

The New Grand Tour



*Jan Ritch-Frel - Photo:
Independent Media
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Six million years of human evidence offers a powerful universal education to address humanity's most significant challenges and opportunities.

All of humanity can now take the Grand Tour: a travel circuit of global sites that help us understand ourselves and our history, made increasingly clear thanks to recent advances in archaeology and the sciences. The stops on this tour include archeological sites key to understanding the stages of human history starting six million years ago and leading up to the dawn of the modern era. Other sites include museums and spaces that educate visitors about the biology of our existence, focusing on our primate roots within a diversity of ecosystems.

The point of this Grand Tour is to co-mingle an education on the phases of human history with a study of our biology and evolution that only recently became available due to advances in science and research. It fosters an understanding of the human story as a single global data set. As people become accustomed to relying on the wider breadth of evidence to understand themselves, we are all stronger. It becomes easier to authentically connect with each other when we have a true universalizing framework. This framework will open constructive pathways for finding happiness, reducing suffering, and adapting together for resilience and survival. Wherever you are in life, there is potential to find value in this evidence-based understanding of human tendencies.

It only became possible in the past decade to trace the outlines of the complete

human story. Travelers will be surprised by the increasingly clear evidence that illustrates the diversity of [early hominin species](#), the pace at which they made complex and ingenious tools, and the emergence of ritual, religion, agriculture, and even our modern societies. Similarly, scientific discoveries we've made about brain development, hormones, and genomics will compel us to rethink the causes of criminal behavior and reimagine childhood development and education.

Taking the Grand Tour

Completing the Grand Tour may be easier for the one billion people who travel internationally each year than the seven billion others. But the good news is that the education embedded in the tour is available online through a study of the sites along the tour and related research. For many people, there are relevant pre-historical sites, museums, and research centers located within a few hundred miles to visit and more deeply enrich their educational experience.

You can say you've completed a Grand Tour when you have obtained a good general understanding of each study topic listed below and visited and/or studied at least two sites related to each of them.

The study topics are:

- Paleoanthropology and the human evolutionary story of the past six million years of evolution.
- Primatology and the behavior and lifestyles of wider mammal families.
- Transitions from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to village societies and the establishment of the first city-states.
- Behavioral biology and neuroscience to learn about the function of the human brain and its interactions with the processes that produce language and real-world functioning.
- Ecology and the study of regional wilderness areas to understand animals as part of the fabric of interdependencies in the larger ecosystem.

Some experts who have tracked the paradigm shifts across these topic areas have predicted that many of the newest discoveries will spill over into the wider societal spectrum. The rising public interest in human cultural and technological evolution, early societies, and the biological facets dictating human behaviors is

visible on best-seller lists, popular podcasts, and highly-rated YouTube channels. [Educators believe](#) there is potential for the new, globally sourced breadth of knowledge we now have about our species' origins to become preeminent within the study of political and social sciences. This would edge out the near-monopoly that Europe has had on scholarly understandings of human history for the past 2,500 years.

Below is a sample list of Grand Tour locations for each of the geographical regions and/or topics of study listed at the bottom of this article. Over time, a map could grow to contain hundreds or thousands of sites that qualify as educational sources to populate the Grand Tour. Newer evidence, sites, and museum exhibits will often be easier to learn from as they are less weighed down by the historical attitudes of previous eras. The world has exceptional books and reference materials, tour guides, and teachers, real and online, to help people along their journey. And it is increasingly easier to ensure docents and guides educate people with the most up-to-date information about the sites they're helping to interpret.

The Old Grand Tour

There was a Grand Tour in a previous era. This famous journey through Italy and the classical world established particular pieces of ancient history as central to humankind. The ancient worlds of Rome, Greece, Egypt, and the kingdoms of Sumeria were understood as the borders of the ancient past. What came before these worlds was vaguely understood to have involved stone tools and ice ages.

For 300 years, if you were a young, privileged European man, the final stage of your education would include a visit to Italy to learn about the Renaissance and its roots in Rome, then to Greece and the wider Mediterranean. Young elites gained a worldview shared across nationalities living in high-income countries, shaped by the expert guides who accompanied them. It was sweeping in scope entrenched in a reductive understanding of the human past and a linear sense of history and the progress of humanity.

This "old" Grand Tour cemented a particular political and philosophical education that the world has largely inherited today. This education is often presented through colonial and imperial conquest, modeled and legitimized by the collapsed empires and city-states of the northern Mediterranean regions.

Even with its many blind spots, misconceptions, and lapses, the old Grand Tour

did help to create a shared sense of history and culture where none had existed before by linking together disparate sites across the European continent. It provided a common—if faulty—framework for understanding the then-contemporary world.

And it should not come as a surprise for students of history that there was an even older Grand Tour before this one. Young privileged men of ancient Rome relied on a Grand Tour guided by a historian and geographer named Pausanias to learn about a selectively chosen, venerated history of Greece. Touring is a hugely popular educational format, from the Santiago de Compostella pilgrimage route for learning about medieval Europe to following the Great Wall of China to learn about the country's wider dynastic history.

The New Grand Tour

The new Grand Tour proposes to revolutionize this outdated vision through visits to museums, archaeological sites, and research centers that explain the different facets of human biological and technological history. Together, these sketch a more accurate story of humanity. This Grand Tour takes us from the emergence of our genus, "Homo," to the beginnings of our hunter-gatherer past and the transition to early societal organizational schemes. Then, onwards, to the founding of the first city-states.

This education can reshape our core beliefs, attitudes, and approaches to daily life. It also provides sounder, more actionable answers to some of the most important questions we face today, such as:

- Does social complexity require social hierarchy?
- What social models are the most resilient and produce the least suffering?
- What kind of resource consumption are we designed for?
- What is a sustainable and healthy mix of work and leisure?
- How do we explain the prevalence of conditions like obesity, depression, anxiety, cancer, and heart disease—and what can we do about it?
- What are the kinds of child-rearing and educational environments that the human lineage evolved with and depended on?

- Does the moral arc of the universe “bend toward justice”?
- How should we understand criminal culpability in a structurally unequal world?
- What is addiction, and how can we treat it?
- What social relations tend to promote cooperation or conflict? What is the relationship between social arrangements and the tendency toward peace or war?

You don't have to make [every stop on the Grand Tour](#). Get acquainted with and learn about at least a few items from each category below. Try to pick from two different regions of the Earth for each.

Human Origins

A series of recent archeological site findings have significantly updated our evidence and understanding of humanity's origins. Some of the most significant discoveries include:

Koobi Fora / Lake Turkana — Kenya

A region of paleoanthropological sites in northern Kenya known as [Koobi Fora](#), near Lake Turkana, features well-preserved hominin fossils dating between 3.2 and 1.3 million years ago. This includes at least two species of *Australopithecus*, three species of the genus *Homo*, *Kenyanthropus platyops*, stone tools dating back to 2 million years ago, and a nearly complete skeleton of a male adolescent *H. ergaster* specimen about 1.5 million years old called “[Turkana Boy](#).”

