

T H E L O N D O N G L O B A L I S T

Annual Anthology

2023

Conflict & Contradiction Navigating an Uncertain World

China's increased economic and diplomatic presence in Latin America

The moral panic over TikTok in America

The emerging trend of minilateralism in South East Asia

The potential divergence in the United Kingdom's migrant policy with France in view of Rishi Sunak's appointment

The Cross-Channel deal and the future of Anglo-French relations

The European Union's roadmap to Ukraine's recovery

The significance of football player acquisitions by Saudi Arabia and Qatar as a fight for regional dominance

Labour shortages and anti-immigration policies in the UK, a disequilibrium

UK & Germany, a Tale of Tanks

The Role of Business Interests in the Tigray war

"Conflict and Contradiction."

The London Globalist

About

The London Globalist is a student-run international affairs magazine based at the LSE. We aim to use our writing to sharpen our own thinking, promote civic engagement, and to stimulate thoughtful, candid debate on a whole range of international political and economic matters.

We are part of the Global 21 Network, a network of international affairs magazines published in top universities around the world including Oxford, Cape Town, Jerusalem, Paris, Peking, Sydney, Toronto and Yale. The LSE chapter was established in 2010. Though we operate out of the LSE, we hope to tap into talent right across the University of London and beyond in order to get the broadest possible coverage.

For this year's topic, we bear in mind the ramifications of conflicts in a post-Covid world. With a focus on states, institutions and corporations, we're interested in how they react and interact in a world that appears increasingly multipolar, while accounting for the unique environmental, economic and political problems that affect each country over the past year. Considering the geopolitical climate, with key events such as Turkey's recent earthquake, the Northern Ireland Protocol, and climate injustice in the backdrop, to name a few - we wish to discuss conflict and confrontation: how do we address them in this changing geopolitical dynamic?

Any opinions voiced in the pieces herein reflect the personal opinions of the contributors themselves. They do not necessarily reflect positions held by the editors, by members of the society, by cited authors, or by the London School of Economics Students' Union.

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**All articles featured in The Annual Anthology have been published online. If you want to have a look at the references, please refer to the online version.*

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THE
LONDON
GLOBALIST

The Editorial Team.

The London Globalist editorial team in 2022-2023 is comprised of a group of both LSE undergraduates and postgraduates, committed to advancing the discussion of international affairs

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Editors' Notes

Turbulence seems to be dominating the current geopolitical dynamics. The looming threats posed by conflicts and contradictions has shaped the world into a state of turmoil. The fight between democracies and autocracies, the struggle between industrial development and environmental protection, and the disputes over technological races have all put the world vulnerable to uncertainty. Though headwinds and challenges persist, hope is always with human civilization. Regardless of the obstacles our international community is facing, new ideas are born every single minute to address the changing geopolitical environment. With this spirit, we hope to discuss conflicts and confrontations and the way to solve the problems in this issue. It is absolutely our privilege to have our talented correspondents and contributors sharing their insights into this topic. I would also like to acknowledge the dedication of our professional editorial board for tirelessly giving detailed feedback on the pieces. Lastly, without the support of our readers, The London Globalist will not be that successful this year. I look forward to seeing how the magazine can continue to lead a vibrant discussion on global affairs in the future.

Bosco Hung

Following a decades-long trend of globalisation, the past few years has seen the concept of multipolarity regaining prominence. With it, more than ever, geopolitics appears increasingly characterised by conflict rather than cooperation. From outright military action and unilateralism to football and aid diplomacy, the articles within this anthology explore the innumerable ways in which conflict manifests around the world. Almost inevitably, internal disagreements become an additional dimension to such conflict. At times, as the ongoing migration crisis in Europe illustrates, governments and institutions must grapple with difficult decisions that threaten to run counter to strongly professed principles which historically have offered them legitimacy. Of course, one may argue that the balancing of competing, contradicting interests is inherent to the conduct of politics, and thus deserves little discussion. Even so, as underscored by the insightful commentaries of our correspondents, the tumultuous circumstances that we find ourselves in offers no greater opportunity for introspection, to probe our passively-held beliefs, and ensure that we are better prepared for future challenges ahead.

It has been an immense privilege to be a part of the editorial team of the London Globalist this year. Their support and feedback was indispensable to the publication of this anthology. I must further extend my thanks to our correspondents and contributing writers, whose incisive discussion of global affairs remains a constant amidst uncertainty. As the new academic year approaches, I wish the best of luck to the incoming team of the London Globalist; I look forward to what new perspectives this magazine will bring.

Joseph Matthew Cheng

In examining the recent tumultuous events unfolding in France, it is increasingly apparent that they represent a vivid tableau of conflict and contradiction – the undercurrents of which pervade modern society and politics. The tragic incident and ensuing public outcry have not occurred in a vacuum; instead, they have risen from a landscape already marred by disparities and tense police-community relations. The narrative surrounding the untimely death of 17-year-old Nahël Merzouk is one steeped in contradiction. It exposes the stark contrast between a youth's ambition to flourish and a societal structure that seemingly truncates such dreams. At the same time, it brings into sharp relief the dilemma that law enforcement faces: tasked with maintaining order, yet often perceived as a source of discord. The public's response, manifesting in waves of vehement protests, further emphasizes this conflict. It is a struggle for voice and recognition, a call for justice from communities who perceive themselves as marginalized. However, it clashes with the state's pursuit of law and order, revealing a contradiction that lies at the heart of any democratic society - how to balance the scales of justice and order, freedom and security. It has been a great time working with the editorial team and my correspondents, and a huge round of applause to our contributors and everyone at The London Globalist. Last but not least, for readers, enjoy!

Yunwei Huang

The 18th century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argued that human societal progress is very much akin to the swing of a pendulum, with historical forces leading us from one extreme to another before momentum inevitably slows, landing us in some kind of middle. Whilst it is safe to say that the momentum is not slowing down by any means, 2023 may be the year where the pendulum finally begins to swing the other way. The much feared financially ruinous winter has not materialised across much of the Old Continent, thanks to broadly competent stockpiling practices and a growing reliance on alternative forms of power. Populist forces, most notably in the UK, have been put to bed, if only temporarily, as more traditional establishment figures seized the political spotlight. And arguably most importantly, most European countries are showing concrete signs of steady, if slow economic recovery in spite of the toll placed on them over the past couple of years. Not everything is rosy, of course – falling gas prices and economic recovery have been offset by crippling inflationary surges that served to remind Europeans why the United States, for its faults, remains the top dog of Western monetary policy. In addition, the moderate politicians of today will have to contend with the increasingly popular extremist right-wing factions of tomorrow. Despite it all, we have been here before, and lived to tell the tale – as long as the pendulum keeps swinging our way, this time will be no different.

Nicola Balducci



How China is taking over America's backyard – and what the US is doing about it.

Camilo Pallasco

Camilo Pallasco analyses China's increased economic and diplomatic presence in Latin America, and how the United States is looking to counteract it

In the centre of Buenos Aires, Argentina, there stands a proud modern white building with four red letters on the front: ICBC (Industrial and Commercial Bank of China). In 2012, the ICBC, owned by the Chinese state, got approval from the Central Bank of Argentina to take a more than 80% stake in Standard Bank Argentina, the first acquisition of a Latin American financial institution by a Chinese bank. This, in the eyes of many, shows just how much Chinese influence has grown in recent decades not only in Argentina, but all over the region.

China's presence in Latin America is now undeniable. In the Colombian capital, Bogota, a Chinese engineering company is building the city's metro system. In Bolivia, the giant Chinese battery company, Catl, is set to start 'the historic industrialization of lithium', a key component of the batteries in electric vehicles, the sales of which are expected to surge in upcoming years. Examples of China's establishment in South America are increasing. This has triggered serious concerns within the United States, which is troubled by its biggest rival taking hold in what has historically been its sphere of influence. The US Southern Command (a branch of the US Army overseeing American security interests in the region) has expressed its concern, stating that Beijing is "seeking to establish global logistics and basing infrastructure in our hemisphere in order to project and sustain military power at greater distance". The Chinese don't currently have any military bases in South America, with their only overseas military base being in Djibouti. However, Chinese power and influence over Latin America takes other forms: commercial influence, natural resources extracting infrastructure, and diplomatic "donations", such as Covid vaccines or public infrastructures like stadiums. What is the extent of Chinese influence in Latin America today? What are Beijing's goals? And how is the US responding?

Beijing's economic grip

To the detriment of Uncle Sam, China is becoming Latin America's most important partner. In 2019, China's total trade with Latin America represented \$316 billion. This only heralded how deeply China's industry would take root in Latin America today. For example, in Brazil and Argentina, Uber and Deliveroo are overshadowed by their competitor "99" which has been acquired by the Chinese company DiDi, who previously bought out Uber's operations in China in 2016. China's commercial strategy in Latin America is being perceived as an alternative to Western companies, selling the same, but cheaper. And it works. Not only for Didi and "99", but for any daily-use goods, ranging from cars to telecommunication. The other way around, Chinese imports from South America are worth taking into account (\$165 billion in 2020), demonstrating an intensified Sino-Latin American market.

In addition, China has also sought to develop infrastructure to extract South America's natural resources. In Ecuador, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation signed a ten-year contract allowing it to drill oil fields. As mentioned, China also recognizes the potential importance of lithium, as it vows to expand its influence, and therefore infrastructure construction in the "lithium triangle" of Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile. It is therefore not surprising that mining accounts for 27% of all Chinese investments in Latin America. Why? There are three reasons. Firstly, as an investor, China is looking to obtain dividends in the form of resources or profits once mining infrastructure is fully developed, with its strategic investments in lithium demonstrating its long-run economic ambitions. Secondly, it is possible that China expects recognition and gratitude from Latin American countries with emerging economies for helping them develop their industrial potential, translating to easier political, diplomatic and commercial concessions. Lastly, China's interest in Latin America's natural resources may have an underlying, long term political agenda. For this, "the resource curse" must be explained.

Typically, it is assumed that democratic states have a social contract with citizens, providing them a voice to govern themselves, in return for their financial contribution in the form of taxes. However, if a state finds stable income in an abundant natural resource, such as oil or lithium, it is less concerned with taxation from citizens, and therefore less incentivized to give citizens a voice. Thus, incumbents take the opportunity to expand and secure their executive powers, and in rare cases, might compensate the degrading of democracy with investments into public infrastructure to ensure the public's acquiescence, as it is the case in Singapore, where to compensate the lack of democratic voice, Lee Kuan Yew's dictatorship transformed the city-state into the "Monaco of the East".

