift the majority of the war effort from the U.S. military to the Afghan central government, so that the nation is able to defend itself and continue in the absence of U.S. protection.

Central strategy of the Taliban

Since 2009 the Taliban have undeniably and overwhelmingly been winning the War in Afghanistan,

so in terms of negotiations they have much more bargaining power and can afford to relinquish some control of their own. The Taliban have a stranglehold over Afghanistan's economy, because in a climate where few marketable crops can grow, poppy cultivation, which yields the drug opium, is highly profitable and is a major source of revenue in Afghanistan's primarily agrarian economy (OEC). The Taliban, like many insurgent groups throughout history, draw the bulk of their power from the local people. Unlike the mostly corrupt Afghan government, the Taliban, while ruthless in their methods, do bring a sense of legitimacy and security to the locals. For many poor Afghan farmers, opium is one of their only sources of income, and U.S. efforts to bomb and destroy Taliban opium labs only weakens their position and strengthens the Taliban in the effort to win over hearts and minds. Politically, economically, and militarily, the Taliban outclasses the U.S. effort in Afghanistan.

The framework of the current deal

Only two main ideas have been agreed on: the U.S. will withdraw its troops, and the Taliban will not allow Afghanistan to be used for terrorist operations, because eliminating main reason the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001. Several key details, such as the time frame for troop withdrawal, how many troops will be withdrawn, whether all U.S. military presence and personnel will be withdrawn, and whether a ceasefire will be called are all still unresolved.

Evaluation

To an extent, while this isn't a perfectly ideal solution, this may be the best option for the U.S. and the Afghan government. The Taliban has every reason to stay, while the U.S. has every reason to leave. By staying, the Taliban can continue to enjoy financial support from Pakistan as well as the ability to defend their territory. By leaving, the U.S. can avoid the international backlash that arises for every civilian casualty, of which there have been at least 32,000 over the last decade. The U.S. will no longer be obliged to defend Afghanistan, and it will no longer suffer any more humiliating tactical setbacks against the Taliban insurgents.

The main reason why the Afghan military are so dependent on the U.S. military is because of U.S. air superiority on the battlefield, but in recent years the Afghan air force has seen some major successes and

have started conducting drills, overseeing bombing operations, and training pilots on their own (Rempfer). Furthermore, the Taliban also have some legitimate reasons for seeking peace – since the conflict started, they have lost more than 60,000 fighters (Nordland; Mashal).

Yet, considering the terms of the current deal, the concessions that the U.S. are offering give the Taliban far too much leverage and political power in the long term. Without a strong central Afghan government, it is likely that the Taliban will spread their influence and threaten the legitimacy and integrity of the government by assuming effective control like they did in 2001. There is no guarantee of what the Taliban will do with Afghanistan once the U.S. leaves, and while it is possible that they will stick to their promise of purging terrorism in Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrawal leaves an opening through which the Taliban can return and assume control. The Afghan government have not even been consulted or allowed to negotiate with the Taliban on their own, because the Taliban refuse to hold talks with them.

The main losers of this deal are the Afghan people, because for three decades they have been transferred and pulled in a tug-of-war contest of power between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and now they will continue to do so. As one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world and saddled with a \$4 billion trade deficit, Afghanistan is in desperate need of economic reform and aid, but the U.S. withdrawal means that the U.S. has no real obligation to commit anything more, including aid.

Time is the resource that is most valuable to the Afghan government, because without it, they have no chance to develop and resist a potential Taliban takeover, hostile or otherwise. The Taliban's negotiation and terms may have good intentions, but it is most likely a tactic for which time, both for the Afghan and American governments, is deliberately constrained, so that the U.S. is forced between two unpleasant choices: conceding to the Taliban or continuing the war. The Taliban wants the U.S. forces to withdraw within three months, while the U.S. wants up to three years. Either way, the Taliban will most likely walk away more satisfied than the U.S.: the negotiation is just the shortcut that accelerates the inevitable U.S. withdrawal – on the Taliban's favourable terms.

Works Cited

- “Afghanistan.” OEC - Afghanistan (AFG) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners, atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/afg/.
- “Afghanistan Civilian Deaths Hit Record High in 2018: UN.” News | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 24 Feb. 2019, www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/afghanistan-civilian-deaths-hit-record-high-2018-190224071129307.html.
- Byman, Daniel, and Steven Simon. “Trump's Surge in Afghanistan.” American Foreign Policy, 18 Sept. 2017, www.longwood.edu/staff/harbourwr/bh343s2018.htm.
- Felbab-Brown, Vanda. “The US-Taliban Negotiations Breakthrough: What It Means and What Lies Ahead.” Brookings, Brookings, 29 Jan. 2019, www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/29/the-us-taliban-negotiations-breakthrough-what-it-means-and-what-lies-ahead/.
- Mashal, Mujib. “2 Weeks of U.S.-Taliban Talks End With 'Progress' but No Breakthrough.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 12 Mar. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/world/asia/afghanistan-us-taliban-talks.html.
- Nordland, Rod. “The Death Toll for Afghan Forces Is Secret. Here's Why.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 21 Sept. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/09/21/world/asia/afghanistan-security-casualties-taliban.html.
- Nordland, Rod, and Mujib Mashal. “U.S. and Taliban Edge Toward Deal to End America's Longest War.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 26 Jan. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/01/26/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-peace-deal.html.
- Pennington, Matthew. “Pentagon Says War in Afghanistan Costs Taxpayers \$45 Billion per Year.” PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 6

Feb. 2018, www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/pentagon-says-afghan-war-costs-tax-payers-45-billion-per-year.

Rempfer, Kyle. "The Afghan Air Force May Be One of the Few Success Stories in a 17-Year War." *Air Force Times*, Air Force Times, 5 June 2018, www.airforcetimes.com/flashpoints/2018/06/04/the-afghan-air-force-may-be-one-of-the-few-success-stories-in-a-17-year-war/.