Denisova Cave — Russia

Situated on the foothills of Siberia's Altai Mountains, [Denisova Cave](#) is the only site known to have been occupied by Homo Sapiens, Neanderthals, and Denisovans. The cave has yielded impressive jewelry and other [artifacts](#) and provided genomic evidence of the direct descendants of Neanderthal and Denisovan parents.

Luzon — Philippines

In 2018, researchers [discovered](#) a cache of butchered rhino bones and dozens of stone tools that pushed back the earliest evidence for human occupation of the Philippines's largest island from 100,000 years ago to a startling 700,000 years ago. Included in the discovery on Luzon was a unique human species that has been dubbed [Homo luzonensis](#). This raises questions about how our supposedly

primitive ancestors crossed the Southeast Asian seas. The northern areas of the island, with their extensive [cave systems](#), illuminate the early movement of people to the Philippines—from Late Pleistocene to Early Holocene foragers to the spread of Neolithic farming and later metal-age cultures.

Central Narmada Valley — India

The Central Narmada Valley is a region in central India [featuring](#) extensive Early and Middle Pleistocene deposits, associated Palaeolithic fossils, and the only fossil evidence of a non-modern hominin species in the subcontinent. This makes it an especially vital region for understanding Acheulean stone tool technologies in the Paleolithic records of the Indian subcontinent.

Hunter Gatherer Transitions to Early Societies

Various recent archeological discoveries have expanded our knowledge about the societal transition from hunter-gatherer, to agrarian, to modern. Some of the most significant discoveries are below:

Transitions:

The following archaeological sites provide some key insights into important transitions made by early human societies:

Dolni Vestonice — Czech Republic

Dolni Vestonice is an Upper Paleolithic [archaeological site](#) in the [Czech Republic](#) and a particularly abundant source of prehistoric artifacts dating back 29,000 years. It is unique for its insight into Ice Age cultural practices in central Europe, with huts of mammoth bones, technologies like kilns, task specialization, burial practices, and art-making. Highlights include some of the earliest examples of symbolic representation, especially ceramic figures of humans and nonhuman animals, such as the famous "[Black Venus](#)" and an enigmatic grave known as the "[Triple Burial](#)."

Mal'ta Buret — Siberia

Mal'ta, about 62 miles northwest of [Irkutsk and Lake Baikal in Siberia](#) represents the vast, vital [Mal'ta-Buret](#) culture dating back around 24,000 years. The site comprises a series of subterranean houses made of mammoth bones and reindeer antlers, from which have been excavated expertly carved bone, ivory, and antler objects. These include famous female figurines, as well as sculptures depicting swans, geese, and ducks, and engravings of mammoths and snakes. The findings

shed light on the cultural practices of ancient northern Eurasians who contributed to the peopling of the Americas and whose technologies spread from Europe to Africa.

Scaling Up:

A variety of historical sites full of archaeological evidence show the enormous scale and scope of ancient human societies, some of which are below:

Caral-Supe / Norte Chico — Andes

Caral-Supe is a [sacred ancient city](#) dating back some 5,000 years and is thought to represent the oldest city in the Americas, at the origin of Andean culture. The 150-acre complex of pyramids, plazas, and residential buildings shows clear evidence of ceremonial functions, revealing the existence of a well-established and powerful religious ideology and a consolidated hierarchical state system. Bone instruments, [quipus](#) (the knot system used in Andean civilizations to record information), and extensive trade goods have been unearthed from the complex.

Teleilat Ghassul / Ba'Ja — Jordan

At [Teleilat Ghassul](#), just north of Jordan's Dead Sea, a cluster of hills contains the remains of several villages dating back at least 6,000 years. They offer an unparalleled glimpse into the increasing social and economic complexity between the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. This encompasses the earliest production of olive oil, products such as fiber and dairy, and cult and religious practices.

South of the Dead Sea, shielded in the area's rugged sandstone formations, lies [Ba'Ja](#), a neolithic settlement of 9,000 years ago. The site features an ossuary with the bones of three adults and nine small children, with walls painted in a fresco technique showing abstract motifs and geometric figures, as well as the richly furnished tomb of a young girl whose magnificent [necklace](#) made of limestone and shell beads is on display at the nearby [Petra Museum](#). The museum also includes a significant collection of Neolithic artifacts.

Şanlıurfa Province / Boncuklu Tarla / Çatalhöyük — Turkey

[Şanlıurfa](#) Province, in [southeastern Turkey](#), contains multiple significant archeological sites. Three of these—Göbekli Tepe, Nevalı Çori, and Gürcütepe—have revolutionized our understanding of the Eurasian transitions from the Ice Age into domestication, agriculture, and a host of new technologies that lead to modernity.

[Boncuklu Tarla](#) contains remains from a settlement first occupied about 12,000 years ago. Houses and other dwellings have been unearthed alongside temples and other sacred buildings, accompanied by complex art forms and advanced artifacts. Together, these paint a picture of the settlement of northern Mesopotamia and the upper Tigris region. They reveal information about the cultures and religions of the people that lived there and the transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyles to a sedentary agricultural lifestyle.

[Çatalhöyük](#) is the site of two ancient mounds, beneath which lie the remains of a complex, 9,000-year-old society with a population between 3,500-8,000 inhabitants. Layer-by-layer, excavation of the site has revealed evidence of continual transformation and radical changes in behavior, lifestyle, art, and ritual. The site is exceptional for its substantial size and longevity, distinctive housing layout, wall paintings, and reliefs. UNESCO [refers to it](#) as: “the most significant human settlement documenting early settled agricultural life of a Neolithic community.”

Communities and Institutions:

Evidence has shown how early human societies contained advanced institutions, communities, and culture, some of which are highlighted below:

Monte Alban — Mexico

The [Monte Alban civic ceremonial center](#) of an ancient metropolis in Oaxaca, Mexico, was inhabited for 1,500 years by the Olmecs, Zapotecs, and Mixtecs. These people built terraces, dams, canals, pyramids, and artificial mounds carved into the surrounding mountains. They even constructed a ball game court, temples, tombs, and bas-reliefs with hieroglyphic inscriptions. This site offers unique insights into pre-Columbian society in Mesoamerica.

Ugarit — Lebanon

A vital seaport city on the Mediterranean coast of northern Syria and a key economic hub in the ancient Near East, [Ugarit](#) served as a trade center between Egypt and the major powers of Bronze Age Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. Key finds include the world’s earliest recorded [treaty](#). Stratified mounds reveal the city’s development from its origins around 8,000 years ago, its peak around 3,470 years ago, and its destruction around 3,200 years ago. The excavation of its Golden Age libraries revealed a hitherto unknown [cuneiform alphabetic script](#) and an entirely new mythological and religious literature (some of which shed new

light on the Hebrew Bible). The library also revealed archives dealing with the city's political, social, economic, and cultural life.

Primatology

Expanding our understanding of our other primate relatives offers many clues and insights about humanity, and breakthrough research is happening in the following centers:

Gombe Stream Research Center — Tanzania

Founded in 1965 by Jane Goodall, the [Gombe Stream Research Center](#) is home to the longest-running field research on chimpanzees and remains a world-class research laboratory that uses the best available methods to advance innovative science, to support conservation, and to train Tanzanian scientists.