It is therefore possible that China's important investments in the mining sector are long-term political bets, hoping to see the natural resource curse operate. This could potentially foster more autocratic regimes in the region, which China hopes would be more compliant towards Beijing's demands and expectations, at the expense of Washington.

There is an undeniable commercial dependence developing from Latin America towards China, and many fear that China is leading Latin America's emerging economies into a debt trap. For South American emerging economies, having China as a client is a reassuring and reliable source of income that contributes to domestic stability. But as decades pass, these same countries are susceptible to becoming dependent on Chinese savoir-faire for their infrastructure, primary resource extraction, and even basic goods. This dependency would make any decision from a Latin American country to distance itself from China very costly, which appears to be the plan for China.

Chequebook diplomacy

It is no secret to any foreign affairs enthusiast that China is seeking to checkmate Taiwan. In recent decades, it has been fighting to turn the last countries maintaining diplomatic relations with Taipei towards the PRC. And for this fight, the Chinese chequebook is a weapon of choice. For example, in 2016, Panama and China signed a \$900 million deal allowing the Chinese Landbridge group to build a strategic commercial port on Isla Margarita. Heavy Chinese investments in shipping and telecommunications have made Panama China's 8th largest trading partner. In exchange, Panama officially established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 2017, abandoning those with Taipei, following which, infrastructure investments by China in the country surged. The economic and infrastructural benefits of this diplomatic switch have stirred up the interest of many states, such as El Salvador. After changing its diplomatic relations towards Beijing in 2019, El Salvador received a new national library and stadium in gratitude. These "gifts" from the PRC serve two purposes: Endorsing bilateral friendships, and telling Washington that even within its traditional sphere of influence, the US can't prevent the Chinese model of international relations from prevailing.

Uncle Sam stands firm

Over the last two decades, America's attention has shifted away from South America to the Middle East, then to the South China Sea, and now Eastern Europe. This suggests that America had hoped it could count on its implicit grip over Latin America, while it was focusing on other priorities. While Latin America seems to have been somewhat neglected by the US, some small American victories in the region during recent years prove that Uncle Sam is regaining the initiative in standing firm against China's looming presence.

One major American victory took place in 2018 at the mouth of the Panama Canal, where China had definitive plans to build its embassy. This would have been a major symbolic blow for America, who built the Canal at the beginning of the 20th century and kept sovereignty on it until 1999. After immense US pressure on Panama's government, China was forced to scrap its plans. An American diplomatic source has been quoted as saying: "Of course there was pushback from the US: they weren't going to allow a huge Chinese flag next to the entrance to the canal," showing just how much importance America attaches to the region. Moreover, America proves its capability to go on the offensive, as it did with the "América Crece" (Growth in the Americas) initiative in 2018.

This initiative seeks to "catalyse private sector investment in energy and other infrastructure projects across Latin America and the Caribbean." Today, ten countries have signed agreements with the América Crece program, including El Salvador, Ecuador, and Brazil. America's financing of the South American region includes a \$2 billion investment in Honduras and Guatemala, and a long-term goal of investing \$2 trillion across Central and South America from 2020 to 2025. This initiative vows to maintain America's image as the go-to contributor to economic development in Latin America.

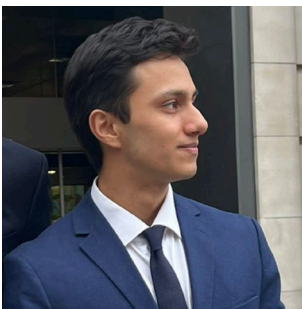
It is also worth noting the US army's involvement in the war on drugs on the continent, especially in Colombia. For more than five decades, the US army has been attempting to eradicate the drug trade. Since 2016, the United States has provided more than \$1 Billion worth of aid to fight insurgents and drug traffickers and from 2020, taking more direct action, US troops have been deployed on the ground to counter narcotraffic. Most crucially, the United States maintains a military presence all over the region not only in drug operations but also through physical bases.. In 2019, after nearly a decade of rule by the anti-US President Rafael Correa, Ecuador established friendlier relations with America, with the new President

Lenin Moreno giving the US military permission to use the Galapagos islands, which former President Rafael Correa had said “were not for gringo use”.

In addition to hard power, America holds a robust soft power that might be hard for China to undermine. In the minds of many Latin Americans, the American dream is very much alive. The United States remains an idealised land of opportunities, and the archetype of a modern society. This is partly the result of more than a century of financial aid, such as the “Alianza para el progreso” financial aid program conducted between 1961 and 1970. It vowed to spread “modernization” and ensure American ideological supremacy over the region against the Communist Soviet Union and Cuba. This aid supply has become somewhat of a tradition, and Latin American countries know they can always count on their northern ally in times of need. In any Latin American nation, the United States is omnipresent in security, commerce, culture, and politics. In many of the 33 Latin American countries, the American dream is part of the collective subconscious.

Conclusion

The current situation in Latin America resembles the Cold War fight for influence, in what seems to be a repeat of history. However, this time, America’s antagonist has established an unprecedented grip on the region, and there is little America can do to undermine it other than injecting their own funds and re-affirming diplomatic ties. The era of American-backed coups is over, meaning China has much more room to pursue its quest for global hegemony and forcing American isolation. But despite all that, cultural ties and established financial and military assistance, along with America’s diplomatic determination to safeguard its traditional sphere of influence, remain an obstacle to China’s expanding influence. Despite Beijing’s ambition and the immense economic and diplomatic means it’s employing, it seems that Washington won’t give up the fight so quickly.



Camilo is French and Ecuadorian, studying International Relations at the LSE. He is interested in politics, diplomacy and philosophy, and is an aspiring diplomat. He has been active as an intern in the United Nations office in Geneva, and at the French Embassy in Switzerland and Liechtenstein. He is mainly focused on the development of American global influence, conflicts of interests in Latin America, and French diplomacy.



Painting TikTok Red: America's Digital Cold War

Kaviesh Kinger

Kaviesh Kinger analyses the moral panic over TikTok in America as a reflection of America's anxieties about China's growing influence online

The American Dream is not only an individual, but a collective force. Built on American values of individuality, freedom and success, America assumes a rise to international hegemony by promoting its values as the world's protector. Essential to achieving this vision is its subjugation of counter-values by framing them as threats to this prophecy. The Red Scare during the Cold War is a prime example, with American contempt for the Soviet enemy's way of life. The American identity was fueled and framed by its opposition to the Soviet identity, with subsequent decisions such as testing government employee loyalty and scrutinising film productions all attempting to protect America against these values. The recent national fervour against Tik Tok in America can be understood in a similar light: as a digital Red Scare far less concerned with privacy, and more with identity.

On the 23rd of March 2023, the CEO of TikTok was welcomed into a hostile questioning of the app and its relationship to the Chinese Communist Party. TikTok is currently a bipartisan hot topic on the legislative agenda, attracting support across party lines. This interest comes after the spotting of a Chinese space balloon in the US. The supposed apprehension about China from what was assumed to be a spy operation led to Blinken postponing his plans to visit Beijing. China and the U.S have had a diplomatically strained relationship in the past, but, these recent suspicions have arguably helped flare up an American legislative conundrum over other possible methods of surveillance. Marco Rubio, a Republican American senator has thus introduced bipartisan legislation to ban TikTok from operating in the US with the Anti-Social CCP Act.

This act is not made in isolation and comes about in a wider focus Americans have been placing on TikTok. ByteDance, TikTok's parent company has come under fire for its employees tracking physical movements of reporters. ByteDance did agree to cooperate with

any official investigations, as well as having an ongoing internal investigation of their own. Those involved have been fired or resigned, but the suspicion over TikTok as a result remains prevalent in discussions of national security in America. The Biden administration has threatened a ban on TikTok unless its Chinese parent company ByteDance divest their stakes in TikTok and sell their shares in it. Allowing the U.S to freely own ByteDance shares means increasing accessibility to Chinese media firms. As a result, the U.S can gain greater control over these firms that are currently competing against previously uncontested American social media companies. While it could be that these economic means are a way of resolving security threats, it could equally be that these security threats serve as a camouflage for U.S economic interests.

Therefore, central to America's discussion of Tik Tok is a paintbrush, used to dramatically cast this app away by colouring it red. The elements of this American effort can be better understood in conjunction with the deployment of American identity. Republican Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers has described her distrust of TikTok because it does not 'embrace American values.' Building on this, Republican Representative Mike Gallagher has compared allowing TikTok to continue operating in the U.S as equivalent to letting the U.S.S.R buy up major American journalist outlets such as the Washington Post during the Cold War. Clearly, the rhetoric of this issue of digital privacy is one that has a glaring red haze, nostalgic of Cold War hostilities. The success and popularity of TikTok serves as the perfect opportunity to create moral panic, and drive support behind an issue that seems to be related to reinstating an American hegemony.

Political fear mongering is how the recent hearing was described by Democratic Representative Jamaal Bowman, opposing the efforts to ban Tik Tok. To him, these conversations are focused on 'speculation and innuendo' rather than actual concrete evidence. Indeed, Democratic Senator Michael Bennet says his concerns about TikTok are because it is 'subject to dictates from the Chinese Communist Party'. His anxiety seems to ignore that TikTok cannot be downloaded in China, with all American user data being stored only in Virginia and Singapore, a claim TikTok has made. Furthermore, TikTok and Shou Zi Chew have reiterated their plans to protect American data, especially with Project Texas. This plan would relocate all American user data to domestic servers and allow a third-party tech firm, Oracle, to scrutinise and monitor TikTok. Despite a lack of concrete proof to substantiate national security concerns, Mitt Romney, a Republican senator, has compared the aforementioned controversial air balloon to 'Chinese TikTok balloons on our phones.'

Another element of this fear mongering is related to the threat TikTok supposedly presents to children. In Chew's questioning, Republican Congressman Gus Bilirakis cited the suicide of a 16-year-old boy who had been shown self-harm content on his social media and blamed TikTok for this. Other lawmakers have described content promoting drugs and their sale on the app. Related to this, Congresswoman Democratic Kim Schier describes a generation that needs saving, presumably through the banning of TikTok. Similarly, in a press release Representative Gallagher describes TikTok as 'digital Fentanyl that's addicting Americans.' Framing issues of national security and privacy with the stories of vulnerable children helps lawmakers expand their data privacy concerns into a generational threat to the future of a nation's youth.