Shifting Sands of Democracy

Zimbabwe: Crisis of Democracy and Economy

Raag Pathak

On November 21st, 2017, the Zimbabwean armed forces were able to overthrow Robert Mugabe from presidency after weeks of attempts, a surprising accomplishment due to their history of prolonged support for the ex-president. Their goal was to fix Zimbabwe's deteriorating political, social and economic conditions. Following Mugabe's removal from power his vice president and 'enforcer', Emmerson Mnangagwa, replaced him as a temporary leader in December that year and promised 'free and fair' elections in 'four to five months'. Optimism was evident: Zimbabweans and observers were sure that elections meant a step towards true democracy and reforms. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

Zimbabwe's past elections have been marred by violence, fraud, and questions about the credibility of the voter rolls; this one was no different. Voters who were in favour of opposition parties were intimidated and threatened with violence. Human rights groups reported dozens of abductions, beatings, and rapes carried out by unidentified men against opposition supporters. Local media heavily covered the ZANU-PF's (The Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front) campaign, which is Mnangagwa's and formerly Mugabe's party, barely even mentioning others. However, the biggest disappointment was that the election itself was not conducted in a way that corresponded to international standards, the opposition challenged the vote-tallying process and argued that the ZANU-PF rigged the vote, causing the ZANU-PF to finish with a 50.8% majority. The only thing that was certain at the time was that Mnangagwa failed to keep his promise.

Not all was lost though, Mnangagwa has made some convincing steps to revive his country's collapsed economy. He has sought foreign investments and loans from international financial institutions. Sur-

prisingly, the current leader even started overturning his former president's hostile and economically hurtful policies towards white people, returning seized land from white farmers and mostly lifting the ban on foreign ownership of Zimbabwean assets. The military was also ordered to replace police at checkpoints in major cities which is a respectable decision since soldiers are paid more and are less susceptible to bribes. Nevertheless, Mnangagwa was notorious for violating human rights while serving as an 'enforcer' of Mugabe and it is unlikely that his character has changed since, questioning whether Zimbabwean optimism was justified at all.

The international community has proposed that Zimbabwe should introduce a new currency. Since the Zimbabwean dollar was killed off by extreme hyperinflation in 2009, the US dollar has been the main currency for transactions. This is not ideal since there has been a critical shortage of supply of hard foreign currency due to their significant trade deficit, preventing imports of capital goods from abroad, suppressing the country's economic potential. A new currency would be a discerning move because it would allow firms and consumers to withdraw enough cash from their bank accounts to make consequent transactions which they were previously unable to make, increasing demand and in turn promoting a higher national output.

While Mnangagwa has proposed a few impressive reform ideas, he has failed to address major corruption within the top-level of his government administration, clearly an issue that has been hurting Zimbabwe's already fragile economy ever since the country's independence. By tackling corruption, there would be higher tax revenues available for use as part of public expenditure, which could stimulate a struggling economy.

'Formal' jobs in Zimbabwe are rare, yet the country has an abundance of natural resources in both agriculture and mining which have not been put to use. Because of this, Zimbabwe currently has a negative trade balance meaning that imports exceed exports. Creating conditions for investment is key for improving its economy. There are a few possible ways to achieve this, mainly promoting and encouraging foreign investment, especially by international governments as well as negotiating with foreign lenders. This would allow domestic businesses to utilise these free resources resulting in greater employment and output.

Still far away from a true democracy, Zimbabwe needs to focus on having free and fair elections in 2023. This means ensuring that political violence and bribery is not exercised, different parties are allowed a fair share of coverage on television and radio and that the elections themselves are conducted up to international standards, meaning that re-votes would be authorised as well.

Zimbabwe's future is highly dependent on the government's actions now. Although they seem keen for a stronger economy and democracy their goals are unachievable if the correct actions are not followed. On the other hand, if the proposed suggestions are followed it will result in high and unstable inflation, reminiscent of their disastrous past. What is truly in need is a group of experienced economists and a third-party to further analyse how best to recover and become a stable, democratic economy.

Bibliography

- Campbell, John. "Mnangagwa Tightens the Screws in Zimbabwe." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, www.cfr.org/blog/mnangagwa-tightens-screws-zimbabwe.
- Davies, Matthew. "Five Ways to Revive Zimbabwe's Economy." *BBC News*, BBC, 22 Nov. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42079584.
- Malunga, Siphosami. "Zimbabwe Needs Genuine Democracy, Not Window Dressing." *Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, 28 June 2018, foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/28/zimbabwe-needs-genuine-democracy-not-window-dressing/.
- Mwita Chacha, Jonathan Powell. "Analysis | It's Been One Year since Zimbabwe Toppled Mugabe. Why Isn't It a Democracy Yet?" *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 17 Nov. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/17/its-been-one-year-since-zimbabwe-toppled-mugabe-why-isnt-it-a-democracy-yet/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.0b960e352587.
- Winterburn, Derek. "Zimbabwe." *Zimbabwe (ZWE) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners*, 2017,

atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/zwe/.

Why Brexit?

Larrissa Leung

The impending withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, also known as 'Brexit,' has been seen in headlines, as a political fight that has erupted in the UK government over the issue. Within 24 hours, three members of May's cabinet — Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, Brexit Minister David Davis, and the minister for the Department for Exiting the EU, Steve Baker — quit the government in protest over May's handling of negotiations with the European Union. If the British government anticipated this political uproar within its nation, why was such an idea proposed in the first place?

Many currently believe that the referendum surrounding the exit from the European Union reflected the rise of nationalism across the world. There was a growing distrust of multinational financial, trade, and defense organizations created after World War II, which include but are not limited to the European Union (EU), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and NATO (North-Atlantic Treaty Organization). Many who oppose the EU believe these institutions no longer serve a purpose that is beneficial to their country. Not only that, these organizations take control away from individual nations, where this mixture of mistrust and fear of losing control made Brexit a reasonable solution to the people as well as politicians in the UK.

On the other hand, Brexit supporters think that they will gain more control of their own country after leaving the European Union. Currently involved in the Paris Climate Summit, with its role as an instigator of the single market, and as a central player in Europe's fight against Islamic terrorism, the departure of Britain will relegate the nation to a less prominent role. Although they still have to abide by global trade rules, including those that govern our financial industry, they will no longer be influencing the rules to the extent that existed before. When trading with Europe, Brussels will write them; when they trade with America, Washington will take charge; when trading with China, guess who will be

dictating the terms of trade. Is that the promised control over one's nation and economy Brexit promised?