Camp Leakey, Tanjung Puting Reserve — Borneo

Camp Leakey is a center in the Tanjung Puting Reserve in Borneo where researchers study orangutan, proboscis monkey, gibbon, and leaf-eating monkey behavior and ecology. It also houses research into orangutan sign language abilities and cognition.

Behavioral Biology and Neuroscience

It is often difficult to access scientific research centers or real-world site experiments in behavioral biology and neuroscience, so the most approachable research in these fields is available through scientific journals and authors such as Robert Sapolsky and [Frans de Waal](#).

A great place to start is by listening to Robert Sapolsky's famous [Behavioral Biology lecture series](#) at Stanford University. It takes time to learn how to read academic journal papers on biology or to work through the many exceptional books on human behavior. Brenna Hassett's book on the evolution of childhood, [Growing Up Human](#), is another excellent starting point.

Museums

There are hundreds of museums with exhibits relevant to the Grand Tour, some of which include:

Iziko South African Museum — Cape Town, South Africa

The [Iziko South Africa Museum](#) in Cape Town helps humanity reimagine the story of human evolution, centered on the diversity of humans today and how we came

to be as we are. The museum pairs storytelling with fossils and artifacts from across the continent to paint a picture of how biology, technology, and culture influenced humanity's emergence.

Museum of Human Evolution — Burgos, Spain

[The Museum of Human Evolution](#) in Burgos, Spain, aims to offer a holistic vision of human presence on the Earth. It has one of the largest collections of early hominin fossils from many species, found at the nearby [Atapuerca archaeological sites](#) and elsewhere. It also showcases the scientific disciplines involved in fossil recovery and the scientific interpretations drawn from them.

Natural History Museum, Paleoanthropology Collection — London, United Kingdom

The [palaeoanthropology collection](#) at London's Natural History Museum holds the United Kingdom's largest assemblage of fossilized hominid remains and a diverse collection of hominin tools, with over 3,000 specimens. The collection includes 17 of the 24 generally recognized hominin species in the form of original fossils and scientific replicas.

Museum of Us — San Diego, California

Exhibits at the [Museum of Us](#) in San Diego, California, offer multicultural perspectives to spark dialogue, self-reflection, and human connections centered on the shared human experience.

Comparing How The West And China Offer Loans To Developing Countries



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
Independent Media
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11-19-2023 ~ Established Western economic institutions are facing a formidable challenge from Chinese newcomers, each side offering distinct and competitive lending strategies with far-reaching consequences for global infrastructure and development.

In October 2023, amid [celebrations commemorating the 10th anniversary](#) of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Beijing, Pakistan and Chinese leaders [signed a multibillion-dollar deal](#) for a railway project. As a pivotal component of China's efforts to promote economic integration and develop infrastructure abroad, Pakistan has received significant developmental assistance from Beijing through the \$62 billion [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) (CPEC).

Nevertheless, Western nations and financial entities have also been strategically maneuvering in Asia, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approving a [\\$3 billion loan for Pakistan in July](#), "[saving it from defaulting on debt.](#)" Other countries in the region are experiencing similar competition. Bangladesh, for instance, inaugurated the BRI-linked [Padma Bridge Rail Link](#) in October, and weeks later received a [\\$395 million loan](#) from the EU. That month, Sri Lanka [struck a debt deal with China](#), while the U.S. extended a \$553 million loan for port construction in Colombo in [early November](#).

As competition over infrastructure and investment has grown in recent years, [standoffs](#) between Western and Chinese lenders over debt restructuring and relief

have intensified. Lenders [hesitate to offer relief packages](#), fearing that one creditor's concession might allow a debtor country to use that relief money to pay off others. These impasses underscore the challenges being faced by the decades-old Western-dominated financial system and lending initiatives.

The foundation of this system was laid at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. The meeting [established the IMF](#) to ensure stability of the international monetary system and offer policy advice and financial assistance to countries in economic crisis. It has since grown and comprises 190 member states, while its "sister organization," [the World Bank](#), was created simultaneously and has grown to include 189 member countries. The World Bank focuses more on long-term assistance through loans and grants, supporting infrastructure and poverty reduction in developing countries.

Efforts to democratize these institutions have been made, but both the [IMF](#) and [World Bank](#) still remain under significant Western influence. Western countries are [overrepresented on the IMF's board](#) and voting arrangements, while [all](#) the IMF's managing directors have been European. All the World Bank's presidents except for Bulgarian national Kristalina Georgieva, who served as acting president [in 2019](#), have been U.S. citizens, and the voting shares of the bank have [not been rearranged since 2010](#). Both institutions are based in Washington, D.C.

In addition to the IMF and World Bank, other Western-dominated (or heavily influenced) multilateral development banks and institutions include the [Paris Club](#), the [European Investment Bank](#), the [Inter-American Development Bank](#), the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#), and the [Asian Development Bank](#). Government initiatives like USAID, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, as well as private banks, also play prominent roles in advancing Western economic interests.

China's [role in multilateral banks like the IMF and World Bank](#) has expanded as its economy has grown. But Beijing continues to [criticize](#) the current global debt governance system as "dominated by the 'Paris Club-IMF-World Bank' structure of the West," and has chosen to create its own path to expand its economic influence globally.

China's state capitalism offers a unique alternative to Western infrastructure and

development initiatives for the first time in decades. Through its robust, globally integrated economy, [technological expertise](#), and extensive industrial power, Beijing can help fund and build projects on a scale that rivals the West in a way not even the Soviet Union could achieve. Furthermore, Chinese assistance does not require political and economic reforms typically attached to Western developmental initiatives.

China's approach has seen significant success. It has become the world's largest creditor [since 2017](#), and is lending more than the IMF, World Bank, and Paris Club combined, said Brent Neiman from the U.S. Department of the Treasury in September 2022. With [\\$1 trillion spent](#) and more than \$2 trillion [in contracts](#), China's BRI has transformed global trade routes and economic development and is even [garnering interest from the Taliban](#).

A [Center for Global Development 2020 study](#) estimated that Chinese loans generally have a 2 percent interest rate, in comparison to 1.54 percent for the World Bank's concessional loans, and the penalties for late repayments have increased [since 2018](#), according to AidData. Nonetheless, most BRI partner countries [view China's project positively](#).

To implement its vision, Beijing has deployed a network of national financial organizations, including the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), China Development Bank (CDB), the Export-Import Bank of China, China Construction Bank (CCB), Silk Road Fund, China Investment Corporation (CIC), China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), and the People's Bank of China.

Though China has largely focused on striking bilateral deals, it has developed some multilateral initiatives. The New Development Bank was created in 2015 and is headquartered in Shanghai. It is increasingly seen as a method to [encourage transactions in China's currency](#), the renminbi, between BRICS member states. Meanwhile, the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund ([GDSSCF](#)) is being used for China's software-focused Global Development Initiative (GDI). But China's major multilateral project is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which was established in 2016. Now [with 106 approved](#) members, the AIIB focuses [on lending to](#) investment projects, infrastructure,

transport routes, energy, and information networks.