There is no doubt that social media has terrible consequences for youth. Some online forums have led to harmful practices such as bone smashing, hate crimes and glorifying eating disorders. The misunderstanding however lies in projecting this blame merely to TikTok,

with other social media apps being equally able to display dangerous content to teenagers. After all, social media feeds are based on concepts of algorithms which can negatively influence people on a variety of apps seen in a study of TikTok, Instagram and Youtube. Hence, banning TikTok does not serve as a solution to these issues of social media, but merely as a smokescreen for American soft power. This clear misunderstanding of social media use raises the question of whether those interrogating TikTok have the understanding necessary to be properly questioning and legislating against this issue. Discussions of pupil dilation conspiracy theories and misconceptions of Wi-Fi networks would suggest that they do not, and that this hearing lacked any proper productive potential due to this. Hence, banning TikTok does not serve as a solution to these issues of social media, but merely as a smokescreen for American soft power.

American lawmakers have thus relied upon Chinese scepticism to not only develop their project against TikTok, but fuel support behind it. An earlier article from 2019 by the New York Times describes Washington ‘reaching back into the Cold War toolbox to confront the threat (of China).’ This description is all the more relevant in today’s context, where the popularity of this app, competing with Meta, has left America possibly dumbfounded at why its technology is not reigning supreme. In resorting to such rhetoric which has been seen recently America positions itself in contrast to the surveillance Communist state that is threatening its security. By doing so, it champions the unlimited freedoms of Americanism. The ‘Red’ dynamics of this make it all the more successful in driving support. This issue has drawn bipartisan support, with 56% of Americans viewing TikTok as a Chinese national security threat. Indeed both Former-President Trump and President Biden have made attempts to ban TikTok. This can serve as a reminder that internationally America remains aggressively interested in projecting its identity, no matter how divided it remains domestically.

TikTok is thus, as Forbes describes ‘the punching bag of the day’. It is without a doubt beyond the scope of this article to ascertain whether TikTok does serve a legitimate threat to the national security of America. However, it is evident that the investigative efforts against TikTok remain far less concerned with digital privacy, protection and surveillance. Instead, they are more concerned with China, and whether TikTok is its Trojan horse intended to topple the American state. If the American concern was genuinely related to social media, then American-owned social media businesses would have also come under scrutiny of an outright ban, but have instead only been subject to calls to regulate and address their conduct. U.S mobile apps also collect sensitive data such as geolocation and device identifiers, but America’s concern strays far from this, focusing more on this ‘economic protectionism’ while ignoring its ‘underregulated U.S counterparts’ that take part in the same practices. Indeed there has been speculation that this push to ban TikTok has a commercial element to prevent a further breakdown of U.S digital monopolies such as Alphabet and Meta. This supposed hypocrisy only extends one step further when you consider that the US denounced Nigeria for banning Twitter, and Russia for its bans on technology platforms and services. This presents the paradox of American freedom, only supporting unlimited liberty if it can be derived from an American source.

In opposition to the legislative proposal to ban TikTok, there have been calls for more comprehensive user security with a consumer privacy bill. U.S data privacy laws have been accused as being old-fashioned and lack adequate restrictions. A legislature actively concerned with data privacy would instead engage in efforts to regulate all social media platforms, not just the popular Chinese ones. Representative Bowman calls for wider regulation of big-tech monopolies, allowing the people to actively make decisions on their

data. However, this arguably progressive and people-centred digital policy seems to stray far from what's on the American agenda. Instead, America's agenda is concerned with questioning the digital threats that TikTok presents to her interests. Both the answer to these doubts about TikTok and its validity remain uncertain, but what stands clear is the red paintbrush that has been used to construct them.



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Minilateralism or Multilateralism? Reflecting on the South China Sea Dispute for Southeast Asian States in 2022

Amy Lin

Amy Lin considers the emerging trend of minilateralism in South East Asia, and how it builds upon weaknesses in existing multilateral frameworks

2022 was a particularly significant year for the South China Sea dispute. Firstly, it marked the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), signed between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China in 2002. Secondly, it marked the 40th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) adopted in 1982. Yet, despite the longstanding presence of such political and legal documents, sponsored by multilateral organisations, the waters of the South China Sea remain choppy as ever. The U.S. and China continue to confront each other in the region, with several near-clashes in air and at sea, while Southeast Asian states and China have, after two decades of discussions, yet again failed to implement a Code of Conduct in the Sea. After decades of China and US-backed Southeast Asian states tussling over the territories, waters and fisheries of the South China Sea, prospects for resolution remain bleak.

Yet, 2022 also marked an important new dimension to the dispute: the rise of minilateralism. Against the backdrop of deadlocked superpower competition and the inefficacy of multilateralism, new US-led minilateral security groupings such as AUKUS and The Quad are playing an increasingly active part in the dispute. Australia, India, Japan and the EU are growing more present and vocal on the dispute. In the 12th Annual South China Sea Conference by the Center for Strategic & International Studies and the 14th South China Sea International Conference by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam—the two biggest annual academic conferences on the dispute, these countries featured often as speakers or sponsors, while the issue of minilateralism featured heavily on the agenda.

Is minilateralism the way forward? While US-led minilateralism may offer inroads in the dispute, ultimately, the impetus for a sustainable long-term solution must come from China and the littoral Southeast Asian states. To that end, it is necessary that ASEAN centrality continues to be upheld in regional security architecture.

Multilateralism: The Record

Multilateralism, defined as an alliance of multiple countries pursuing a common goal, has long been the default and go-to mechanism for resolving the South China Sea dispute. Firstly, Southeast Asian countries and the US often invoke UNCLOS to emphasise respect for international law in the South China Sea. UNCLOS is a comprehensive regime of laws for the world's seas and oceans and their resources.

In theory, drawing on this neutral mechanism should be effective as all claimant states in the South China Sea have signed and ratified the treaty. However, in reality, China has been categorically challenging UNCLOS when it conflicts with its stance. In 2016, the Philippines requested arbitration against China under Annex VII of UNCLOS. The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that China's claims to the South China Sea with its 'Nine Dash Line' was incompatible with UNCLOS and thus invalid. Yet, the Chinese government has rejected the ruling and refused to give up their claims. Given that UNCLOS is non-binding, there is little the other claimant states can do, demonstrating the limits of UNCLOS as a tool for conflict resolution.

Beyond the UN, ASEAN, the regional organisation for Southeast Asian states, has long been a major player in the dispute. Four of ASEAN member states—namely Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia—have claims in the South China Sea. Hence, ASEAN meetings provide a platform for dialogue and coordination between the Southeast Asian claimant states. Member states often issue collective statements on their positions in the South China Sea, posturing a united front against China. As early as 1992, in the wake of the China-Vietnam confrontation over resources in the Spratly Island, ASEAN issued a declaration emphasising that the dispute should be resolved by peaceful means.

The centrality of ASEAN in the dispute is a deliberate preference of Southeast Asian states. By virtue of size alone, Southeast Asian states are militarily and economically much weaker than China. Hence, the collective weight of ASEAN, as an established diplomatic community, and the principles of international law that it subscribes to lend great political strength to smaller Southeast Asian states. This prevents a 'might is right' order from prevailing in the region. In contrast, China has consistently insisted on bilateral negotiations with individual claimant states, which may be disadvantageous to Southeast Asian states given the power asymmetry. ASEAN centrality in the dispute also draws international attention to the issue. Consequently, countries outside the region may also exert moral pressure on China to abide by international law, which is beneficial to Southeast Asian states.

Arguably, the greatest contribution of ASEAN is providing a forum for dialogue and negotiations with China. Since 1999, ASEAN has been conducting discussions with China on a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. In 2002, ASEAN and China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), which paved the way for a formal code. Thereafter, ASEAN states and China have discussed the COC at ASEAN-China Senior Officials' Meetings, ASEAN Regional Forums and the ASEAN-China South China Sea Joint Working Group. The efforts of ASEAN on the COC and DOC processes are

commendable. The fact that China signed the ASEAN-sponsored agreement suggested that diplomatic tides were in ASEAN's favour and signalled a possibility of resolving the dispute through multilateral means.

However, critics may argue that the heyday of multilateralism is over. Despite the PCA ruling and ASEAN efforts, tensions in the South China Sea remain strained. Notably, the DOC is a 'soft' document without enforcement mechanisms. After 20 years of discussions, no Code has been implemented. Meanwhile, China has ramped up its assertiveness at sea in recent years, as it swarms contested reefs with its ships. Moreover, the effectiveness of ASEAN and UNCLOS is limited if Southeast Asian states are not united. For example, from 2016-2021, the Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte systematically undermined the PCA's ruling by calling it 'only a piece of paper' which he will 'throw...in a waste basket'. In the hopes of receiving more economic aid, he cozied up to the regional economic powerhouse, even declaring that the maritime dispute would be relegated to a 'backseat' during China-Philippines talks. Such cases severely undermine the united front of ASEAN and hampers multilateral efforts to resolve the South China Sea.

Minilateralism: The Solution?

Against the backdrop of the laggard progress of multilateralism, the US has been leading minilateral initiatives in the Indo-Pacific to address the dispute. In contrast to multilateralism, minilateralism offers a more targeted approach by bringing 'the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact'. The two most prominent groups are the Quad (the US, Australia, India, Japan), revived in 2017, and AUKUS (the US, the UK and Australia), launched in 2021. Unlike ASEAN, the like-minded member states of these groups find it easier to reach a united stance, impelled by a common security concern about China's rapid economic and military rise in the region.

The US is no stranger to the South China Sea dispute. Since President Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' in 2012, the US has become increasingly concerned with freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, including the South China Sea dispute. It often openly castigates China—its strategic competitor—for 'intimidation' and 'bullying' Southeast Asian states in the sea. Not only is the US vocal on the dispute, it is also physically involved. In the last decade, the US has regularly conducted Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the sea and conducted intelligence surveillance missions in the airspace overhead.

Yet, 2022 saw a new development—US-led minilateralism steadily gained momentum. Firstly, under AUKUS, a security partnership aimed at integrating defence-related science and technology, the US and the UK are helping Australia acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. This will substantially boost Australia's naval capacity. By doing so, it is hoped that Australia can provide a counter-weight to China's military power in the region and support the US militarily in the event of a US-China confrontation. As a former US Navy secretary, Richard Spencer, puts it, Australia is viewed as the 'tip of the spear' in countering China.

