

The Future

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Gaza Crisis

Syria's Future

Sudan's
Humanitarian Issues

US-Pakistan
Relations

Pope's Sermon

McCarthyism
on Campus

Commission to investigate
the BDR mutiny

The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute from First Floor, East, Business Centre, 93 Greenfield Rd, London E1 1EJ.

This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of emerging nations with the potential to impact their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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Photo: Hosny Salah/ Pixabay

15 months of relentless genocide with impunity in Gaza

As the world entered another year, and people all over the world greeted the new year with fireworks, the tent cities in Gaza did not get any respite from Israeli genocidal conduct. Palestinians in the enclave welcomed 2025 amid grief and destruction, as freezing temperatures and heavy rains compounded the ever-present threat of Israeli attacks. Israel killed over a dozen Palestinians in overnight strikes on central Gaza's Bureij camp and northern Jabalia just as New Year's Day began, most of them babies and children. Moreover, heavy rainstorms and freezing weather has claimed the lives of several newborns, who have died from hypothermia. The effects of the harsh weather conditions on Palestinians in Gaza have been exacerbated by the lack of humanitarian aid, forced displacement and worsening food insecurity. Since the war began more than a year ago, Israel has imposed a siege on Gaza, restricting the entry of essential supplies such as food, water, electricity, medicine and tents.

This continues amidst Israel's genocidal war against Palestinian civilians, which includes destroying all civilian facilities and basic infrastructure, as well as an all-out attack on healthcare facilities.

In Northern Gaza, after weeks of brutal siege and heavy pressure from the Israeli army, on 27 December, Israeli soldiers stormed Kamal Adwan Hospital, the last remaining medical facility in the northern Gaza Strip, torching large sections and ordering hundreds of people to leave. Gaza's Ministry of Health said they had lost contact with staff inside the hospital in Beit Lahiya – it was later confirmed that Israeli forces had detained the hospital director Husam Abu Safia, and taken him to an undisclosed location for "interrogation." Israel's military has claimed that the hospital had become "a key stronghold for terrorist organisations and continues to be used as a hideout for terrorist operatives," something for which it had shown no evidence, and a claim which had been repeatedly denied by Hamas officials.

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In other news, Aljazeera offices were shut down by the Palestinian authority in Jenin and parts of the occupied West Bank, allegedly to stop reporting of security measures taken by the authority against armed Palestinian opposition brigades, a move many see as being aligned with Israeli policies targeting freedom of speech and media censure on the issue of reporting on the unfolding genocide in Gaza.

The number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza as of January 7, 2025, is at least 46,000 dead, including more than 17,492 children, while the number of Palestinians wounded has reached more than 109,196. Last July, according to a study published in the Lancet, it was reported that the accumulative effects of Israel's war on Gaza could mean the true death toll could reach more than 186,000 people in Gaza alone; and current estimates are much higher with the expansion of the war into other areas of the region.

The number of missing people is more than 11,160, most of whom are reported missing due to been trapped in building rubble, and might have been killed as well. In the Occupied West Bank, there have been at least 841 deaths, of whom more than 172 are children, while more than 6,700 are injured. According to the latest data from the UN, WHO and the Palestinian government as of January 2, more than half of Gaza homes have been destroyed or damaged, 80% of commercial facilities, 88% of school buildings, 47 percent of hospitals are partially functioning, 68% of road networks and 68 percent of cropland have been damaged. Every hour in Gaza, 15 people are killed, of whom 6 are children, while 35 people are injured and 12 buildings are destroyed. As of December 27, more than 200 journalists, predominantly Palestinians, had been killed since October 7. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 217 Palestinian, three Lebanese, and two Israeli journalists were killed.