Other countries, including Western nations such as Germany, have [some influence in the AIIB](#). Nonetheless, the bank is dominated by China. It has an [effective veto over major decisions](#) and has been governed by China's former vice minister of the finance ministry, Jin Liqun, since its founding. China's dominance prompted the AIIB's Canadian communications chief, Bob Pickard, [to resign](#) in 2023.

A divided response by Western countries to China's initiatives has further undermined their traditional dominance. Many expressed interest in the AIIB as it was being formed, and Washington [failed to dissuade them from joining](#) the bank. The U.S. then attempted to counter the AIIB with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which came into force in 2016. However, the U.S. left the organization in 2017 under former President Donald Trump, and the project was [repackaged into a smaller one](#).

China's newfound leverage has seen it confront the West around the world. In 1990, for example, Western countries accounted for [85 percent](#) of infrastructure construction contracts in Africa. Yet from [2007-2020](#), Chinese entities provided \$23 billion in funding for infrastructure projects across sub-Saharan Africa, more than double lent by banks in the U.S., Germany, Japan, and France combined, according to a study by the Center for Global Development. [In 2020](#), Chinese entities were responsible for 31 percent of all infrastructure projects in Africa valued at more than \$50 million, up from 12 percent in 2013, while the West's contribution to the projects in Africa declined from 37 percent to 12 percent during the same period, [according](#) to the Economist.

Brazil and Mexico enjoy [significant investment from China](#), and Argentina officially joined the BRI [in 2022](#). [In August 2023](#), China highlighted its increasingly important role in Argentina's economy by providing a \$3 billion loan that allowed the South American country to avoid default. Even in [Eastern Europe and the Balkans](#), China has spent billions of dollars linking countries to the BRI.

Nevertheless, the U.S. and the collective West maintain considerable economic influence and have responded assertively. The U.S. passed the BUILD Act [in 2018](#) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) [in 2022](#) to increase investment and infrastructure development in developing countries, and

the EU put forth its Global Gateway program [in 2021](#), “the bloc’s new infrastructure partnership plan that’s seen as an alternative to China’s worldwide Belt and Road Initiative.” Meanwhile, the World Bank’s lending to sub-Saharan African nations soared from \$26 billion in 2019 to [\\$49 billion in 2023](#), while the World Bank and the ADB also [overtook Chinese entities](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic to become Southeast Asia’s biggest sources of funding, said a report by the Lowy Institute.

The U.S. and the EU have also [expressed support](#) for developing a new transport corridor connecting India, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, the West has presented a united economic response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, including the [World Bank halting all its programs](#) in Russia. The AIIB’s \$100 billion fund also still [pales in comparison](#) to the IMF’s \$800 billion mobilization capacity.

Both the West’s and China’s economic lending and infrastructure practices, however, have faced criticism. Former Chief Economist at the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, [has stated](#) that the conditions placed on borrowing countries by the World Bank and IMF often cause significant pain for local populations and stifle economic development in these nations. [UN Secretary-General](#) António Guterres stated in 2023 that the IMF and World Bank benefit richer countries at the expense of poorer ones, urging for change.

China’s projects have [faced criticism](#) for predominantly employing Chinese companies and workers, as opposed to making local hires, resulting in protests and attacks against them. BRI deals are also criticized for being [opaque](#) in terms of financing and implementation, and countries struggling to repay loans have found themselves [giving up some autonomy to their export revenues](#). And while allegations of Chinese debt diplomacy are often exaggerated in Western media, [Chinese economic opportunism](#) has increased debt burdens and debt-for-equity swaps with BRI partners.

Pakistan’s multifaceted economic challenges persist despite its engagement with Western and Chinese lending and infrastructure institutions. The country is grappling with neighboring Afghanistan’s instability, its longstanding rivalry with India, the ongoing [effects](#) of the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating flooding [in 2022](#), [systemic corruption](#), and [soaring energy prices](#) caused by the conflict in Ukraine.

While these challenges remain complex, investment stands out as a potential remedy. Rather than engaging in blind competition, a more effective use of funds for all parties involved could be achieved by acknowledging and pursuing greater coordination between Western and Chinese economic interests in the country, such as increasing Pakistan's energy efficiency. [Amid their competition](#), the AIIB and World Bank signed a framework for cooperation in common areas of interest in 2017, and the AIIB has similar agreements with the [Asian Development Bank](#) and the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#).

Despite the rise of [alternative markets](#), China stands as the sole challenger to the West's established lending and infrastructure development networks. This rivalry has already prompted slow reform in the decades-old financial system, offering support to emerging powers and impoverished nations. While more equitable economic statecraft may prove elusive, borrowing countries have an opportunity to leverage the best deals essential for their progress.

By John P. Ruehl

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Source: Globetrotter

Fast Fashion Is Antithetical To Workers' Rights



Sonali Kolhatkar

Don't believe the fashion industry's stated commitment to support a living wage for Bangladesh's garment workers.

'Tis the season for holiday shopping, and as American consumers ready their spending dollars, few of us are likely to link our gift buying to the high cost of low prices on the other side of the planet. This is especially true for what has come to be known as "[fast fashion](#)," the clothing equivalent of a Big Mac: attractive, affordable, and throwaway. But the Bangladeshi women who toil as underpaid garment workers so we can wear disposable outfits, are making their voices heard loudly enough to reverberate across oceans and continents. [Mass protests](#) for higher wages have roiled the nation, at least three workers have been killed, and there is no end in sight.

Bangladesh is the [world's second-largest exporter](#) of apparel in the world, after China. It is the South Asian nation's largest industry, employing more than four million workers, a majority of them women. The largest share of Bangladesh-made garments is bought and sold by United States retailers, which include [recognizable name brands](#) such as H&M, Zara, Calvin Klein, American Eagle, and Tommy Hilfiger.

Garment workers had been taking home a meager [pay of about \\$75 a month](#), and have demanded a nearly threefold increase to about \$205 a month. When the [Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association](#) (BGMEA) initially set new wages at \$90 a month, the mass protests began. When the BGMEA then responded by raising wages to \$112 a month, the protests actually intensified. According to [Al Jazeera](#), "more than 10,000 workers staged protests in factories and along highways to reject the panel's offer."

Headlines touted the offer as a [56 percent increase in wages](#), while Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, long hailed as a [liberal leader](#), patronizingly told workers to put up or shut up. She [said](#), "They have to work with whatever their salary is increased, they should continue their work." She roundly condemned workers' attacks on factories, saying she was worried that, "if these factories are closed, if production is disrupted, where will their jobs be? They have to understand that."

Hasina's government has unleashed security forces that have intimidated and attacked union organizers. Police recently [fatally shot a 23-year-old mother](#) and sewing machine operator named Anjuara Khatun after firing at protesters.

To understand why protests intensified after wages were dramatically increased, it's worth examining the context of garment workers' livelihoods. By one estimate, the [cost of living](#) for a single person in Bangladesh is about \$360 a month, not including rent. Garment workers' wages have not risen since 2019 and since that time inflation has hit Bangladesh just as it has hit most of the world.

Even the demand for \$205 a month will not allow most to make ends meet. The factories' offer of about half that number was insultingly low. Abiramy Sivaloganathan, the South Asia coordinator for the Asia Floor Wage Alliance, [told Vogue](#), "[The] increase that unions are asking for is not even enough, technically speaking, [given] inflation and the crisis the country's going through."