Since the Brexit vote, the Government has said that it will work to maintain security relationships with the European Union despite not being a part of the organization. "In today's uncertain world we need that shared strength more than ever," said Andrew Parker, the head of MI5, in May 2018. "I hope for a comprehensive and enduring agreement that tackles obstacles and allows professionals to get on with the job together." As seen at the Paris Climate Summit, in the absence of the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the UK Committee on Climate Change has stepped into the role of dispenser of information to the government. The committee is chaired by Lord Deben (John Gummer), a long-time advocate for climate policy, and produces independent reports offering critiques of the current and longer-term climate objectives to achieve.

But will Brexit succeed or backfire? Even at the Paris Climate Summit, rather than acting, Brexit has limited the United Kingdom to an advisory role, thus limiting their and have a say in future political, economic and social issues. Whether it be losing control on the global stage or gaining power in their own nation, the foreseeable future of the United Kingdom will slowly begin to unravel.

Yellow Vests

Lee Obersteller

The name of French Yellow vests had been circulating around Central Europe since November of 2018. The movement otherwise known as the gilets jaunts movement sparked social media and news coverage during a protest on 17th November 2018. The very first protest had successfully rounded over 300,000 people in Paris alone to protest through blocking roads and forming barricades. But what were they protesting for?

What sparked their decision to protest was to revoke the green tax on diesel implemented by French President, Emmanuel Macron. As part of Macron's plan to reach the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, Macron decided to implement higher taxes on already high fuel taxes; the public outcry was due to

how the increased taxes would only affect the working and lower classes, while for the rich it would be as if nothing has changed. The French yellow vests believe that Macron is only favouring the rich; cut taxes on the rich, as well as making it easier for employers to fire employees, on the basis that it might increase their desire to employ more people. This caused many protesters to believe that Macron should resign as President, believing that he is incapable of leading the country fairly and help reduce the gap between the rich and the poor; doesn't seem to understand majority of his population, working and lower class, want.

In response to the yellow vests, Macron has chosen to drop some of the tax increases, while increasing the minimum wage. He hoped that this would tame the Yellow Vest movement as well as stabilize the economy, however, this plan failed to work as the yellow vests were still frustrated, and the economy returned to its previous state, a stalled economy that couldn't provide aid for the poorer people. The main reason as to why Macron is failing to quell the anger and frustration of the public is due to the fact that the hidden anger and frustration is from the underlying problems of the green tax, and that the green tax is just the tip of the iceberg of their reasons for being unhappy: how the rich have tax cuts and aren't affected as much as the working class and lower classes.

On the other hand, the public were very supportive of the French yellow vests. 72% of the public supported the yellow vests, however 85% believed that the protests should stay peaceful and not resort to violence. This is due to the protest which happened on 24th November when the protests became violent with people lighting things on fire, tearing down road signs, building barricades and pulling out cobblestones. This was only the beginning to multiple violent protests resulting in injuries and damage of properties. At the end of December, 1,843 protesters and 1,048 police officers were injured, these were mostly facial injuries.

On May 25th the lowest turnout of yellow vests held a protest with only 12,500 protesters around France compared to the peak of the yellow vests with almost double, 300,000, the number of protesters. Although the numbers of people and supporters have dwindled the emotion and message behind their movement haven't disappeared.

A look into Singapore's proposed law against fake news

Christopher Shen

In the South East Asian city-state Singapore, a bill has been recently proposed to combat what the city-state calls “online falsehoods,” also known as “fake news.” The conclusion to make such a legislative decision was reached by a parliamentary selected committee of 10 that was created in 2018 to examine the implications of fake news on the country.

As information becomes more accessible than ever, so has the prevalence of misinformation. Singapore's new bill is just the latest in a series of statements the country has made against the spread of fake news. Just last year, the country condemned Facebook and Facebook's ability to govern itself in a public hearing. This bill in particular aims to correct and penalize online internet sources for the distribution of misinformation.

While it is set to be enacted by the second half of 2019, the bill has been relatively controversial, facing opposition from both Singaporeans and the international community alike. Recently, 80 some academics and professors released a press statement voicing their concerns on the bill, stating that cannot accept the integrity of their work as a guarantee unless it is explicitly addressed in the bill.

The Human Rights Watch in particular has been adamant about this particular bill. They believe that it yields too much power to the Singaporean government, as it will be able to decree whatever information it defines as “false.”

If passed, Singapore will join a select group of countries that have acted upon the distribution of misinformation in our digital age. Recently, Russia and Singapore's neighbor Malaysia have passed similar controversial legislation.

Our responsibility, regardless of whether such laws pass, is to be able to critically identify and evaluate information. By doing so, we will be able to become more informed and make better decisions in an age of spoon-fed information.

Works Cited

“Singapore Introduces Anti-Fake News Law to Combat Misinformation.” South China Morning Post, 1 Apr. 2019, www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3004196/singapore-introduces-anti-fake-news-law-counter-falsehoods-aimed.

“Singapore's Fake News Bill Set to Become Law in Second Half of the Year.” The Business Times, www.businesstimes.com.sg/government-economy/singapores-fake-news-bill-set-to-become-law-in-second-half-of-the-year.

An Ascendant China

Cybersecurity: Huawei

Nicky Wong

Founded in 1987, Huawei is a multinational company that has expanded continuously in recent years. Its primary focuses include building telecommunication networks and manufacturing smartphones. Despite having located its headquarters in China, its services can be found internationally, from the US to European states. In this essay, we will discuss the causes behind its rapid ascendance and analyse the recent developments on the international stage which involve it heavily.

One of the main causes for its recent rise is due to its investment in research and development. Consequently, many devices manufactured by this company tend to consist of advanced technological features that are incomparable to any other business. Another reason for its rise is resulted by huge customer loyalty. Due to the fact that many products have plausible ratings, its sphere of influence has spread to others that have developed a positive public perception of Huawei; hence, are willing to purchase their products with high hopes of continuous satisfaction. As a result, Huawei has made huge profits that allow further investment in entrepreneurship and investment.