On one hand, AUKUS may be an effective mechanism in the dispute: Experts note that it may pressure China to 'expedite the negotiation of the code of conduct before the US has more influence in the region'. However, AUKUS also runs the risk of antagonising China. Unsurprisingly, China has reacted negatively to the security alliance, labelling AUKUS a 'threat to peace'. Moreover, China-Australia relations have deteriorated considerably as a result—2022 saw a new spate of 'unsafe encounters' between Chinese and Australian planes

over the South China Sea, pointing to rising military tensions. Rather than feeling pressured to make more concessions, it is likely that AUKUS and its military buildup has hardened China's stance in the South China Sea. Consequently, China could be even more opposed to signing a COC which it deems unfavourable to its interests in the slightest. Moreover, AUKUS may compete with ASEAN—it undertakes hard balancing against China's rise in the South China Sea, which is diametrically opposed to ASEAN's strategy of peaceful dialogue and multilateralism in resolving the South China Sea dispute.

Secondly, in 2022, the QUAD held its 4th leaders summit in Tokyo, Japan—their fourth meeting in a year. Notably, while not explicitly mentioning China, the summit was filled with thinly-veiled references to Chinese actions in the South China Sea. The joint statement affirmed members' desire for a 'peaceful settlement of disputes without resorting to threat or use of force [or] any unilateral attempt to change the status quo', and emphasised 'freedom of navigation and overflight'. Most notably, the QUAD launched the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), a maritime surveillance plan to track Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and illicit activities in the South China Sea in real-time. Although China was not directly named, experts have concurred that it is targeted at clamping down on China's illegal fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Southeast Asian countries and China's swarming of disputed waters with its maritime militia vessels.

At first blush, the Quad appears to be a bold, implicitly anti-China grouping determined to constrain China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. Some have termed the Quad the 'Asian NATO', while Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has accused the quintet of trying to 'contain China' and 'make Asia-Pacific countries serve as 'pawns' of US hegemony', adopting rhetoric reminiscent of Cold War-era superpower rivalry. There is a concern that the Quad may, or may have, escalated geopolitical competition in the region, posing an obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the South China Sea dispute.

In reality, however, the Quad is not explicitly 'anti-China' as fearmongers may like to believe. Firstly, unlike NATO, the Quad is not a formal alliance, but an informal forum. Secondly, India is not a US ally, following its longstanding foreign policy tradition of non-alliance. Finally and most crucially, the Quad also tackles other non-security issues in the region, such as its joint efforts to supply Asia with a billion Covid-19 vaccines in 2022. Moreover, in contrast to AUKUS, the Quad cooperates with and supports ASEAN centrality. For example, the Quad supports the practical implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific with its military and economic resources and routinely affirms the 'centrality and unity of ASEAN'. Hence, the Quad may be an effective supporting mechanism to contain China assertiveness in the dispute, where lawfare and multilateralism fall short.

The Way Forward?

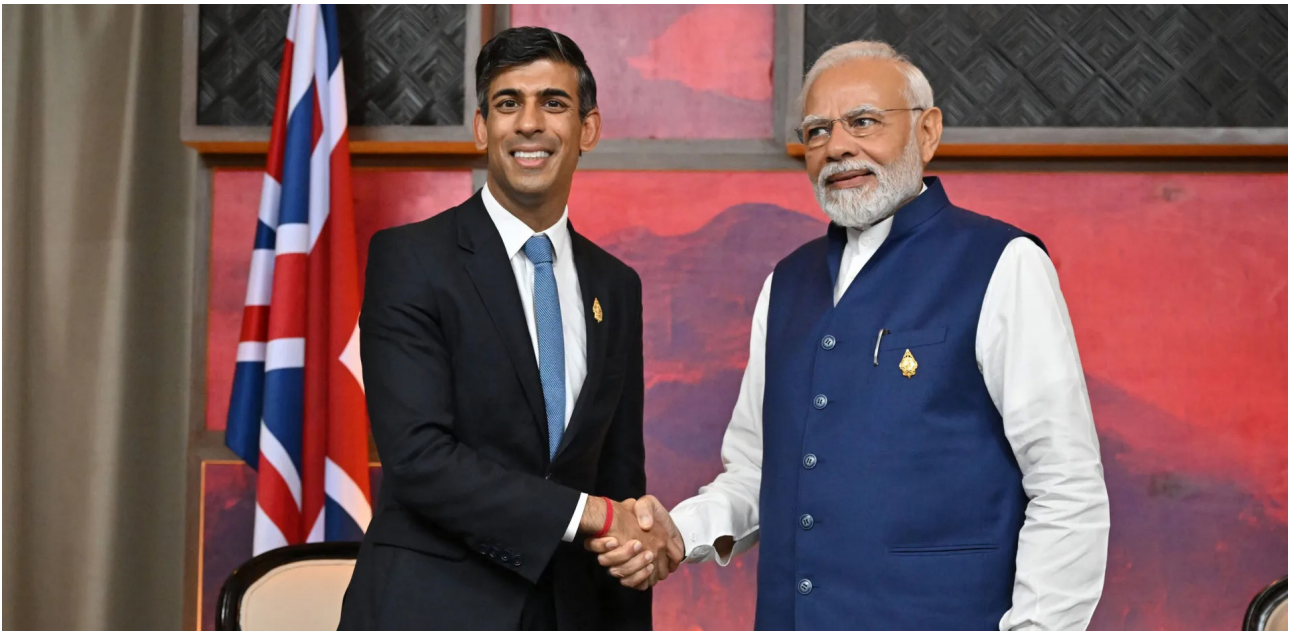
While not entirely unforeseen, 2022 has perhaps most clearly revealed the weaknesses of multilateralism in the South China Sea conflict with the rise of US-led unilateral blocs. The then-groundbreaking PCA ruling of 2016 holds little real weight in the conflict today, given China's refusal to recognise it; similarly, ASEAN faces an impasse in negotiations of a COC with China. The rise of unilateral groupings points to the fact that ASEAN institutions may not be as agile or capable to respond to the strategic challenges posed by China today, and additional solutions may be needed.

To that end, the Quad is a useful partner for ASEAN in the dispute. Given its resources, it can act as a 'strategic filler to and a strategic amplifier for existing ASEAN initiatives

and institutions' to contain Chinese assertiveness at sea. On the contrary, there is a risk that AUKUS, with its hard orientation, might overshadow and drown out the longstanding efforts of ASEAN to reach a peaceful resolution to the dispute at the negotiating table. While ASEAN may not have made as much headway as desired in the dispute resolution, states should strive to uphold an ASEAN-centric regional security architecture—the regional organisation has made laudable and hugely symbolic progress in the dispute thus far, such as in the signing of the DOC and conducting talks for the COC. More importantly, ASEAN prevents divisions within Southeast Asian littoral states, which may further hinder dispute settlement. For a sustainable long-term dispute settlement, ASEAN multilateralism must still lead the way, supplemented by minilateral arrangements that support its regional centrality.



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Identity vs Interests: Rishi Sunak’s Election and the ‘Indian’ optimism

Aishwarya Giri

Aishwarya Giri evaluates whether optimism for greater British-Indian cooperation due to Rishi Sunak’s ethnicity is misplaced in view of pressing political priorities that beset the Conservatives party.

True to the saying - “Victory has a hundred fathers”, the election of Rishi Sunak to the prime ministerial seat at Westminster witnessed a surge of celebrations that cut across the United Kingdom and featured in its former colonies like India, Pakistan, and Africa (Tanzania specifically). Twitter especially seemed to be flooded with rhetorical misplaced tweets with racist undertones such as “Rishi governing a crisis-struck England is ‘the brown man’s burden’”. Similarly, the headlines of popular news agencies in India read - “Indian son rises over the empire. History comes full circle in Britain” and “From Age of Empire to Rishi Raj as Sunak moves into no 10”. A different set of narratives lashed out at the optimistic celebration of Rishi Sunak’s election, one of them being a deleted tweet by an Indian-origin Labour MP Nadia Whittome assertively arguing that Rishi Sunak’s election “isn’t a win for Asian representation”.

True to the saying - “Victory has a hundred fathers”, the election of Rishi Sunak to the prime ministerial seat at Westminster witnessed a surge of celebrations that cut across the United Kingdom and featured in its former colonies like India, Pakistan, and Africa (Tanzania specifically). Twitter especially seemed to be flooded with rhetorical misplaced tweets with racist undertones such as “Rishi governing a crisis-struck England is ‘the brown man’s burden’”. Similarly, the headlines of popular news agencies in India read - “Indian son rises over the empire. History comes full circle in Britain” and “From Age of Empire to Rishi Raj as Sunak moves into no 10”. A different set of narratives lashed out at the optimistic celebration of Rishi Sunak’s election, one of them being a deleted tweet by an Indian-origin Labour MP Nadia Whittome assertively arguing that Rishi Sunak’s election “isn’t a win for Asian representation”.

Where do these narratives lead us, and how relevant are the questions of identity and representation in the big game of international politics? While I concur that Sunak's election is commendable to the extent that questions of 'domestic representative politics' are concerned, the ethnic origins of the PM are unlikely to have a defining role in international politics. Further, the 'Hinduness' of the PM is far from a significant factor influencing his policy stance towards India. Thus, the 'emotional euphoria' in India upon Sunak's election needs to be contained and replaced with a 'realist grasp' of the changing dynamics. To delve into the question above, one needs to go beyond the myopic view of Rishi Sunak's family history and trace the trajectory of his foreign policy developments since he assumed office.

Rishi Sunak's family migrated to East Africa from that region of undivided India that post-partition became Pakistan's domain. However, his descent has been largely traced to an Indian Punjabi belonging to the Hindu community. His parents migrated to Southampton, United Kingdom where Rishi was born making him a first-generation immigrant in the UK. Even though the Indians are overly pleased to have a British Prime Minister of Indian descent and have been claiming Sunak as 'their own', Rishi Sunak is unquestionably a British national and his concerns for Britain become clearly evident in his decisive stance favouring Brexit.

It is also striking that the Goan heritage of Ireland's Prime Minister Leo Varadkar and the Tamil heritage of Kamala Harris were not as fervently received as Rishi's. This is where the politics of religion comes into the picture. Rishi Sunak's practice of the Hindu religion and his public display of reverence to the Hindu ethics such as taking an oath upon the Bhagwad Gita, the holy book of the Hindus, on being appointed as the Chancellor of the Exchequer fit into the popular imaginations of those who equate the idea of a Hindu being a 'pure' Indian. Hence, he in comparison to his Sikh or Christian counterparts was more warmly received as he stood 'more qualified' to be seen as an Indian.