On the surface, U.S. brands, who purchase their inventories from Bangladesh's factories, appear to be on the right side of the fight. The American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA), an industry trade group, wrote a [joint letter](#) to Hasina's administration urging her to "raise the minimum wage to a level that corresponds with a wage level and benefits that are sufficient to cover workers' basic needs and some discretionary income and takes into account inflationary pressures."

The AAFA even went as far as asking the government to avoid retaliating against unions and to respect "collective bargaining rights." The U.S. State Department issued a [statement](#) saying, "We commend the members of the private sector who have endorsed union proposals for a reasonable wage increase."

Further, global retailers are offering to eat into their profits by [increasing the price they pay factories](#) to help them offset increased wages. Currently, the cost

of the labor to produce garments is a mere 10-13 percent of a product's total manufacturing cost. The industry would have to increase that number by about 5-6 percent.

But are companies really committed to raising garment workers' wages? A spokesperson for the [Clean Clothes Campaign](#), a rights group based in The Netherlands [said](#), "The living wage commitments of brands are nothing but empty promises as long as they refuse to explicitly support the workers' demand for a bare minimum, let alone a living wage."

A [survey](#) of about 1,000 factories in Bangladesh, published in early 2023, revealed that companies like Zara and H&M underpaid factories for garment purchases, making it harder for them to pay their workers. When the COVID-19 pandemic led to global shutdowns, large retailers canceled orders and delayed payments. One industry expert [told The Guardian](#), "Only when suppliers are able to plan ahead, with confidence that they will earn as expected, can they deliver good working conditions for their workers." Rather than dip into their profits to compensate for the market slowdown in 2020, many global brands simply refused to keep their financial commitments to Bangladesh's factories, leading to downward pressure on wages.

Given this context, fast fashion's stated support for a living wage increase and a commitment to swallow the resulting increased labor costs sound disingenuous.

It has been more than 10 years since the deadly collapse of [Bangladesh's Rana Plaza](#), the world's worst garment industry disaster. The eight-story compound of factories in Dhaka was filled with thousands of workers when it crumbled under the weight of government neglect and worker exploitation in April 2013. More than 1,100 workers, most of them women, were killed.

The Rana Plaza disaster was a turning point for Bangladesh's garment industry as workers were seen as dispensable pawns by governments and industries alike. In the wake of the disaster, North American brands [refused to join other global companies](#) in signing on to [the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh](#). Citing high costs, they chose instead to form their own alliance for inspecting factories, one that applied lower safety standards. It was a stark indicator of where these companies' priorities lay, one that frames their current lip service to higher wages for garment workers.

Fast fashion’s outlook is rosy. The industry has been steadily growing and, thanks to the cooperation of government heads such as Sheikh Hasina—who has been fixated on “[growth](#)” at all costs—it is [expected to more than double its market size](#) over six years, growing from \$91 billion in 2021 to a projected \$185 billion by 2027. Meanwhile, the workers who fuel the profits behind that expansion are [facing starvation](#). This holiday season, perhaps the best gift we can give is a commitment to [force the industry to pay up](#).

By Sonali Kolhatkar

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Provocations By The U.S. State Department Can Chill Press Freedom In Latin America



Vijay Prashad

The headline is provocative: “The Kremlin’s Efforts to Covertly Spread Disinformation in Latin America.” This was a [statement](#) on the U.S. State Department website, posted on November 7, 2023. The United States government accused two companies—Social Design Agency and Structura National Technologies—of being the main agents of what it alleged is Russian-backed disinformation. The statement named the heads of both of the firms, Ilya Gambashidze of Social Design Agency and Nikolay Tupkin of Structura. On July 28, 2023, the European Union [sanctioned](#) several Russian individuals and firms, including SDA and Structura. The European Union accuses these two IT firms of being “involved in the Russian-led digital disinformation campaign” against the government of Ukraine. The statement by the U.S. State Department now alleges that these IT companies are involved in a disinformation project in Latin America.

Neither the European Union nor the U.S. State Department offer any evidence in their various public statements. The U.S. document does, however, refer to the 2023 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, which [says](#) the following: “Russia’s influence actors have adapted their efforts to increasingly hide their hand, laundering their preferred messaging through a vast ecosystem of Russian proxy websites, individuals, and organizations that appear to be independent news sources.” Here, we get mainly the methodology—laundering information through proxy websites—rather than any hard evidence.

On May 3, 2023, the U.S. Foreign Relations Committee held a [hearing](#) on “The Global Information Wars: Is the U.S. Winning or Losing?” The main speaker at the hearing was Amanda Bennett, the Chief Executive Officer of the [U.S. Agency for Global Media](#) (USAGM), an umbrella group that runs several U.S. government media projects from Europe (Radio Liberty) to the Americas (Office of Cuba Broadcasting) with an \$810 million annual budget. Bennett, the former director of the U.S. government’s [Voice of America](#), [told](#) the senators that if the U.S. government fails to “target investments to counter inroads Russia, the [People’s

Republic of China], and Iran are making, we run the risk of losing the global information war.” These three countries, she argued, have “outspent” the United States in Latin America, an advantage that she said needed to be overcome by increased U.S. interference in Latin American media.

The Role of RT

In Latin America, Jessica Brandt of the Brookings Institute [told](#) the Senators, Russian media has secured a decisive advantage. The facts she laid out are worthwhile to consider: “Through the first quarter of 2023, three of the five most retweeted Russian state media accounts on Twitter messaged in Spanish, and five of the ten fastest growing ones targeted Spanish-language audiences. On YouTube, RT en Español has also proven capable of building large audiences, despite the platform’s global ban on Russian state-funded media channels. On TikTok, RT en Español is among the most popular Spanish-language media outlets. Its 29.6 million likes make it more popular than Telemundo, Univision, BBC Mundo, and El País. Likewise, on Facebook, RT en Español currently has more followers than any other Spanish-language international broadcaster.” In other words, RT by itself has become one of the most influential media outlets in Latin America. Brandt’s facts are widely accepted, including by a [report](#) published in March by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism called “Despite Western bans, Putin’s propaganda flourishes in Spanish on TV and social media” and by a [study](#) from the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab from 2022.

[RT](#) (formerly Russia Today) is owned by [TV-Novosti](#), a non-profit organization founded by the state-owned [Ria Novosti](#) in 2005. RT is banned or blocked in Canada, the European Union, Germany, the United States, and several other Western countries. In fact, at the Senate hearing, there was little discussion about the entire web of RT projects. The focus was on the “laundering” of “disinformation”.

‘Most Likely’

What is striking about the U.S. State Department statement is that it names two news projects that operate in Latin America as these “proxies” without any evidence but with hesitant language. For instance, the U.S. State Department says that part of the Russian campaign is to cultivate a group of journalists “most likely in Chile,” but not definitely. This hesitation is important to underline because a few paragraphs later, the doubt vanishes: “While the network’s

operations are primarily done in concert with Spanish-language outlets [Pressenza](#) and [El Ciudadano](#), a broader network of media resources is available to the group to further amplify information.”