However, its recent development of the 5G network, which is supposed to be a more efficient version of 4G, has jeopardized its market and perhaps even its customer views on the company. Recently, the US government has suspected that Huawei's new technology includes Chinese espionage software. In addition to the fact that the company was founded by Ren Zhengfei, who was previously a communist at the People's Liberation Army, the statements by the United States, which currently seems speculative, have caused other countries such as Denmark, Japan, and New Zealand to have the same concerns. Such concerns have resulted in countries restricting the importation of Huawei products in prevention of cyber risks. Consequently, revenue yield for the company have plummeted by over 5% despite Ren's

public declaration of no such affiliation with the Chinese government.

This was perhaps not the most serious consequence, as convoluted aftermaths unfolded later. Shortly after the declaration of Huawei's cybersecurity issue, Meng, the CFO of the company, who also happens to be Ren's daughter, was arrested in Canada. This was done by the request of the United States, and due to certain treaties (such as the US-Canada extradition treaty), Canada was forced to oblige to US's orders. It was the perfect timing for an arrest as Meng had been transferring flights in Vancouver. Reasons for such arrest were not related the Huawei but were due to potential violations of US sanction against Iran, which would involve Ren's daughter importing products from Iran without regards to trade limitations such as embargoes and bans. However, not much evidence has been collected regarding this matter, causing some to suspect that it had all been due to a trade war between US and China. In the most recent years, both countries have continuously imposed tariffs on each other's imports through retaliation or trade protectionism, which has ended up with a trade war between the two nations. One of the non-trade retaliation methods aforementioned include spreading rumors, which could prove true, about Huawei.

Of course, China did not let the matter rest without further action. During the month of December 2018, two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, were reported to be detained in China without justified reasons. The detainees were accused of threatening national security, but evidently, did not seem to pose much threat. Kovrig and Spavor's occupations were only to assist diplomats in travelling within China but were not affiliated in any acts that threatened the Chinese government. Hence, many seem to believe that their arrests were related to Meng's and were a form of retaliation to the US.

For now, both nations have already been engaging in trade discussions to hopefully leverage the damages done to the economy. Meng has been "released" from the criminal court, but only after a posting bail of 7.5 million USD. Nevertheless, with tensions rising, it does not seem likely that tariffs will be removed.

South China Sea

Yanhe Xuan

The so-called 'nine-dash' line is an invisible boundary that lies within the South China Sea. It serves as the underlying issue that plagues China's neighbours in South East Asia and has raised questions over the rightful sovereignty of said nations. The term 'nine-dash' originates from almost a decade ago, when the PRC first designated its territorial claim in region, claiming that she had "indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and adjacent waters," being privy to both "sovereign rights and jurisdiction" (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN Secretary-General, May 7, 2009) over this region. In fact, China's assertions date back to 1958 where the nation first claimed sovereignty over the vast majority of islands in the South China Sea containing the Spratly, Paracel, Diaoyu and Dongsha Islands. Henceforth, other nations have come forward with their own overlapping claims: Vietnam with the second largest claim in the area, the Philippines maintaining their hold over the western sector of the Spratly islands, while Malaysia and Brunei also hold smaller claims bordering their respective coasts.

The most notable piece of legislation utilised by China and other nations in progressing regional claims has been the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In simple terms, it is a piece of "legal framework that governs the use of all oceans" (Beckman – Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea). The framework establishes an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that surrounds every coastal nation, taking into account the extension of said country's continental shelf and including smaller bodies of land such as islands. As per UNCLOS, 'territorial waters' of a nation are classified as a 12 nautical mile (22 kilometre) limit extending around the coast or baseline (low-water line) of said country. In this area, the claimant nation is allowed to set their own laws and harvest any resource for commercial use. The EEZ covers a much larger region of 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres). Here freedom of navigation is permitted, but the designated nation is still allowed to exploit all-natural resources located in the area. This has resulted in claims that persistently overlap with one another, leading to rising tensions between involved parties.

Despite clauses of the convention that exist to settle disputes regarding conflicting claims, the execution and implementation of these procedures have proven unsuccessful. In October 2015, the Permanent Court of Arbitration made a controversial ruling concerning a UNCLOS dispute of China's Nine-Dash Line which was contested by the Philippines. The arbitral tribunal concluded that China's 'historical claims' concerning the Nine-Dash Line were false. This decision was made with the consideration of the terms of UNCLOS, China's co-operation with other affected parties and the legitimacy of the claim itself. China's 'historical rights' were dismissed by the committee as they violated their maritime entitlements as provided in UNCLOS. The committee also clarified the convention's definitions on EEZs and islands ("naturally formed areas of land, surrounded by water, which are above water at high tide" – UNCLOS, Article 121) and decreed that China's artificial islands did not comply with the convention. Lastly, the tribunal also stated that the nation's harmful fishing activities also violated the terms of UNCLOS and their ability to contest such a claim. Despite the ruling, the decision was ignored by China and the dispute is left unresolved to this day.

One of the reasons territories within the South China Sea are so hotly contested is due to the vast abundance of resources that reside within it. The area houses over 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 7 billion barrels of oil all vital to the economic development of developing nations like Vietnam and the Philippines. Furthermore, the area is a strategic honeypot for trade and military purposes. The South China Sea's buzzing shipping ports welcome over 50% of global oil tanker shipments and provides endless opportunities for cooperation in business ventures, marine exploration and greater importation of foreign goods.

Most concerning of all, should freedom of navigation be threatened in this region, access to vital resources would be severely threatened for smaller nations like Vietnam and the Philippines which rely on importation of goods via cargo ships. It would not only endanger the livelihoods of the 1.5 billion people who live in the region, it could also provoke a larger conflict between local parties.