Perils abound as Syrians dream of building a new Syria

On December 8, Syrian opposition forces swiftly captured Damascus, ending Bashar al-Assad's regime after a rapid offensive. The al-Assad family, in power for half a century, reportedly fled in an unknown direction before the capital fell. This marks a historic political shift in the Arab world, breaking with decades of military-backed autocratic rule that has shaped the region since the 1950s. After toppling the regime of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) formed a de-facto caretaker government, and the leader and commander-in-chief of HTS, Ahmed al-Sharaa, assumed power of the new administration. Al-Sharaa, more popularly known by his pseudonym Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, proceeded to appoint a technocrat, Mohammed al-Bashir, as prime-minister to lead a caretaker government until March 1. The move aims to stabilise the country by providing basic services to civilians and preventing a power struggle between armed groups over state resources and ministries, drawing upon past experiences of the Syrian opposition of civilian rule in Idlib and parts of Northern Syria. Apart from the politics, there is also the huge challenge of financing the new government,

which is no easy task. Syria's economy is in tatters – the World Bank ranks its gross domestic product (GDP) at 129 out of 196 states, and before the fall of Assad, the country was subject to crippling sanctions from Western countries over terrorism concerns.

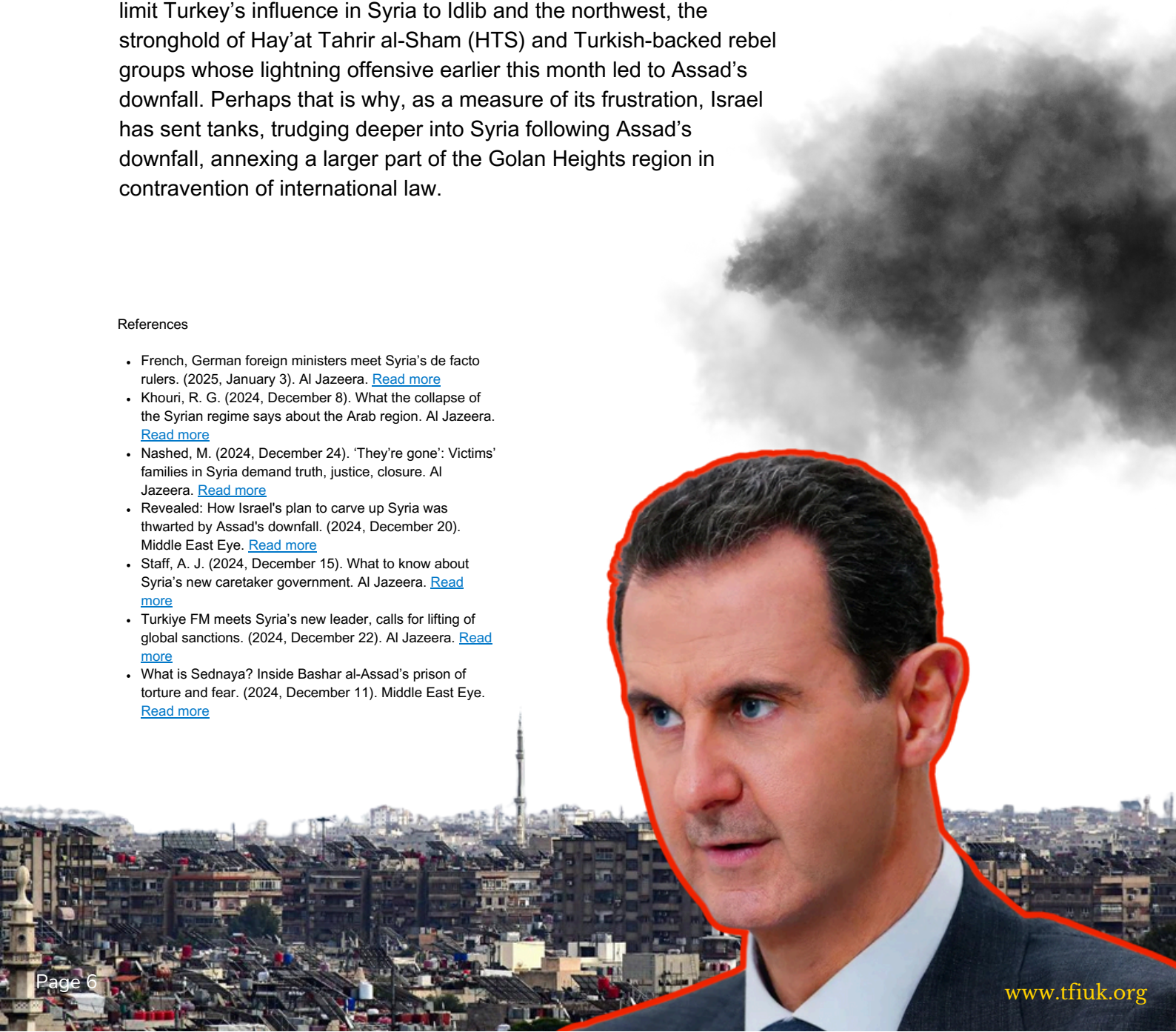
The new government, however, is set to receive help and support from neighbouring Turkiye, as well as hopefully the European Union and the US. Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met with al-Sharaa in Damascus earlier in December, pledging support for Syria's political transition and reconstruction following the fall of Bashar al-Assad. Both leaders emphasized the importance of unity, stability, and the removal of international sanctions to aid Syria's recovery. Moreover, in a positive move that seeks to break the ice, French and German foreign ministers have met Syria's new de facto rulers in Damascus, marking the first trip by top European officials to the country since the fall of Bashar al-Assad. Yet another issue to process and address is the scale of horror and repression inflicted by the Assad regime upon civilians and opposition over the past 13 years.