Pressenza, founded in 2009 in Milan, Italy, emerged out of the debates and discussions provoked by the International Commission for the Study of Communications Problems (formed by UNESCO) and its report, *Many Voices, One World* or the [MacBride Report](#) (1980). The MacBride report itself built on discussions about media democracy that had resulted in the formation, in 1964, of [Inter-Press Services](#), and then later in Pressenza. El Ciudadano was founded in 2005 as part of the process of democratization in Chile in the aftermath of the fall of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in 1990.

Both outlets denied (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) that they are either funded by the Russian government or that they launder information for the Russian government. In their joint statement, signed by David Andersson (editor of Pressenza) and Bruno Sommer Catalán (editor of El Ciudadano), they say, “We believe that this kind of attack is malicious, and we insist that the US State Department withdraw this accusation as well as publicly apologize to us for maligning our reputations.” In a separate statement, Italian journalist Antonio Mazzeo (who won the [Giorgio Bassani prize](#) in 2010) [said](#): “This affair worries me because it could prepare for the next step, the creation of a proscription list... to put all those who do not accept to think only of war and therefore become dangerous and must be silenced.”

By Vijay Prashad

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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Source: Globetrotter

Wannabe Führer Donald J. Trump Must Be Stopped



Preventing the former president from being reelected should be the primary goal of all progressive forces from this point on.

During Trump's tumultuous four-year reign (2017-2021), democratic norms in the U.S. experienced a huge shock. Almost overnight, the U.S. became a different country as Trump's policies and racist rhetoric tore the social fabric of inclusive democracy and inflicted a body blow to the concept of a decent society. In the end, abnormal became the new normal.

Indeed, Trump's 2016 campaign was unlike anything seen in U.S. presidential elections in decades. It was solely driven by racism, sexism, and xenophobia. And it had a dramatic impact. For example, [hate crimes](#) surged by more than 220% in counties that hosted Trump's campaign rallies in 2016 and reached an all-time high in [2021](#), according to the FBI. [White nationalist hate groups](#), an integral component of the far-right movement in the U.S. targeting immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ people, Blacks, Muslims, and other groups, increased 55% throughout the Trump era.

Trump's inflammatory rhetoric and posturing himself as the only leader able to save the country led many to wonder whether Trump was more than a racist and a populist with an unmistakably authoritarian streak. Scholars and pundits alike began wondering whether it was time to use the "F" word about Trump, and some started doing just that. I happen to be one of the people who objected to the idea of using [fascism](#) as a catch-all term to describe leaders and movement with authoritarian tendencies, while acknowledging that the movement that Trump had created and still leads has a proto-fascist lineage.

Trump's revenge politics and desire to cleanse U.S. society of undesirable elements like migrants, refugees, LGBTQ people, and radical leftists may very well find us with a dictator in charge in 2025.

Fascism represents the most extreme form of the "exceptional capitalist state," and should not be confused with all forms of authoritarian rule, as the late Marxist theoretician Nicos Poulantzas argued in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, a work that is essential reading for anyone interested in a serious study of fascism. Fascism worships the state, promotes militarism, and establishes absolute state power over private enterprise. Trump's nationalist, racist, sexist, homophobic, cult-like movement embraces none of these fascist characteristics and beliefs.

Most [experts](#) agree with this assessment. The Trumpist movement is an extreme populist movement and, as such, poses a clear threat to open society. When granted the opportunity, it will destroy liberal democracy by imposing censorship and even arresting political opponents. If the institutions have not become as weak as the prevailing norms, and if the democratic forces are significantly divided to the point that they muster little resistance to the dismantling of government institutions and their transformation into some sort of proto-fascist state. These are indeed the critical questions that all democratically minded citizens should be concerned with as the 2024 election gets close.

The U.S. is on a very dangerous political trajectory.

Trump is the most likely GOP nominee to run for the White House and, apart from Chris Christie, all other Republican presidential candidates will back Trump even if convicted. [Republican National Committee chairwoman Ronna McDaniel](#) also said that she will support Trump even if he's convicted. More worrisome is the fact that a recent poll found that [Trump leads Biden](#) by 4 percentage points among registered voters and that most [Americans are unhappy with the state of the economy](#) under Biden.

The U.S. is on a very dangerous political trajectory. If Trump succeeds in returning to the White House, not only will he unleash state power to exact revenge on those who he feels wronged him but may try to turn the U.S. into a Christofascist state. As he pledged to his supporters in a speech in New Hampshire on Veteran's Day, by copying Hitler's rhetoric from "Mein Kampf," he will "root out the Communists, Marxists... and Radical Left Thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country..." Clearly, the wannabe führer felt the need to double down on Nazi propaganda after he had said in a recent interview

that immigrants and asylum seekers are “poising the blood of our country.”

This brings to mind Martin Niemöller’s famous quote “First they came for the socialists.. then they came for the trade unionists...then they came for the Jews...”

How one counters and neutralizes the effect that Trump’s rhetoric is having on millions of U.S. citizens has no easy answer.

Of course, what is shocking here is that we are not in the midst of a Great Depression and the U.S. has not been humiliated by some sort of a Treaty of Versailles—two key factors in the rise of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party to power. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Republican voters stand behind Trump, believe in all his lies, pay no attention to his criminal activities and the indictments, and apparently embrace his vision of a United States where white supremacy and authoritarianism rule the day and a world in which the principles and values of strongmen prevail.

The US has a serious problem with its citizenry. Even in a country like Greece, when unemployment in 2013 had reached nearly 28%, more than 30% of its citizens lived below the poverty line, and a policy of fiscal sadism had been imposed on the country by its international creditors, the far-right Golden Dawn party only got as high as 6.9% of the popular vote in the 2015 legislative election and lost all its parliamentary seats in the general election of 2019. The fact that nearly half of U.S. voters are still behind Trump says that the country faces a severe political crisis with profound moral connotations.

The ideals of the Enlightenment are largely absent from the mindset of most of the followers of today’s GOP.

Whether it is because of deeply held religious beliefs and the legacy of slavery and racism, or because of political socialization and the constant bombardment of mainstream media propaganda, the ideals of the Enlightenment are largely absent from the mindset of most of the followers of today’s GOP. Hence their rejection of science, cosmopolitanism, reason, and tolerance. This is why Trump appeals to the emotions of his primary base and not to their reason—just like Mussolini and Hitler did with their own followers. Trump demonizes his enemies, presents them as threats to U.S. society, and then pledges to get rid of them. In this context, he follows to the letter Hitler’s belief that “all propaganda has to be popular and has to accommodate itself to the comprehension of the least

intelligent of those whom it seeks to reach.”

How one counters and neutralizes the effect that Trump’s rhetoric is having on millions of U.S. citizens has no easy answer. Vigilance, community organizing, solidarity, and resistance are all the weapons progressive forces have in today’s United States to prevent the further spread of the proto-fascist movement headed by Donald Trump. The U.S. will surely experience major repression in the event that Trump returns to power. And this time the stakes are higher than ever before. Trump’s revenge politics and desire to cleanse U.S. society of undesirable elements like migrants, refugees, LGBTQ people, and radical leftists may very well find us with a dictator in charge in 2025. How to stop that from happening should be the primary goal of all progressive forces from this point on. Failure to do so may very well mean the difference between living in a decent society or in one where cruelty and horror dominate.