Some Indians tend to see it more than a progressive move, they believe that his descent will implicitly bear a tendency to favour his ethnic origins which will translate into friendlier and favourable foreign policy towards them. Such heartfelt optimism among Indians based solely on the reasons of similar ethnicity is incorrectly positioned. Further, extrapolating that Britain would henceforth have a friendlier stance towards South Asia owing to the ethnic similarities of the prime minister is also flawed in logic. Not only is the Prime Minister structurally constrained due to the Westminster parliamentary governance style, but his priority list at the moment comprises a set of altogether different imperatives.

A look at the UK foreign policy since Sunak assumed office reiterated the timeless realist wisdom that in the anarchical setting of international politics, national interests far more dominate a country's foreign policy manoeuvres than the ascriptive identities of the decision-makers. Sunak has largely been assumed to be a market czar but a neophyte in diplomatic circles. However, he seems to have an articulated plan for dealing with competitors abroad as he pledged an 'evolutionary' foreign policy approach mixed with 'robust pragmatism' in his first major foreign policy speech at London's Guildhall. The Ukraine war continues to get his attention, especially owing to its repercussions, with Ukrainian refugees knocking at the UK's borders and the increasing costs of the war that would prove detrimental for the UK which is already in the midst of rampant inflation. Ipso facto, Sunak in his recent visit to Ukraine has assured continued support for the embattled country in the face of Russian aggression. Sunak has also been vocal about viewing China as a 'global adversary' and a 'systemic challenge' that has to be dealt with through approaches going beyond 'short-

termism'. Further, questions about energy and climate change also occupy his concerns as evident in his address at the COP27 summit in Egypt. Sunak unequivocally emphasised the linkage between climate security and energy security, and also used the COP27 platform to launch a new program for preserving the world's forests.

India only comes to the list prior to the G20 summit at Bali. Before his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Bali, Rishi Sunak confirmed the news on living and working rights for young Indian professionals in the UK under the UK India Young Professional scheme. However, foreign policy analysts interpreted his move more as a redressal mechanism in the context of the diplomatic row sparked after Home Secretary Suella Braverman's cynical stance on Indian immigrants, that cast doubt on the anticipated trade deals between the UK and India.

Nevertheless, the narratives themselves are in a state of flux. According to some recent UK media reports, Downing Street has been considering putting limitations on dependents and foreign students pursuing "low-quality" degrees in dubious universities. Whatever the case be, his support for lowering net immigration cannot be missed, and the brunt of which will be borne by South Asian students, particularly Indians who exceeded the number of Chinese students in the UK with the year 2022 showcasing a hike of 273% in visas granted to the Indian students.

If at all India occupies an essential place in the UK foreign policy map, it has to do less with the questions of identity and ethnicity of the power holder and more with the nation's interests. There can be a realist explanation for the resurgence of close ties between the UK and India as the UK recognized the importance of India which is set to take over the G20 presidency in 2023. The signing of a Free Trade Agreement between India and the UK also influences the dynamics. The reason to woo India could also have to do with domestic politics as the minister has to consolidate his political position at home in face of difficult politics, and the role of the Indian diaspora in the UK elections is unmissable.

To conclude, the election of Sunak does have a silver lining but the Indians must not let themselves be blinded by it. As certain Indian foreign policy analysts have also noted, the election of Rishi Sunak is an achievement on the lines of representative politics in so far as it alludes to Britain's increasing accommodativeness of the aspirations of its minorities, but, in the realm of foreign policy, it is prudent that the expectations New Delhi has from Britain are touched with a sense of realism.



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The Cross-Channel deal and the future of Anglo-French relations

Ruxandra Albescu

Ruxandra Albescu explores potential for amending the United Kingdom and Frances' migrant policy after Rishi Sunak's appointment.

Relations between France and the UK have been tense following Brexit, with clashes between French President Emmanuel Macron and UK officials over a range of issues. The recent deal on Cross-Channel migration and appointment of a new British Prime Minister, whose promising relationship with Macron observers have already started to pick up on, could mark the latest stage in a rapprochement taking place between the two countries. Many have come to see this as an opportunity for resetting Anglo-French relations, which have been undermined by disputes over Brexit, AUKUS, migration and fisheries. This could usher in a new era of friendship and much-needed cooperation in light of current events, such as the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis.

Although the recent agreement marks a turning point in discussions between London and Paris, its shortcomings make it look more like a communication strategy rather than a permanent or practical solution to tackling illegal migration. As for Rishi Sunak, overcoming divergences and fostering a closer relationship with Macron might prove essential to solving the Brexit-related challenges threatening his party's performance in the next general election.

From foes and animosity to “bankers’ bromance”?

After Brexit, the growing animosity and frequent clashes between Macron and Boris Johnson, together with the 2021 fishing dispute, did not inspire hope for restabilizing relations following Brexit negotiations. Although Liz Truss declared that the “jury is out” on whether France was a “friend or foe” before becoming Prime Minister, she was urged by officials to reconcile relations. Indeed, she even attended the inaugural meeting of the European Political Community this November – the first diplomatic mission by a British PM to a major European summit since Brexit and a gesture well-received by Paris.

However, it seems like things have truly started to improve since Rishi Sunak took over. Media analysts noted the “instant bond” between the two leaders, who met last week at the COP27 conference in Egypt, and even went as far as to point out the possibility of a “beautiful bromance” between Sunak and Macron. Indeed, the similarities between the two are striking: privately educated, wealthy, investment bankers in their early 40s who worked as finance ministers before ascending to leadership and share a commitment to pragmatism and free markets.

The former British ambassador to Paris, Lord Peter Ricketts, declared that “although Macron and Sunak are miles apart on a policy level, they do have comparable styles and approaches to government”. On a superficial level, at least, it looks like the relationship between the two can work. Of course, Europe remains a topic of divergence: Macron is a fierce proponent of the EU, while Sunak is pro-Brexit. Nevertheless, after the turbulent period since Britain’s decision to leave the EU, it appears both governments have moved on and are looking to seize the opportunity for a fresh start presented by fresh leadership. Notably, the first formal UK-France joint summit in five years is planned for early 2023.

Cross-Channel Migration Deal

On the 14th of November, the two sides revealed a long-awaited deal on cross-Channel migration, after negotiations had stalled under Britain’s previous leadership. The joint statement, signed by Home Secretary Suella Braverman and French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, sets the foundations for deeper UK-French cooperation to tackle illegal migration, following a record rise in the number of people making the crossing to more than 40,000 this year. Under the revised multi-year arrangement on tackling small boat crossings, the UK will boost its financial investment to €72.2 million in 2022 to 2023 and increase the number of UK-funded officers patrolling French beaches by 40%. The self-declared objectives of this joint strategy are to make the small boat route unviable, save lives, dismantle organised crime groups and prevent and deter illegal migration in transit countries.

As part of a more integrated approach, UK officers will, for the first time, be embedded with French officers, increasing information sharing and encouraging operational cooperation. The agreement also sets out to strengthen port security by investing in cutting edge surveillance technology, including drones, detection dogs, CCTV and helicopters meant to detect and prevent crossings. The new investment will also support French reception and removal centres for migrants whose journeys to the UK are prevented. Despite acknowledging that the deal includes some breakthroughs which Britain previously resisted, Darmanin urged the UK to rethink its own migration and labour market rules and create some legal immigration avenues in order to become less attractive for illegal migrants. This comes as a consequence of Britain’s reduced ability to return migrants to European countries since Brexit, when it also left the Dublin Agreement – which allowed it to return some refugees to EU member states without considering their asylum claims.

Finally, a new task force focused on reversing the recent rise in Albanian migrants and organised crime groups will be set up. The number of Albanians arriving illegally via the Channel has increased by 43% between May and September, according to UK government figures, prompting Braverman to call the wave an “invasion” and many of the migrants, “criminals”. These accusations triggered the response of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, who criticised the UK’s “rhetoric of crime”, called for mutual respect and declared that the UK should “stop discriminating Albanians to excuse policy failures.”

Other Avenues for Cooperation

External circumstances have also brought the two countries closer together. The war in Ukraine has played an important role, with the two nations being largely in agreement over their handling of Putin. In their first phone call on October 28, Sunak and Macron talked about cooperation on nuclear energy, defence and Ukraine. Both sides also seem keen on resolving the dispute over the Northern Ireland protocol on trade. This is a promising avenue: even as Chancellor, Sunak was opposed to escalating the dispute with the EU and feared the economic damage of a trade war, while France's Macron remains one of the most hawkish European leaders on the protocol issue. Despite having voted in favour of the protocol bill in the past, which Brussels views as a clear breach of international law, Sunak has recently expressed optimism that a deal over the issue can be reached by spring. This could clear the way for more cooperation on a range of issues, including migration.

UK-France Deal: more of the same?

On his way to the G20 summit in Bali, Sunak said he was "confident" that the deal with France will help reduce the number of illegal migrants, but also acknowledged that it was only a start. However, the accord has been met with criticism by various actors. Conservative MPs have joined refugee groups and British unions in condemning the deal. The main concern relates to the lack of an arrangement for processing migrations. This means that Britain still lacks the means to send back refugees and would be slow in processing asylum applications, leaving thousands of people stuck in overcrowded migrant centres. The deal does not give UK officers the right to patrol on French territory, nor does it set a target for boat interceptions or guarantee that those stopped will be detained – a demand of many Tory backbenchers. Lucy Moreton, a professional officer at the ISU, explains that this is problematic because those individuals not processed and detained in France can simply come back and try to re-enter the country again. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer acknowledged the agreement to be a "step in the direct direction" but also expressed concerns over the asylum process.

Enver Solomon, the head of the Refugee Council, expressed worry that the deal does not pay enough attention to the factors driving people to embark on these dangerous crossings. He also noted that several migrants that are ultimately turned away are later found to have legitimate claims for asylum. Similarly, Olivier Cahn, a member of the Centre for Sociological Research on Law and Penal Institutions, highlighted that the accord fails to provide solutions for unaccompanied minors and family reunifications. A report by *Le Monde* on the ongoing judicial investigation of the November 2021 tragedy, in which 27 people died after a packed boat capsized, brought to light significant failures in the under-resourced sea rescue services. This issue is ignored in the UK-France agreement, which focuses on making the routes "unviable" instead of funding rescue forces.