However, this military standoff would not be one between China and other South East Asian nations. Instead, it is a conflict between China and the United

States concerning naval power and control in the region. If the dispute revolved only around conflict over natural resources, many would suggest that the issue would have already been resolved with the arbitration of ASEAN (an international governmental organisation that facilitates political and economic co-operation between countries in South East Asia and beyond) with concessions being made to all sides and a consensus reached. This has not been the case due to the significant power struggle between both parties. China wishes to create a 'zonal defense' in the South China Sea where she would be able to deploy naval submarines and establish 'safe sanctuaries' for Chinese naval bases in the area. In essence, it keeps out any foreign interference from the US and its navy. To date, China has developed an ASMB (Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile) that has the ability to destroy US aircraft carriers and sea vessels. Fundamentally, China is definitively establishing its own 'sphere of influence' in this region and snatching Western Pacific control from the Americans. The Obama administration had rejected China's claims and has done so to maintain their commitment to their Japanese and South Korean allies as well as to sustain their remaining influence in the region.

Ultimately, the dispute has called into question the current legal procedures in place that govern and designate new areas of territory and the identity of any one rightful claimant. In addition, it highlights China's newfound interest in obtaining further international influence and strengthening its role as an economic superpower.

Reform

UN Reform

Andy Sofia

The Second World War (1939-1945) was the bloodiest conflict in history. It killed over 40 million people and displaced over 11 million people across Europe. As a result, the United Nations (UN) was established in 1945 with the goal of preventing another such conflict from happening again and foster international diplomacy. However, inherent flaws with the original UN framework and changes that our world has undergone since 1945 have left the framework paralyzed. In order for the United Nations to remain as a sustainable global institution, changes have to be made—even if it takes beyond candidness and courage.

According to Article 109 of the UN Charter, any amendment to the UN requires the approval of two-thirds of the General Assembly and the approval of all Permanent Five members to pass. This is where the problem lies at heart, making it harder than ever to dilute or even perhaps extend the number of permanent members. Therefore, the Security Council (SC) has become referred to as an echo chamber for the Permanent Five-member states, to reinforce their foreign interest.

Firstly, the SC should open up a new category of members, who serve for a much longer time. Currently the SC consist of 10 non-permanent members, elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly. A non-permanent member should have their time extended to five years, eligible for reelection. In addition, these non-permanent seats should be divided among the different geographical regions of our world. Policies implemented in the United Nations are often based on foreign interest, whereas this increase of new permanent members would assure a more global approach toward finding solutions.

Secondly, the UN needs to improve its early warning system by placing more focus on prevention and sustainability. When a global issue arises, the UN is there to 'clean up the mess,' but too often damage would have already been done. For example, UN's peacekeeping failure in Somalia genuinely reflects

the ineffectiveness of its current peacekeeping system. In 1991, the fall of President Siad Barre from power in Somalia quickly caused a power struggle that turned into a civil war. According to Britannica, the conflict caused mass starvations and escalating violence; cutting medical services, food supplies, and water sanitation systems causing mass starvations. Only in 1992 did the UN try to bring in humanitarian aid, but the presence of foreign troops in Somalia ended up escalating the violence resulting in numerous attacks on peacekeepers. The UN was fully aware that Somalia was a fragile state prone to collapse, but they did not take any action before 1992. The UN has to improve its capacity to deal with issues including environmental problems, humanitarian emergencies, and peacekeeping initiatives at faster speeds.

Although the flaws in the UN's current structure are apparent, one might argue that controversial reform to an already well-functioning institution has the risk of crumbling the entire institution at once. If unwanted change happens to the UN, countries might decide to abandon the institution altogether, which is why Article 109 still exists to maintain the status quo. However, the longer we delay reforms, the more ineffective the UN will become. The UN will grow increasingly out of place and out of sync as it fails to meet the changing demands of the 21st century with its outdated structure from 1945. Once the UN is rendered ineffective, nations will start to leave the institution. Instead, we have to challenge the status quo, and challenge leaders of the world to push through change and improvements. Before it is too late, we must venture out our selfishness and become visionaries of the ever-changing world.

Members around the world need to stand up for what's right and protect the lives of the people. As Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the UN, best puts it in his book *Interventions*: "A United Nations that serves not only states but also peoples—and becomes the forum where governments are held accountable for their behavior toward their own citizens—will earn its place in the twenty-first century."

Works Cited

Annan, Kofi A., and Nader Mousavizadeh. *Interventions: a Life in War and Peace*. Penguin Books, 2013.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Somalia Intervention." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 2 Dec. 2018, www.britannica.com/event/Somalia-intervention.

"Chapter XVIII." United Nations, United Nations, www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-xviii/index.html.

Kofi Annan and Gro Harlem Brundtland. "Opinion | Four Ideas for a Stronger U.N." The New York Times, The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/opinion/kofi-an-nan-gro-harlem-brundtland-four-ideas-for-a-stronger-un.html.

Rising Sea Levels in the Netherlands

Jasmine Huang

Thousands of lives were lost during Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. In Myanmar, 138,000 lives were lost during Cyclone Nargis. Mozambique's biggest city, Beira, was hit with a devastating Cyclone Idai. Researchers state that the combination of sea level rise and storms in only California, has the potential to displace more than half a million people and cost them \$150 billion by the end of the century. Rising Sea Levels has constantly hurt the lives of million individuals and continues to be a major threat to our entire world. However, the Netherlands have solutions to both prevent flooding, and live with it.

Over the past few years, because of the rapidly rising sea levels, the Netherlands have invested billions into preserving their land; now less than a meter above sea level. Their philosophy is now to learn how to live with water, rather than fight it. The Dutch have been finding ways to go against the rising sea levels since the 1990s, when they built the massive Maeslant Structure. The Maeslant Structure is the biggest mobile barrier in the world consisting of two steel gates, both 22 meters high and 210 meters long. The Maeslant Structure's main purpose is to protect the Rotterdam Harbour from flooding, and to control vessel traffic. The gates closing has a major impact on vessel traffic because of the time and effort it takes to close the gate. Ships are warned four hours ahead of time and the traffic

officially comes to a standstill two hours before the gates close. If there were a storm surge that reached 3 meters above the normal sea level, the docks would be flooded and then the gates would start to float, closing the river. Once they're closed, the gates become flooded, and then descend down to the bottom. The entire process of closing the gates takes about an hour. It was estimated that if the country were to be flooded, the total amount of money to pay for repairs would be 700 billion euros. Therefore, justifying the cost of the infrastructure implemented around the country to reduce flooding.