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Source:

<https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/stopping-fascist-donald-trump-2024>

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US, Israel, And Gaza: A Failure Of International Systems Of

Governance



Gaza Strip - Ills.:
en.m.wikipedia.org

Gaza is facing a humanitarian catastrophe as Israel continues its massive assault across the besieged region. More than 11,000 people have already been killed and most of Gaza's infrastructure is destroyed. Even hospitals have not been spared from the Israeli rage. Yet, the international community is unwilling to act and force Israel to stop the killings. This is a failure of grand proportions for the international systems of governance, argues political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist *C. J. Polychroniou* in an interview with the French-Greek journalist *Alexandra Boutri*. Polychroniou also objects to the idea that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unique in history and explains why. In this context, he contends that the US bears immense responsibility for the plight of Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

Alexandra Boutri: Since the end of the Cold War, the international system has undergone fundamental changes. Liberal democracy spread around the world, economic globalization deepened, and the nature of the "security problem" changed. Yet, the end of the Cold War did not bring the end of armed conflict, there was little impact on international law, and the collective problem-solving mechanisms of the United Nations remained ineffective. In addition, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised again the specter of nuclear war while even an ultranationalist junior minister in Netanyahu's government suggested dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip. How do you assess the international order erected after the Cold War? Is it collapsing, as some suggest? And how does it relate to what's going on today in Gaza?

C.J. Polychroniou: The so-called “liberal international order” erected after the end of the Cold War was flawed from the start and, in fact, started to crumble by the late 2010s. It was flawed because it came to signify nothing more than a new era of US hegemony and the “imitation of American ways.” From politics to economics, the US had the upper hand, faced no competition, and sought to spread its own version of the *ideal* politico-economic order around the globe, especially since it had “[utterly unrivalled advantages in global power-projection capabilities and the tools and aptitude needed to control the global commons.](#)” In fact, some thought that since the US had emerged victorious in its ideological battle with Soviet Communism, and capitalism and liberal democracy had won, that history had come to an end.

To avoid simplifications, it should be said that Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis did not mean to imply that history as such had reached an end point but, rather, that there was nothing to surpass liberal capitalist democracy. In other words, there were no systematic alternatives left to liberal capitalist democracy and the expectation was that “peace” would break out in many regions of the world.

However, things turned out quite differently and rather quickly. So many crises erupted shortly after the end of the Cold War (the Gulf War, the Yugoslav Wars, the Chechen Wars, the 9/11 attacks, and the Afghan and Iraq Wars, to name just a few) that it became immediately obvious that the post-Cold War order was already unravelling as it was not about fundamental principles but geopolitics as usual. As for the spread of capitalism, the Washington Consensus dogma and the economics of shock therapy that were implemented in eastern Europe, Russia, Latin America, and Africa produced oligarchs, weak states, massive inequalities, and social decay. Moreover, the “unipolar moment” of US hegemony soon came to be faced with a far more complex global strategic environment on account of the rise of great powers such as Russia and China, while the Washington Consensus encountered global backlash. The latter development was yet another strong indication that the capitalist liberal international order envisioned by the United States during its “unipolar moment” was fraught with inherent contradictions. In any case, by the early 2000s, the US had lost whatever international credibility it may have gained in the early years after the end of the Cold War. For example, Obama’s drone murder campaign was so notorious that, as former CIA director [Michael Hayden](#) put it at the time, “there isn’t a government on the planet that

agrees with our legal rationale for these operations, except for Afghanistan and maybe Israel.” Unsurprisingly enough, from the early 2010s onwards, people worldwide have come to regard the [US as the biggest threat to world peace](#).

More recently, we have seen the global expansion of authoritarian rule, including in the US with the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency and his complete control of the Republican Party, Brexit, the advance of far-right parties across western Europe and in many other parts of the world, and the delegitimation of international governance—all of which are strong indicators that the post-Cold War order is in fact over. We are living in the times of interregnum—in a time of transition from one world order to another.

Unfortunately, what’s happening in Gaza right now is a continuation of a global order in which international systems of governance simply do not work, and that includes the UN architecture.

Alexandra Boutri: The Middle East is one region of the world where major geopolitical shifts have taken place in recent years, yet peace in the Israeli-Palestinian remains elusive. Why is that?

C.J. Polychroniou: It’s true that we have recently seen a seismic geopolitical shift taking place in the Middle East, starting with the Saudi-Iran reconciliation. Equally important is the fact that the normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran was brokered by China. Why is that important? Because it’s not merely about China’s rising influence in the Middle East and its interest in positioning itself as an international mediator in a troubled region. This move must be seen in the context of China’s global initiatives to remake the world order—i.e., to forge an alternative international order, one away from the “liberal international order” that was established in the aftermath of the Second World War and its post-Cold War variation. Egypt and Iran are also moving toward a closer relationship. Economic considerations seem to be at the heart of the rapprochement between Cairo and Tehran, but so are security issues. Of course, both the Saudi-Iran deal and the prospects of close relations between Egypt and Iran may be something of a nightmare for Israel as these developments could shake up the Middle East, but only time will tell what the future holds.

The question as to why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved can be viewed from several different perspectives. It is a conflict with a long and

complex history which cannot be addressed here. Essentially, however, it is about territory — disputes over borders, competing claims on Jerusalem, and security — while religious ideologies among ultra-orthodox Jews and radical Muslim Palestinians tend to stoke tensions and spark violence. Israel itself is a divided society over political values and the role that religion should play in politics. Many years ago, Israeli activist [Uri Avnery and Ariel Sharon](#) had a friendly discussion. Avnery told Sharon that he is “first of all an Israeli, and after that a Jew.” Sharon responded heatedly that he is “first of all a Jew, and only after that an Israeli.” Indeed, [polls](#) indicate that secular Jews in Israel see themselves as Israeli first and Jewish second, while most ultra-orthodox Jews see themselves as Jewish first and Israelis second. Similarly, secular Jews assign priority to democratic principles over religious law, while the opposite is true for a large share of ultra-orthodox Jews.

But not everything in life is black and white. Many orthodox Jews worldwide have expressed strong support for Palestinian hardship under Israeli occupation. Holocaust survivors have condemned Israeli actions and the unprecedented scale of destruction in Gaza where the Palestinian death toll has surpassed 11,000 people. And some Israeli citizens are protesting the war and calling for a ceasefire. We shouldn't ignore these courageous voices and make sure that we condemn antisemitism along with islamophobia and racism.