Ultimately, the agreement affects very little. It does not address one of the main causes of small boat crossings: the lack of legal routes for those wishing to apply for asylum in the UK. It strikes more as a communication strategy, or a signal to prove that the UK is taking concrete steps – "more money, more equipment" - rather than an effective permanent solution to illegal migration. After all, the pressure put on Suella Braverman to tackle the issue of migration is closely linked to a separate, domestic problem. Indeed, as the next general election approaches, Tory MPs are alarmed by the prospect and the consequences of not delivering on one of the main promises of Brexit – border control. Downing Street may well be looking to reassure Conservative politicians that they will not be punished at the polls for failing to curb the number of migrants crossing the Channel. Even if for now it is mainly

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rhetoric, the deal does, at least, mark a turning point in Anglo-French relations and a break from the hostile exchanges of the past years.



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The New Marshall Plan? Europe's Designs for Ukrainian Economic Reconstruction

Tara Chandni M.

Tara Chandni explores the European Union's roadmap to Ukraine's recovery, in view of the present difficulties of the ongoing war.

In 1947, George Marshall's proposition of a reconstructive plan for the states of a fragmented, post-war Europe was certainly a novelty, yet seemingly set a precedent for global polity's management of wartime economic recovery efforts in the century to follow. The European Union's architecture of assistance in the case concerning Ukraine has, thus far, been compromised by the absence of organised mechanisms for financial aid and dispensation; but is the '21st Century's Marshall Fund' the newfound key to its structural integrity?

In its capacity of G7 Presidency, Germany played host to the most recent Berlin-Ukraine Recovery Conference on 25th October, marking a notable juncture in the EU's management of the crisis unfolding at its Eastern frontier; presently entering its ninth month. Convening an assembly of experts, senior institutional representatives and academics, the forum aimed to present international perspectives on the logistical dimensions of recovery processes. Within their respective addresses, EU President Ursula von der Leyen and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz outlined Europe's vision for a post-war Ukraine, emphasising the role of global community support while expanding upon the principles of cooperation and democratic concord accepted at the Swiss Lugano Reconstruction Conference in early July.

Characterised by 'catch-all' guarantees of international support and vehement assertions of European collective security, the Recovery Conference was set to proceed congruent with the tone of antecedent summits on the Ukrainian question. However, with designs for the formal establishment of a 'coordinated donor platform', likened by Scholz to "a new Marshall Plan of the 21st century", came renewed emphasis on tangible and organised measures for the revival of the national economy and infrastructure. Conjoined damage assessments

conducted by the World Bank and EU Commission placed the cost of such an endeavour at an approximate \$350 billion, further accounting for \$97 billion in physical damage sustained between February and June 2022. Consequently, the practicalities of financial resource mobilisation occupied a position of centrality within the rehabilitation dialogue.

Interestingly, and converse to its historical counterpart, the operational premise of Europe's 'New Marshall Plan' is multilateral aid, distinguishable from previous attempts at similar international collaboration by virtue of the ambitious scale of its organisation. The contemporary Euro-Marshall Plan aims to mitigate, to the greatest extent achievable, the principal limitations of Marshall's original programme of U.S. financial support. With significant provisions for improved functionality, the importance of an inclusive donor body composed of both private and public sector stakeholders was emphasised during a thematic panel discussion.

Following seldom expressed murmurs of consternation in the capitals of Western Europe, panellists proposed a series of counter-corruption apparatuses ensuring adherence to legitimate practices in the exercise of aid. In the interest of a transparent and 'rule-of law' based sovereign restitution process, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in attendance virtually, conceded 75% membership of the proposed reconstruction fund's advisory board to donor states. Although curtailing Ukrainian ownership, such an allowance conduces a well-delineated distribution of accountability, namely one proving ostensibly consistent with the Conference's 'good governance' agenda.

Presumably, the framework for economic stabilisation is to be launched by the G7, its institutional anchor, in collaboration with the Euro-American partnership, all the while remaining heavily reliant on the support of international financial institutions (IFIs). These IFI's, identified by von der Leyen as the European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are to constitute the fiscal core of the enterprise. The resultant donor platform would effectively formalise a highly regulated mechanism of co-operation, aligned with the strategic and humanitarian interests of partner states.

Despite clarifications of the program's 'preparational' intent to serve as the foundation for Ukraine's future membership to the EU, the initiative invites questions of empirical efficacy and credible substitution. Simply expressed, should designs for reconstructive measures precede or replace initiatives for 'hard-power' wartime assistance? Or, is it prudent to initiate an extensive reconstruction programme when a state remains very much embroiled in conflict, with resolution as yet elusive?

Among the EU cadre there appears to exist a resignation to the reality that such a scheme is a protracted initiative, with Chancellor Scholtz recognising the undertaking as one that shall "take generations" to fulfil. While comparatively, the provision of arms to the ends of defensive capability enhancement would be a palpably utilitarian solution, a rehabilitation programme remains a tactical necessity to ensure the sustenance of Ukraine's economic infrastructure. In this manner, complete subsidence under the pressures of what may, in several regards, be likened to a regional war of attrition, is allayed. It is therefore possible to interpret the donor platform proposal in the context of the long-term reconstitution of Ukraine as a sovereign state, which regardless of comparative efficacy, remains a significant measure in its own right.

It can be surmised, therefore, that Europe's very own Marshall Plan is something of a

‘premature’ operation within the broader agenda of Ukrainian integration into the Brussels bureaucracy. Nevertheless, it remains a crucial development in the context of global economic stability mechanisms, namely those that extend beyond the objective of immediate relief in armed-conflict scenarios. The outcome of October’s Berlin-Ukraine Recovery Conference is set to inform bilateral, European, and multilateral discussions with Ukrainian officials as strategic assistance continues to materialise. Policy recommendations precipitated by Berlin’s special panellist discussions are liable to resurface at the 2023 Ukraine Recovery Conference hosted by the United Kingdom, where definitive commitments are all but presupposed.



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Football Feud: The New Front of the Gulf Cold War

Lok Chan

Lok Chan analyses the significance of football player acquisitions by Saudi Arabia and Qatar as a fight for regional dominance in an increasingly multipolar world through cultural soft power

Half a year ago, the Arab World made history thrice: Qatar's historic hosting of the World Cup, Saudi Arabia's historic defeat of the champions-to-be Argentina, and Morocco's historic entry into the semi-finals over the dead bodies of Portugal and Spain. Who cares about the Messi-Ronaldo rivalry when the Arab World defeated them both? Carrying on the momentum, in 2023, the stature of Middle Eastern football has appeared to reach its zenith to date. Ronaldo has moved to Saudi Arabia to join Al-Nassr, as has Benzema who is now playing for Al-Nassr's rival Al-Ittihad. Messi has turned down the wooing of another rival Al-Hilal, but the Saudi club is not easily giving up and has raised their offer to an eye-watering €1.5 billion. If Al-Hilal had their way, the Saudi League, incomparable in prestige to its European counterparts, would, for the first time, see three Ballon d'Or winners playing against each other.

What is unfolding in Saudi Arabia is a new battle against Qatar in their prolonged cold war. Whilst both are Sunni absolute monarchies allied to the US, they embody opposite values – Saudi Arabia is the leading status quo power of the Middle East, whereas Qatar is prominently revisionist. Over the decades, Qatar has projected a disproportionately huge power, given her size, over the Islamic world through Al Jazeera, the world's most influential Arabic news network owned by Doha, which Riyadh and allies criticised as Qatari propaganda directed against their regimes. Al Jazeera, the Saudis believe, has been used by Doha to catalyse the Arab Spring, which saw the collapse of Saudi allies such as the Tunisian and Egyptian strongmen Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. The Saudis also allege that Qatar has been plotting to overturn regional stability by sponsoring terrorism and supporting the expansion of Shia-Iranian presence. There is also a material dimension

to their rift: Saudi Arabia is an oil power, whereas Qatar is a gas power; it is reasonable that neighbours who amass their wealth through substitute goods will not enjoy good relations. Moreover, Qatar's dependence on gas has led her to cooperate with the Saudis' nemesis Iran, with whom she shares the world's largest gas field. It was therefore no surprise when Saudi Arabia, teaming up with the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain, put Qatar in her worst diplomatic crisis in 2017 by severing relations with and blockading her, whose only land border is shared with the Saudis. It took nearly four years for the US and Kuwait to broker a deal which brought Qatar back from the cold. Qatar would go on to host the 2022 World Cup, which Doha had dedicated to Arab and world unity during its 2009-10 bid. Doha's hopes unexpectedly came true when the Arab World overcame internal divisions and celebrated for the Saudi and Moroccan teams as they won surprise victories against established rivals.

As the World Cup concluded, Saudi Arabia began to ramp up efforts in boosting her football profile as the Saudi clubs' serial purchases of Ronaldo, Benzema, Ruben Neves, and N'Golo Kanté occupy international headlines. It was not the success of Qatar's World Cup that inspired Riyadh to wage its war against Doha with football – it had made major moves such as acquiring and reinventing the Premier League club Newcastle before it heard the claps in Qatar. But Pan-Arab cheers certainly consolidated Riyadh's belief in the political effect of sports. Against the growing trend of territorialisation as Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco rushed to recognise and embrace their pre-Arab Pharaonic and Berber heritages, football proved successful in fostering reconciliation of a divided house and resurgence of a once-dreamed-of Pan-Arab identity which Hussein bin Ali, Nasser, and numerous other leaders worked hard to forge and nonetheless failed. This marvel of sports, coupled with the landmark reinstatement of Bashar al-Assad's Syria to the Arab League, created the best conditions for Pan-Arabism to regain ground in Arab politics. In turn, this poses an opportunity to take up leadership of the united Arab bloc, one that can well develop into leadership of a new pole in an increasingly multipolar world and one that Saudi Arabia cannot afford losing to Qatar. If football is glue for the scattered Arab shards, Riyadh desperately needs to emerge as the football power to reassert its loom over them, which it had historically maintained through its Custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques, but now finds the importance of this sacred role eclipsed by Doha's secular custodianship of the most important national football competition in the world.

Geopolitics explain why Al-Nassr was willing to pay €200 million for an aging, maybe-not-so-helpful Cristiano Ronaldo. Failing to save his club from the embarrassing dethronement by Al-Ittihad, the forward might have passed his prime in the football stadium. But to Al-Nassr's controller Mohammed bin Salman, he remains a valuable asset in the international stadium against his true enemy, Qatar, against whom the crown prince is so willing to spend money. While Al-Nassr denied the widespread rumour that Ronaldo's contract includes a clause obliging him to be the ambassador for Saudi Arabia's World Cup endeavour, it is undeniable the Portuguese star's arrival in the kingdom injected a huge boost to her football standing and soft power, a front on which she had previously not possessed the slightest chance to trump over her rebellious neighbour.