Furthermore, the Dutch not only invested money into building the Maeslant Structure, but also have been working towards building a "floating pavilion" to adjust to a flooded country. It consists of two geodesic domes that can hold about 400 people each. Basically, the pavilions floats on a base, made up of styrofoam, concrete, and high-tech cushions; and the dome is made up of massive inflated bubbles made of ultra-light plastic, similar to a balloon. Although, the creators of the floating building do admit that they're more of a "boutique solution", in a few years, with the rapid increase in sea levels, floating houses will become more and more common throughout the world. In fact, a lot of the Netherlands architects have become increasingly popular because of their creative and new ideas to adapt to rising sea levels.

Finally, the country has worked towards creating a 14-meter-high concrete wall because that's the maximum projected height of the water in the year 2060, 41 years from 2019. This cost a total of 725 million euros to build. They're also building a new kind of concept wall called a "soft seawall" that basically allows a wall to build itself naturally through the process of erosion. Along with dikes, levees, and storm surge barriers to fight against the possibility of flooding.

In 2012, millions of people believed the world was going to end because of a myth, and religious writings. A majority of the population believed that a mysterious planet was going to crash into Earth and wipe out the population; so, they scrambled for safe shelter, and tried to survive. However, Global Warming has been a threat to the human population since it was discovered in 1896; and yet, we failed to take measures to prevent it from worsening. From the 1900's to 2016 the sea level rose 16-21 centi-

meters (6.3-8.3 inches). Not only does rising sea levels cause floods, it causes the destructive erosion, and will cause agricultural soil to be contaminated with salt, fish, and other entities washing ashore; this could lead to massive famines around the world. It also causes intensified natural disasters around the world. Our world is in real danger of ending if we continue to damage the environment; however, a majority of the population still continues to. The prevention of global warming is basically impossible at this point, rather, adapting and creating ways to live with water, and on water, is the better solution; because even if all carbon emissions and greenhouses gases were reduced, the rising of sea levels would continue to rise rapidly.

Mexico's Drug War

Raag Pathak

In the late 1960's South American cartels looking to expand their business and gain market share in the US sought ways to successfully and smuggle their illegal goods into the prosperous nation. One effortless way of doing so was to use Mexico as a transshipment point due to its prime geographical and economic location for accessing American markets. When smuggling prevention efforts intensified in the state of Florida and the Caribbean nation-states, which had previously acted as the gateway to the US for Latin smugglers and relied on coastal smuggling, major drug organisations including Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel formed partnerships with Mexican traffickers to transport narcotics by land into the United States. In Mexico, it was at that point when a minor drug trafficking operation turned into a nation-wide struggle.

Today, Mexico is a major entry point of South American cocaine and Asian methamphetamines to the United States. In exchange for their trafficking services producer cartels usually give Mexican organisations 35%-50% of their to-be-smuggled yields. Over the years, this has created two formidable problems: the increased availability of drugs domestically and the wholesale of narcotics by Mexican cartels themselves.

Because of the immense amounts of money flowing across the border cartels have been able to equip themselves with advanced weaponry and employ

complex military tactics to eliminate competing cartels and win skirmishes against the state, escalating the conflict to a new level. This was especially evident in 2017 when there were over 29,000 drug-related homicides in Mexico alone.

Government corruption plays a key role in the smooth running of illegal operations. Mexican cartels tend to corrupt or intimidate law enforcement officials in exchange for their turning a blind eye towards their members and operations, targeting other cartels, or even their aiding them directly with the cartels' affairs. The most popular of these corruption strategies is 'Pax Mafioso', which guarantees a politician votes in return for not upholding the law against them.

Mexico has adopted an extreme policy against drugs, entailing military responsibility for civilian drug control and their ability to not only carry out anti-drug and public security operations but also to enforce other laws. Human rights groups have accused the military and police of committing various unethical actions such as the prolonged detention of prisoners, torture, rape, extrajudicial execution and the fabrication of evidence. There have been multiple accounts of the military imposing the law against sex workers and injection drug users in the northern border states, where such activities are, in fact, legal.

Unfortunately, the failure of the government to create a sufficient number of well-paid jobs has resulted in many lower-class people turning towards criminal organisations for money. The escalating number of Mexicans joining cartels each year has meant that the issue is unlikely to be solved even to a small extent any time soon without proper measures.

Works Cited

- Burton, Fred (May 2, 2007). "Mexico: The Price of Peace in the Cartel Wars". Stratfor Global Intelligence. Retrieved 2009-08-16.
- Cook, Colleen W. (16 October 2007). Mexico's Drug Cartels (PDF). CRS Report for Congress. Congressional Research Service. p. 7. Retrieved 10 May 2016.
- "Mexico." Drug War Facts, www.drugwarfacts.org/region/mexico.

"Mexico, U.S., Italy: The Cocaine Connection".
Stratfor Intelligence. September 18, 2008.

U.S. State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Mexico," Country Reports on Human rights Practices-2002, 31 March 2003.

Vulliamy, Ed. America: War Along the Borderline.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Human Rights & Gender

Rohingya

Arvind Emmanuel

Over 700,000 Rohingya people have been persecuted for cultural reasons, making them undoubtedly one of the most persecuted minorities in the world and have been persecuted for decades. Yet, this issue has been widely rejected or ignored by the Myanmar Government, thus leaving the Rohingyas in the helpless state that they are in. They have been stripped of their human rights and have suffered several atrocities against them. In this essay, we will explore the complicated nature of this situation.

The root cause of their persecution is faith. As the Myanmar population is up to 90% Buddhist, the main minority group are the Rohingyas with Muslim faith. The west coast of Myanmar comprises of the Rakhine state. One that is primarily made up of the Buddhist Rakhine and the Muslim Rohingya. Consequently, great tensions have built up between the two groups, leading to the oppression of the Rohingyas.

Like many religious conflicts in the past, one religious group attempts to dominate and overpower the other, so that their religion is established as the prevailing religion. With their motive to show their worship to their own deity, slightly more extreme perspectives would be that they would take all measures to ensure that their deity is the only one that is worshiped. Therefore, in their eyes, they don't see any of the human rights violations they have committed against the Rohingyas as wrong. The difference in religion is however not the driving factor of their persecution. The Rohingyas are seen almost as a foreign infestation from neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and Laos, and they have been painted and presented this way for decades. As it is their citizenship in question, the evidence that the Rohingyas have provided to prove their ancestral heritage to Myanmar has been deemed either irrelevant or lacking in validity.