One basic perspective as to why peace has remained an elusive goal in the Israel-Palestine issue suggests that it is because the two sides simply hate each other so much that they are willing to do inhuman things to one another. Sure, Israeli leaders have frequently used dehumanizing language toward Palestinians, the Israeli regime imposes a system of oppression and domination in the occupied territories, and the latest assault on the occupied Gaza Strip is simply barbaric. On the other hand, Hamas also revealed its true colors with the horrific attack inside Israeli territory which killed about 1,200 people (the Israeli foreign ministry revised downwards the death toll from the October 7 Hamas attack), mostly civilians, including many women and children. [Ismail Haniyeh](#), the leader of Hamas who lives in luxury in Qatar and Turkey, said this on the day that his fighters were massacring young people at a music festival and at Israel's kibbutz communities: “We have only one thing to say to you: get out of our land. Get out of our sight. Get out of our city of Al-Quds [Jerusalem] and our al-Aqsa mosque. We no longer wish to see you on this land. This land is ours, Al-Quds is ours,

everything [here] is ours. You are strangers in this pure and blessed land. There is no place of safety for you.”

Another perspective, apparently a bit more sophisticated, suggests that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unique, perhaps unlike any other in modern history, which is why it is nearly impossible to resolve. I beg to differ with both perspectives.

Firstly, over the course of human history, many different ethnic, racial, and religious groups hated each other with as much passion as some Israeli Jews and Palestinians hate each other today. Think of Catholics and Protestants in early modern English history, Greeks and Turks, the English-Irish conflict, Hutus and Tutsis, to offer just a few examples. Think also of Nazi indoctrination and the extreme anti-Semitic beliefs in Germany, which ultimately led to the pursuit of one of the greatest evil plans in the history of humankind, i.e., the “final solution,” and how beliefs toward Jews were eventually modified after the war through policy intervention.

Secondly, what exactly is unique about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? [Looked at from a comparative and historical perspective](#), neither the level of civilian destructiveness nor the scale of indiscriminate violence makes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unique. In terms of civilian destructiveness, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed in places like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, and so on. In terms of indiscriminate violence, which both parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are guilty of, there are scores of cases where aerial bombardment of areas inhabited by civilians (US in Vietnam and the Battle for Fallujah, for example) and indiscriminate attacks on civilians (the armed struggle in Algeria for independence from France involved indiscriminate attacks on civilians, abductions and killings of foreigners) hold far greater significance in the modern history of human violence.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to the end of the 19th century, and while the creation of Israel (with the Holocaust playing a central role, though there are historians who claim that the establishment of Israel would have been possible without the Holocaust due to the role of the Zionist movement) sparked the first Arab-Israeli war, the situation becomes especially complicated after 1967 as the six-day war redrew the region’s landscape in many and fundamental ways and also shifted the nature of the armed conflict. Arab states at the time showed no

interest in recognizing Israel or in peace with Israel, but this position was shattered with the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty, followed by the Israel-Jordan treaty of 1994, and ultimately reversed by the Saudi-led peace plan that was adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002. But as Arab state positions toward Israel became more flexible, the Israeli position, which was at first somewhat flexible, became more unyielding: no two-state solution, no freezing of settlements, no Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem, no to return of Palestinian refugees. And this position really hardened as Israeli society began a rightward turn.

Nonetheless, the position of Israeli leadership wouldn't have become so unyielding if the US had exerted pressure on Israel by threatening to end military aid. However, the US had no interest whatsoever in pressuring Israel to make any kind of concessions that might indeed have produced tangible results towards peace between Israel and Palestinians. Washington's primary objective was maintaining US hegemony in the region and that required the use of Israel as a satellite state. As Harvard professor of international relations [Stephen Walt](#) recently argued, the US is primarily responsible for the lack of progress towards a political solution on the conflict between Israel and Palestinians and, as a matter of fact, "a root cause" of the latest war.

For decades now, every US administration, whether Democratic or Republican, has said the same thing: namely, that the United States is "committed to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." However, in practice, US policy toward Palestine has been driven by one and only one objective, which is to maintain the status quo. The US has always looked the other way when it came to Israeli crimes and violations of international law. To take one example, Israel has a long-running policy of settling civilians in occupied Palestinian territory. From Ford and Carter to Biden today, every US president has gone on record opposing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. But this has been a completely meaningless "criticism" since it has not been accompanied by any pressure on Israel to cease settlement activities which are illegal under international law. Pillage is also a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. To add insult to injury, over the past several decades, the US has opposed more than 53 UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israeli policies.

The same can be said about the two-state solution. The US has paid only lip

service to the two-state solution. In fact, since the Oslo Accords, the two-state solution has become “an open joke in the corridors of the United Nations,” according to ex-UN official [Craig Mokhiber](#).

In sum, it's impossible to grasp why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved if we do not add into the picture the essential role that the United States has played in accommodating, to the greatest extent possible, Israel's objectives. Washington needs Israel for its own geostrategic interests in the Middle East. This is why Israel plays such an outsized role in US policy and why Israel is “[the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II.](#)” This is also why Washington tolerates Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity, which of course makes the US fully complicit in the horror in occupied Palestine. But never mind complicity. The US has launched numerous wars, committed atrocities, and created black holes in many places around the world. It is guilty of many war crimes.

Alexandra Boutri: Human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued reports describing Israel as an apartheid state. Many legal experts also agree with the characterization of Israel as an apartheid state, including UN-appointed rapporteurs. Of course, Israeli officials and pro-Israeli groups in the US have denounced reports labelling Israel an apartheid state as antisemitism, while recently the House also passed a resolution saying Israel isn't a racist or apartheid state. What's your take on the issue?

C.J. Polychroniou: First, let me say the idea that all criticism of Israeli policies is inherently antisemitic is beyond ridiculous and is only intended to silence criticism and debate. As for the House resolution, that should have come as no surprise to anyone who understands the dynamics of US politics and US policy toward Israel. Let's also not forget that the United States supported the white apartheid government of South Africa apartheid and opposed Mandela. So, when it comes to human rights and international law, the US is the last country in the western world that anyone should be listening to what it says. As for Israel being an apartheid state, I don't think that what goes on inside Israel is comparable to what was going on in South Africa under apartheid. Under apartheid, the South African regime enforced rigidly racial laws. Blacks were controlled by racist laws that forced them into poverty and hopelessness. Everything was segregated while policemen with barking dogs and armed soldiers patrolled townships. Palestinians living in Israel, and that's about a fifth of Israel's citizens, have second class

status and their rights have surely eroded since Netanyahu began his second term as prime minister, but South Africa's apartheid is a poor analogy for Israel. On the other hand, as [Noam Chomsky](#) has repeatedly pointed out over the years, what goes on in the occupied Palestine territory is worse than South Africa's apartheid. I think his point that apartheid South Africa needed black labor while the Israelis simply have no use for Palestinians in places like Gaza is spot on.

Alexandra Boutri: So, if the international systems of governance in today's world are incapable of dealing even with a horrendous humanitarian crisis like the one unfolding in Gaza, what hope is there for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

C.J. Polychroniou: I wish I had the answer to this question, but I don't. The fact of the matter is that we are still in the age of the dominance of the nation-state and where, unfortunately, Thucydides' maxim "the strong do as they wish, and the weak suffer what they must" still applies in international relations. Putting pressure on the US government to compel Israel to respect international law and end the occupation is the only thing American citizens can do. On the other hand, hopefully Israelis will also come to their senses and elect a decent government that will pursue in earnest the two-state solution as this is the best alternative for Israel's own security.

Source:

<https://znetwork.org/znetarticle/us-israel-and-gaza-a-failure-of-international-systems-of-governance/>