Qatar had been a forerunner in football investments. Emirs Hamid bin Khalifa and Tamim bin Hamid Al Thani have been investing heavily in eleventh-time Ligue 1 champions Paris Saint-Germain since 2011, which operated with an unprecedented cost of €1 billion in 2022 and gathered Mbappé, Neymar, and Messi, three of the world's most renowned and expensive players. The Qatari royal Abdullah Al Thani also owns the La Liga club Málaga. Perhaps sensing the Saudi threat, the emir's brother Jassim is now in discussion of taking over

Manchester United, one of England's best clubs.

Yet despite its counter-efforts, the football empire Doha paid heavily to build is likely to be dwarfed by Riyadh's very own one, which transcends its Qatari predecessor by breaking free of its Eurocentric ontology. While Qatari money is primarily poured into the traditional European leagues, the Saudi war chest is dedicated to the construction of a rival league of her own – Mohammed bin Salman has earmarked \$3 billion per year for the development of the Saudi League and, in particular, four select teams: Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal, Al-Ittihad, and Al-Ahli. Breaking free of the mindset that prestigious football must be European, Riyadh is guided by the vision to elevate its domestic football to, or even have it surpass, the calibre of Europe. In this sense, Saudi Arabia is far more ambitious and strategic than Qatar. The Arab states did produce world-renowned players in the past such as the Egyptian Mohamed Salah, but they were all lost to European clubs. What Mohammed bin Salman is doing now is to prevent such losses by transforming Riyadh into the Baghdad of football, a 'core' that Arabs from the Maghrebi and Levantine peripheries would orbit around when it comes to football. Thus, by bidding for a dominion over Arab football that can parallel that of European football, Saudi Arabia is, in fact, bidding for a dominion over the Arab World that can parallel the established poles of the world, namely the US, BRICS, and the European Union. As the glory of all Arabs – in the realm of football and beyond – is now vested in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia checkmates Qatar with the very strategy she introduced to the Arab World.

This tactic Riyadh employs is no stranger to history. A popular outlet of nationalist sentiments, football has always been at the forefront of identity politics. In Argentina's famous 1986 match against England, the legendary Diego Maradona became the embodiment of the Argentine nation. Scoring the two goals which dictated Argentina's victory, one of which was a handball, he took symbolic revenge on whom the Argentines believed were aggressors that occupied their Malvinas (Falklands). What ought to be booed as cheating is, until now, lauded by the Argentines and sympathisers as the Hand of God. Sometimes football politics go beyond the stadium. The 1970 World Cup qualifier served as an immediate spark of the Football War between El Salvador and Honduras, who fought first on the grass field then on the battlefield. All these are enabled by football's magic of uniting and dividing, and it was this enchantment that caught the crown prince's eyes.

It is almost certain that more and more players and managers will be lured by the crown prince with his oil money to flock to Saudi Arabia. Ronaldo and Benzema were only the first shots of a perhaps decade-long fight for soft power and cultural supremacy between two rivals who both possess huge piles of fuel cash to fuel their war machines. In the meantime, Ronaldo fans should sincerely hope that the Saudis prevail over Qatar. If things ended up like the star's final season with United, publicly calling out the king on Saudi television would probably result in more than a dishonourable exit from the club and the continent.



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UK & Germany, a Tale of Tanks

Aidan Cross

Aidan Cross compares the political will for providing ‘offensive’ aid to Ukraine by the United Kingdom and Germany

On the 17th of January, the UK broke a precedent in how Western aid had been characterised since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, as it was announced that 14 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks (MBT) would be supplied to assist Ukrainian efforts against Russia. While the actual military and strategic value of this decision is expected to be low, the political impact and subsequent pressure on countries who were yet to send tanks has been significant. Most notably, this decision went in stark contrast to Germany’s policy of resisting Ukraine’s request for Leopard 2 tanks, with the monumental increased political pressure following the UK’s decision eventually forcing Germany to relent. Though Germany did initially waive export controls to allow other countries, such as Poland, to supply their own Leopard 2s, it was only on the 25th of January that the country announced that it too would supply tanks, authorising the provision of 14 Leopard 2s.

By the end of January, the UK and Germany, both of whom had originally opposed sending tanks to Ukraine, began to reverse that policy. Yet, the circumstances which facilitated these shifts in policy differ, with the UK spearheading this move for Western tank supplies, and Germany remaining stubborn until political pressure forced the government to relent. Therefore, it must be asked: What caused this difference in approaches?

The UK has consistently voiced support for sending further assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia’s ‘Special Military Operation’ in February 2022, and the country’s recent decision is a notable expression of this stance. Though it had initially joined Germany in refusing to provide tanks to Ukraine, as both were concerned about escalating tensions with Russia, with the conflict dragging on the UK has become more confident and willing to supply Ukraine with more advanced weaponry. However, the decision to send 14 Challenger 2 MBTs has not been met without controversy. Following the announcement, British Army

General Sir Patrick Sanders stated in an interview with the BBC that while Ukraine would put them to ‘good use’, the decision had ‘temporarily weakened’ the British military. Furthermore, Civitas’ Director of Defence and Security Robert Clark raised the issue that sending Challenger 2s would give Russia the opportunity to capture them, thus gaining vital military intelligence against Britain.

Despite this, the UK has stuck to its commitments. There are of course many assumptions to be made to explain why the country has decided to break this precedent in Western lethal aid, but the persuasive one is that the UK expected that by providing these MBTs, other nations would have to follow suit. At present, this has proven true, with the West giving Ukraine the opportunity to launch an effective counteroffensive using advanced equipment. For the UK, which has committed much towards the war effort, it is important for Ukraine to achieve victories against Russia, especially as concerns rise over its gains in Bakhmut and Vuhledar - battles which have been raging for months. The policy goal stems from the dire domestic situation in the UK. Amid threats of recession, waves of trade union strike actions, and a NHS crisis, the Government needs a success to serve as a distraction. Much like how the Russian withdrawal from Izyum and Kherson city was viewed as a victory for Ukraine and its allies, including the UK, a significant military success against Russia may provide the Government with the boost in popularity it needs.

So far, it seems that the UK Government has succeeded in the gamble that by taking the initiative, it would pressure fellow Western allies to join the aid effort. With Ukraine now receiving tanks from the UK, Poland, Germany and the US, the political and military consequences for both the British government and the general conflict remains to be seen.

Germany has been far more risk-averse than the UK. While the nation has been one of the largest suppliers of arms to Ukraine’s war effort, it has frequently been accused of ‘dragging its feet’ when it comes to providing more advanced military equipment. Though Germany has decided to send Leopard 2s to Ukraine, prior to this its government stated that any shipments would be dependent on the US also sending tanks, specifically the Abrams, a condition that was eventually fulfilled. Yet with this in mind, this entire ordeal has demonstrated how Germany views the conflict in a very different light than the UK, as unlike the British, there remains concerns within the country about further escalation against Russia. This is in part due to the complicated relationship between the two nations. While Germany has managed to end its dependence on Russian energy, there still remains great scepticism on siding overtly with the US against Russia, especially when it comes to the matter of how and what assistance should be provided to Ukraine. Germany, of course, is not alone in this concern, with France having accused the US of profiting from the war amidst severe economic ills in Europe months prior to the current tank predicament.

Germany's concerns, however, primarily stem from the memories of the Second World War. For many citizens, sending tanks to fight Russia in Ukraine is a ‘red line’, and is subject to notable opposition. Opinion polls have found that 45% of Germans do not wish to provide this form of aid, due to both the risk of direct confrontation with Russia, as well as a dislike of the idea of German weapons being used in World War 2 hotspots. For many German voters, there is a consistent hope for the ‘peace option’ and avoiding escalation. There is concern that sending tanks would simply further the violence, without fundamentally ‘altering the course of the war’, as explained by German Foreign Policy Expert, Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff of the German Marshall Fund (GMF). Within the Bundestag itself, this opposition is apparent - prior to the decision to send tanks, Petr Bystron of the Alternative

für Deutschland (AfD) party stated that “The result [of sending German tanks in WW2] was immense suffering, millions of casualties on both sides and, eventually, Russian tanks came here, to Berlin.”

Ukraine will ultimately receive tanks from both the UK and Germany, regardless of how either nation goes about making the decision, and while US President Joe Biden has called this a ‘united effort’, it is difficult to view the European nations as being on the same footing. In eagerly taking the initiative, the UK has seized a leadership position on the issue. Germany, however, has only acted following considerable external pressure, only to be met with sizable domestic opposition. This ordeal has made it clear that the provision of arms to Ukraine is not a cut-and-dry issue across the Western world.



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Labour shortages and anti-immigration policies in the UK, a disequilibrium

Lavinia Pilosu

Lavinia Pilosu discusses the Conservative Party's anti-immigration policy in tandem with existing labour market shortages in the United Kingdom

On the 12th of January 2023, the House of Commons was called upon to address the controversial debate surrounding skills and labour shortage in the UK. There is no universal definition for these just as there is no single cause or solution to them. The economists Blank and Stigler described labour shortages as occurring when “(...) the number of workers available (the supply) increases less rapidly than the number demanded at the salaries paid in the recent past”. This issue is not new, but the volume of discussion around it is unprecedented. Indeed, on the 10th of January 2023, the European Commission met with representatives from Member States in Brussels to launch the new Labour Migration Platform. By bringing together policy specialists from the migration and employment sectors, the initiative aims to promote partnerships with third countries in the hopes of attracting new “talents”. The alarming trend of a declining working-age population has been on the agenda of European policymakers for years. Following Brexit, however, the Europeans’ cooperation is not something the UK will be able to benefit from. The British government will have to develop its own strategy to solve this chronic labour market shortage amid challenges presented by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, the latter of which has resulted in over 1.3 million workers leaving the country.