This perspective is somewhat shared between not only the 52 million Buddhists in Myanmar but

also the government in authority, which is strongly supported by the military. Due to this, the government has broken human rights to tap into the veins of nationalism which support the idea that the Rohingya people belong to a foreign and distant culture and are not worthy of citizenship in Myanmar. Due to the hostility towards the Rohingyas, nearly 727,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled or have been driven out of Rakhine state, the majority of which are scattered in southeastern Bangladesh.

However, religion and cultural issues are not the only causes to the persecution of the Rohingyas. The continual ambition of Myanmar's governing military to expand their development projects has led to the wide-spread confiscation of land of many minorities across the country – regardless of ethnicity or religious status. The Rohingyas being a large minority group, occupy large amounts of land within the Rakhine State, due to this the military has forcibly displaced countless numbers of people within Rakhine, and across Myanmar's borders. More than 500 acres of village land have been expropriated, to support their extensive gold mining projects, leaving several thousand villagers without a fixed abode.

Some of the infringements on human rights include public assaults and attacks, the looting and burning down of their villages, mass killing of Rohingya civilians, gang rapes, and more forms of indescribable sexual violence. The military and local Buddhist extremists have amounted to the murders of nearly 10,000 Rohingya people, burned down 354 Rohingya villages, and committed sexual violence against the Rohingya Muslim women and girls (Human Rights Watch). The prevention of their reproduction was even attempted by the Myanmar government when they passed a law that prohibited Rohingya families from having more than two children. The persecution of the Rohingya people has been described as an ethnic cleansing - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein recently said that "elements of genocide" could be present. The United Nations has hence called for Myanmar military leaders to face genocide charges. This invasion of human rights by the military leaders has upset and angered many of the Rohingya Muslims, to the point where even Rohingya insurgent groups have been formed with purpose of upholding and promoting their rights. One of these groups is known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Their main ideology is Rohingya nationalism. The years of oppression that the Rohingyas

have suffered against the state of Myanmar, has fostered this anger and urge for revenge.

The retaliation from the ARSA and the continual acts of violence from the military powers of Myanmar further entrench the state of conflict and rife in the country. The conflict was thought to be resolved when the Myanmar military coup was overthrown by the National League for Democracy, led by Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. However, due to the still predominantly large Buddhist voting bloc supporting them, they have opted to put humanitarian exigencies before political power.

Works Cited

“Burma: Military Massacres Dozens in Rohingya Village.” Human Rights Watch, 8 Dec. 2017, www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/03/burma-military-massacres-dozens-rohingya-village.

“Burma: Rohingya Recount Killings, Rape, and Arson.” Human Rights Watch, 12 Sept. 2017, www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/21/burma-rohingya-recount-killings-rape-and-arson.

Forino, Giuseppe, et al. “Religion Is Not the Only Reason Rohingyas Are Being Forced out of Myanmar.” The Conversation, 17 Jan. 2019, theconversation.com/religion-is-not-the-only-reason-rohingyas-are-being-forced-out-of-myanmar-83726.

“Human Rights in Myanmar.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Jan. 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HumanrightsinMyanmar.

“Myanmar Military Leaders Must Face Genocide Charges – UN Report | UN News.” United Nations, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2018/08/1017802.

“Rohingya Crisis.” Human Rights Watch, www.hrw.org/tag/rohingya-crisis.

“The United Nations in 2018: Its Role in the Rohingya Crisis.” International Policy Digest, International Policy Digest, 9 Oct. 2018, intpolicydigest.org/2018/03/14/the-united-nations-in-2018-its-role-in-the-rohingya-crisis/.

Gender Gap

Lee Obersteller

The infamous gender wage gap has been a topic on people’s mind for the past 8 decades. Many bills, plans, and policies all try to combat the issue and reduce the wage gap. As of today, the Global Gender Gap score is around 68% this therefore indicates that there is still a 32% gap that needs to be filled and closed. And that for every dollar a man makes, a woman only makes 80.7 cents. Many previous attempts have been made to try and mend the wage gap; one famous example would be the Equal Pay Act signed in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy. This Act prohibited the discrimination of different genders having different wages for the same quality and quantity of work. More recently, in 2017, House Democrats brought back the legislation of the Paycheck Fairness Act.

What exactly is the Paycheck Fairness Act? The Paycheck Fairness Act was introduced in 1997 to help support the Equal Pay Act, and to supply additional clauses which would further decrease gender discrimination in the work field. There were many loopholes in the Equal Pay Act which many employers exploited in order to pay woman less money. For example, in the Equal Pay Act, it states that woman can be payed less as long as the reason has nothing to do with gender. Many employers use other excuses and reasons instead of gender to pay woman less. Furthermore, if a woman sued the company for discrimination against her gender she would only be given back pay and liquidated damages, whereas in the Paycheck Fairness Act she would be given compensatory damages as well as punitive damages. The Act would also allow women to more easily file a class-action lawsuit against her employer. This is only the tip of the iceberg on how the Paycheck Fairness Act planned to benefit the USA in terms of labour laws. When introduced in 2017, the Paycheck Fairness Act had successfully passed through the House of Representatives but was rejected by the mainly republican senate to even vote on the Act. But if the Act did pass, how would it have affected each member of firms and companies?

The Paycheck Fairness Act would affect employers and employees differently. The Act would mandate that the employer to show evidence that the wage discrepancies between the female and male worker

were unrelated to gender. For the benefit of the employee, employers could not retaliate against employees for disclosing their wage, for inquiring about how much the employer gets paid, or how the employer decides how much each employee gets paid. The employer is also more easily liable and sued through class-action lawsuits. While this may be a boon for employees, the employer would have additional administrative costs in order to fill out more paperwork and comply with stricter regulations. This may result in greater caution when employing workers; in fact, partially diminishing the benefits of the Paycheck Fairness Act for the employees.