Under the rule of former President Bashar al-Assad and the war he waged on millions of Syrians to quash any idea of opposition, at least 231,278 people were killed in conflict-related violence, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. The sight of the liberated detention centres and torture sites of al-Assad have shocked people worldwide – particularly scenes of liberation of hundreds of prisoners from the infamous Sednaya Prison, also known as the “human slaughterhouse”.

While the fall of Assad has no doubt weakened Iran’s hold on the region as well as its ability to counter Israel, Assad’s fall has also served to thwart an Israeli plan to divide Syria into three blocks in order to sever its ties with Iran and Hezbollah, according to regional security sources briefed about the plot. Israel had planned to establish military and strategic ties with the Kurds in the northeast and the Druze in the south, leaving Assad in power in Damascus under Emirati funding and control. This would have also served to limit Turkey’s influence in Syria to Idlib and the northwest, the stronghold of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Turkish-backed rebel groups whose lightning offensive earlier this month led to Assad’s downfall. Perhaps that is why, as a measure of its frustration, Israel has sent tanks, trudging deeper into Syria following Assad’s downfall, annexing a larger part of the Golan Heights region in contravention of international law.

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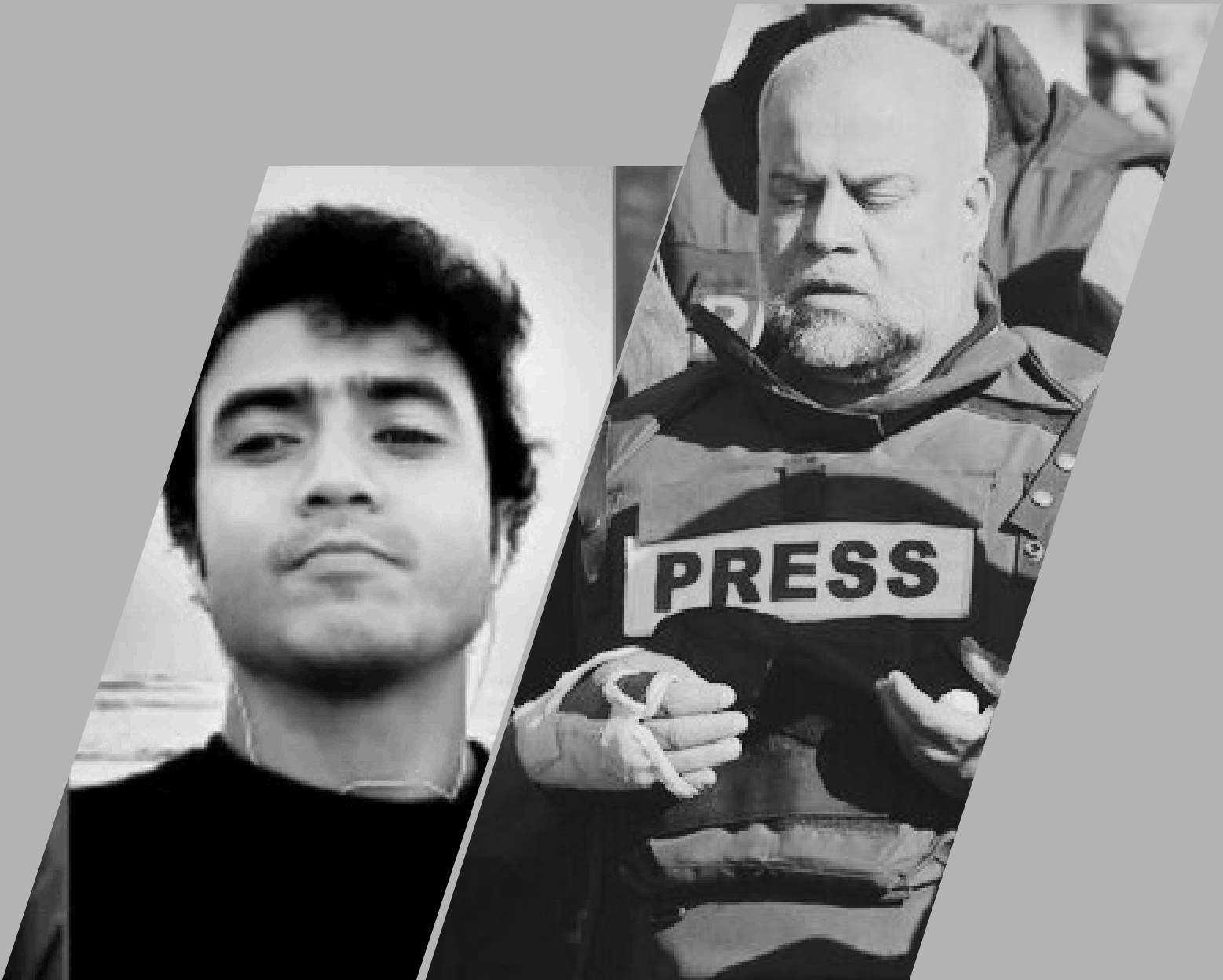
2024 hottest year in climate, deadliest for journalists

In 2024, global temperatures reached unprecedented levels, making it the hottest year on record. The average global temperature exceeded pre-industrial levels by 1.54°C, surpassing previous records. This alarming rise is attributed to the combined effects of human-induced climate change and a strong El Niño event. The increased temperatures have led to a surge in extreme weather events, including heatwaves, floods, droughts, and wildfires, causing significant disruptions to ecosystems and human societies - the year saw a number of life-threatening