In the presence of labour shortages, migration can be an effective strategy to replenish the labour force. Employers usually welcome this option as it prevents them from being bound by the stricter national preferences on wages and employment conditions. However, despite skyrocketing numbers of visa applications from non-EU citizens, the UK Government expressly decided against relying on migration to mend their labour shortages. Indeed, the Government is actively looking to restrict migration. From a certain economic perspective, this seems oddly placed, as more liberal policies regarding immigration would benefit not

only the most affected sectors of the economy by filling vacancies, stimulating the overall demand and potentially reducing inflation, but they would also play an important role in the socioeconomic integration of migrants. Current legislation, for instance, forbids access to the labour market for refugees and asylum seekers for a period of 12 months upon arrival, leading to serious long-term impacts on their inclusion and well-being. Based on the recommendation of the Government's own Migratory Advisory Committee, migrants and asylum seekers should be considered a valuable resource considering the precarious conditions of the UK labour market. Instead, the UK Government chooses to keep potential workers inactive and reliant on the welfare system. This is troublesome, given that the HM Treasury could save as much as £650 million by allowing asylum seekers to find employment, as estimated by Helen Dempster et al. This hostility towards immigration has recently manifested as the "Stop the Boats" Bill issued by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, which aimed to prevent undocumented migrants from reaching the country via small boats. The political will to contain low-skilled immigration is often attributed to the attempt to avoid downward pressures on wages that would risk spurring conflict between immigrants and locals. However, according to recent statistics, some sectors particularly badly hit by labour shortages, such as manufacturing and construction, have seen a steep rise in the wages offered to fill the vacancies. Nevertheless, the problem persists as British workers appear largely uninterested in taking up these jobs, regardless of the higher wages on offer.

Asylum seekers and low-skilled workers are not the only targets of the Government's stringent migration measures. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced his intention to clamp down on student visas after issued numbers peaked in 2022. The Government's goal is to reduce the number of international students taking vaguely defined "low-quality" university courses. Whilst such a move would typically aim to assuage domestic concerns over more competitive foreign labour, the Government is facing strong criticism from human rights activists and business groups to loosen migration policies with the aim of revitalising labour markets. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, nevertheless, adheres firmly to the fundamental principles of Brexit: to curb net migration and take back control over the British borders. To show his commitment to this political goal, he is considering other options to address labour shortages, ranging from the provision of incentives for the over-50s to resume work to providing training to transfer the necessary skills demanded by the affected sectors.

The main issue with this narrative is that the primary causes of labour shortages can be difficult to identify, and even more difficult to resolve in an appropriate time frame. Training and upskilling programmes aimed at providing local staff with the required skills can take substantial time. In this context, government intervention becomes crucial to alleviate an already critical situation, especially in light of the social and economic consequences stemming from recent shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit.

This indiscriminate opposition to migration as a potential option within a broader set of measures for an effective economic recovery benefits nobody and is proven to be financially inconvenient. This is especially the case given the high numbers of asylum seekers already in the UK willing to fill the labour shortage and start building their life as an active part of British society. Among the last set of anti-immigration policies that the Government has launched in recent weeks, there is Operation Brycem, aimed at preventing any migrant worker without a regular permit from being employed. On the 2nd of March, the Home Office arrested six undocumented migrants operating as domestic workers within the care sector, one of the most understaffed sectors in the UK. What we are witnessing is an example of how political discourses and practices can distract from the tangible policy problems that

the UK Government is currently struggling to cope with. This dynamic is likely doomed to last as long as the ultimate priority is going to be electoral power over British economic recovery. The lack of inventiveness and openness towards new solutions risks fuelling concerns and the negative sentiments characterising what former leader of the Labour Party Lord Neil Kinnock deemed this “age of anxiety” even further.



Lavinia Pilosu is enrolled in the MSc in International Migration and Public Policy at LSE, where she has been specialising in European migration policies. Previous to her studies at LSE, Lavinia obtained a Master’s Degree in Resource Economics and Sustainable Development from the University of Bologna, and worked as a project manager with a focus on EU-funded programmes for private and public bodies. Meanwhile, Lavinia’s passion for the humanitarian sector brought her to participate in multiple projects to support refugees and migrants in Italy, Greece and Turkey.



The Role of Business Interests in the Tigray war

Daniel Calero Torres

Daniel Calero evaluates the involvement of local and international corporations in the Tigray war

The conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is estimated to have caused the deaths of up to more than half a million people, according to academics of the University of Ghent (2023), and led to a humanitarian crisis with 875,000 refugees leaving the country according to the UNHCR, in just two years of fighting. It has also caused immense economic damage, estimated at \$20 billion, mainly destroying the industrial infrastructure of this northern province. The war was consequential to multiple tensions between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a political party that ruled the country from 1991 to 2018 after the election of the current Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The BBC report points to several causes of the war, such as ethnic grievances, the political interest of the TPLF in regaining federal authority, the power struggle between the TPLF and the federal government over controlling the Tigray region or the ideological differences between both sides on the peace process with Eritrea, which led to the separation of the TPLF from the ruling coalition. However, a constantly overlooked element behind this conflict is the influence of business groups interested in local resources. Despite their role in the war, analyses of this war rarely address the impact of these non-state actors. Therefore, this article evidences the role of local and international corporations as players in the conflict through instruments like financing both sides and lobbying for the intervention of foreign powers. Likewise, the article aims to show the relevance of taking these actors into account in the post-conflict context and the reconstruction of the region for an actual peace-building process in Ethiopia. In this way, the following paragraphs present three instances where business groups influenced the war in Tigray.

Firstly, to understand the origin of the conflict, it is imperative to mention the influence of the business conglomerate Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), as the biggest company in Ethiopia. While state-owned companies dominate the economy

through key sectors like telecommunications and banking, EFFORT stands out for clustering 34 private companies from diverse industries such as construction, pharmaceuticals, agribusiness and mining with a value of more than \$3 billion. This corporation was born in 1995 as a non-profit and non-governmental endowment fund that sought to invest in the reconstruction and industrialisation of the Tigray region after the destruction of the civil war. According to the research of Sarah Vaughan and Mesfin Gebremichae, EFFORT was founded by “16 central committee members of the TPLF’s senior leadership, and nine other non-fighters, peasants and mass association members from different parts of Tigray”, showing its close connection to the TPLF party. A linkage that remains to this day, as “TPLF officials are still board members of the major companies under this conglomerate”. This conglomerate permitted the Tigrayan ethnic elite to dominate the Ethiopian private sector, a dominance challenged by the change of government in 2018 with Prime Minister Ahmed from the Oromo province. Since his rise to power and the rupture with the TPLF, public investment in other regions has increased, reducing the money that benefited EFFORT for many years. Likewise, the business of the Tigray region suffered from an increasing marginalisation of credits from the public banks, which are the only option for funding in Ethiopia. These changes prompted EFFORT leaders, including non-TPLF members, to support and finance the Tigrayan militia in the war. Therefore, “the federal government has taken particularly strong measures against EFFORT and its subsidiaries, most notably by freezing their accounts and assets”, showing that these funds were essential to finance the rebel militia.

Another economic change launched by the new government that angered the Tigray business elite, but attracted the interest of local and international firms, is the reform of the Ethiopian land policy. The TPLF-led Constitution of 1994 placed land under public ownership, allowing the government to, just between 2008 and 2011, “lease at least 3.6 million hectares” to local and foreign investors in the Southern-peripheral but fertile regions of Gambella, Afar, Somali, and Benishangul-Gumuz. In the process, the business elite of Tigray accumulated the majority of the most fertile land, as were investors from regime-allied countries. According to Samson Berhane, “the government’s monopoly on the property and the strong relationships between politicians, business partners, and banks have turned real estate into a haven for money laundering and corruption, while the majority of Ethiopians continue to be evicted and landless”. In response, PM Ahmed launched several land redistribution programmes handing over properties to local groups, especially in the Oromo and Amhara regions, the main ethnic groups of Ethiopia. Likewise, the government has discussed privatising land use, allowing foreign investors to purchase thousands of fertile hectares. A proposal that has gained prominence with the conflict, where the government confiscated properties of Tigrayan business groups across Ethiopia. Therefore, the increase in fertile land available for investment attracted the interest of foreign companies, who influenced their governments to approach PM Ahmed. For instance, multiple Turkish firms lobbied the government to provide the Ethiopian federal regime with drones in the war, aiming to increase its presence in a post-conflict context.

Moreover, business interests had a relevant role in this war by influencing the position of the United States towards the conflict. The main actions of the US were to actively advocate for a peaceful resolution by pressuring its regional allies, supporting the people of Tigray with humanitarian aid and condemning war crimes. However, more surprisingly, the US government did not provide the Ethiopian government with military support, nor did it condemn the rebellion in Tigray. In fact, the Biden administration sanctioned several Ethiopian and Eritrean officials over their involvement in the conflict and opposed the blockade of humanitarian aid to the Tigray region by the federal government. This policy

may bear the influence of business interests, as among the actors lobbying the US Senate on the Tigray war, it is noted that “Rep. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) is lobbying on support for US humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia via Black Diamond Strategies on behalf of JM International, a real estate development and petroleum distribution company based in northern Virginia”. In this regard, it should be noted that “the Tigray region (...) has, in particular, huge deposits of oil shale”. Therefore, there was an evident interest of the company JM International in ending the conflict due to the presence of petroleum in this region. Similarly, the president of the American Apparel and Footwear Association, Steve Lamar, addressed a letter to PM Abiy in October 2021, emphasising that:

“the humanitarian crisis must be solved and those who can best bring aid and relief need critical access. The ongoing violence and strife need to be replaced by a ceasefire and talks from all sides that can lay the basis for a lasting peace”

The US multinational PVH, whose brands include Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, echoed this position in an official statement after the conflict, as one of the companies that have invested in Ethiopia taking advantage of the duty-free status of the country under the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The interest of these companies led the US government to take an active position in the peace process, putting pressure on regional allies, such as Kenya, and organising secret meetings between both sides to reach a peaceful resolution.

To conclude, the presence of business interests in the Tigray conflict was evident at various stages, from its causes to the intervention of foreign powers in the peace process. Moreover, the companies that played a role in this war were not limited to Ethiopian firms, as multinational corporations that invested in the country or were interested in controlling its resources were also involved. Therefore, businesses took opposing preferences in the conflict. While some firms supported the provision of drones to the Ethiopian government as a symbol of partnership, others lobbied to promote humanitarian aid to the people of Tigray to maintain a good relationship with the TPLF. This contrast highlights the relevance of taking into account the interests of business groups in the reconciliation process in Ethiopia, even more so given that the ceasefire has not solved the deep social rifts in the country. However, this process has not yet integrated societal actors from the Tigray, as denounced by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on his last visit to Ethiopia. Therefore, the government should engage and dialogue directly with the business elite of the Tigray region to reach agreements, as the war showed how damaging the conflict can be for local companies such as EFFORT and multinational firms, including those interested in investing in Ethiopia.



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