Indeed, there are major downsides to the Paycheck Fairness Act which should not be overlooked upon review. Although it is clear that there is a wage gap, there could be many reasons as to why they exist beyond the front of discrimination. For example, if wages were based off of education, experience, responsibility and working conditions, then the wages given could be portrayed as unfair. For instance, a History Teacher who has a PhD, with 10 years of experience working a 42-hour week would be paid the same as a Surgeon who has a PhD with 10 years of experience working a 42-hour week. Because their education, experience and working condition are the same, they would be paid the same. However, surgeons go through more difficult procedures every day and go through more physical and emotion stress.

In conclusion, the Paycheck Fairness Act would be successful to employees who felt as though they have more power over how they are paid and have more knowledge on how they are paid. The Act would've made the Equal Pay Act more reliable and better with the amendment from the Paycheck Fairness Act. The only downside would be how the employers are not benefitted and are instead being given more tedious paperwork and regulations that they have to follow even if the difference in wage has nothing to do with gender.

On Argentina's Movement for Abortion

Cynthia Wang

An Argentinian 11-year-old girl by the alias "Lucía" was raped her grandmother's 65-year-old boyfriend. In January, she found out that she was pregnant. A week later, she was admitted to a hospital after a suicide attempt. She told psychologists at the hospital: "I want you to remove what the old man put inside me" (Goñi 3/1/2019).

So "Lucía" and her mother went to court. Now, Argentina has criminalized abortion since 1921 and only allows abortion on two terms. According to article 86 of the Argentine Penal Code, "abortion is not punishable by law if: one, the woman's life or health is in danger or two, if the pregnancy is the result of rape or abuse against women with mental disabilities.

Now that's all well and good. "Lucía" qualifies for both conditions and, despite the protest of Tucumán authorities, was allowed to get an abortion. But, hours before the procedure, government authorities informed the hospital to "continue with procedures necessary to attempt to save both lives," aka do not commence the abortion. This delay continued as authorities dragged on "Lucía"'s pregnancy, in an attempt to wait until she will be forced to give birth to her rapist's child. She was 23 weeks pregnant when hospital staff saved her by performing something similar to a C-section on her.

This has happened before to girls younger than her and older than her. And it's not just the problem of girls being forced to give birth: it's Argentina's abortion problem. According to the Ministry of Health of Argentina, around 500,000 illegal abortions are conducted each year. 5000 women are hospitalized per year, and anywhere between 150 to 300 women die because of complications with these unsafe and probably unsanitary abortions (Cora). In 2017, 2,493 live births were the results of rape of girls under 15 years old by family members, while 91,500 births were from girls aged 15 to 19 (Goñi 3/5/2019). The World Health Organization even commented that complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the biggest killers of 15 to 19-year-old girls. This article will discuss the attempts by NGOs

and international organizations on remedying this breaching of human rights.

Catholics for the Right to Decide Argentina (CDD Argentina) is an NGO that is, according to their website, “committed to the defense of women's rights, especially those that refer to sexuality and human reproduction, and to a life free of violence and discrimination.” In particular, it founded the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion, which is a national platform for solidarity and support for abortion. It is present in 17 of Argentina's 24 provinces, and since its beginning, there has been massive growth in participation. Now, around 300 social organizations such as human rights organizations, unions, and student organizations work in and support the campaign. From this point of view, one could observe this campaign's effectiveness in raising awareness and garnering support for a united cause. However, to analyze the effectiveness of this organization and its campaign, one must know their ultimate goal: the legalization of abortion.

In regard to achieving this goal, the campaign has, again, been effective in garnering support. It introduced green as the symbolic color for the struggle for legal abortion in Argentina, effectively raising awareness. They call for regular demonstrations as well, the most well-known one being the Pañuelazo – also known as the March with Green Handkerchief. Aside from raising awareness, this organization has presented seven bills to the Argentine Congress over the past 14 years with little success. This article will focus on the most recent 2018 bill.

The 2018 bill called for the decriminalization of abortion in all circumstances in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. The unique thing about this particular bill was that President Mauricio Macri himself called on the Congress to debate the bill. And after the Lower House narrowly passed it with 129 votes for and 125 votes against, the bill moved on to the more conservative senate. Unfortunately, with a vote of 38 for and 31 against, the bill did not pass.

Despite the failure of the many bills, CDD Argentina has made much more progress than the typical NGO – avoiding simply the usual “naming and shaming” tactic and opting to change the law instead. It also got the 2018 bill through the Lower House – a milestone feat. However, in order for this NGO's efforts to bear its fruit, there is still a long way to go

for Argentina as a whole. Fundamental beliefs must change if the legalization of abortion is to happen.

In particular, the conservative Catholic church of Argentina takes on a critical role on the local scale, defining the stakeholder of cultural relativism in this clash of flesh and belief. Being the birthplace of Pope Francis, Argentina is firmly situated upon a “save both lives” mentality, forcing girls to carry their pregnancies to term, no matter the causes. The church is even rallying further growth with a rising number of anti-abortion campaigners, especially after congress rejected the bill last year. These anti-choice campaigners were emboldened by the failure of their bill, and this sort of confidence is particularly prevalent with anti-choice doctors and government officials delaying procedures or blocking cases where abortion should be legal.

Looking at the bigger picture, CDD Argentina's campaign is a part of a larger movement called the Ni Una Menos, or Not One Less, Movement. A fourth-wave grassroots feminist movement, Ni Una Menos was started in 2015 in Argentina after the sudden surge in reports of women being brutally murdered by their male counterparts. More than 200,000 people took to the streets of Buenos Aires, voicing protest against this mass femicide. Since then, the movement has spread across a multitude of Latin American countries, particularly highlighted through public protests and demonstrations.

On a regional and international scale, however, Argentina's ratifications seem to suggest the opposite of the current situation. For example, the Organization of American States (OAS) has a convention called the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, which Argentina ratified in 1996. On international platforms, Argentina ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 and the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights in 1986. It is curious to observe the contradiction between Argentina's international relations and its internal disputes over the same topic.

Although NGOs like CDD Argentina campaign in the name of “Lucía” and thousands of girls just like her, if Argentina is to abide by the Conventions it ratified, systematic changes in opinion and belief are needed.