disasters, from Hurricane Helene, which devastated parts of North Carolina and Florida, to powerful heat waves across the U.S. In June, 1,300 people died in Saudi Arabia when a heat wave hit during the Hajj religious pilgrimage, while during the same summer, elections in India were impacted, and schools had to be shuttered down in the face of devastating heat waves affecting South and South East Asia.

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Likewise, it was also the deadliest year on record for journalists, as the Israeli genocide has continued unabated into the new year, despite a running ICJ investigation into the case of Israel's genocide. Reporters Without Borders has reported that 2024 has been one of the deadliest years for journalists, with a 57.4% rise in fatalities in conflict zones, marking a 5-year high. High-risk areas like Iraq, Sudan, Myanmar, Ukraine, and Gaza contributed to this surge, while the report also notes an increase in journalist imprisonments, with 550 journalists in custody by mid-December. While many will see a cause for optimism in revolutionary changes in government in Syria and Bangladesh, a constant backsliding in democratic and human values in the Middle East and other parts of the world, including widespread far-right tendencies in the Europe and US, especially following the election of Trump, does not leave much room for celebration. That, and the fact that wars in Gaza, Ukraine, and a silent one in Sudan continue unabated and seemingly with no end, makes any forecast of a hopeful future rather grim, not least about whether the international order will survive much longer in the face of relentless US bullying and continued Israeli nonchalance as it goes about perpetrating a genocide without any remorse or fear of consequences in the future.





War exacerbates famine and humanitarian crises in Sudan

Sudan's 20-month-old civil war between the rebel militia RSF forces and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) has unleashed violence, death, hunger and disease on a scarcely imaginable scale: tens of thousands of people have been killed, 12 million have been displaced, and the country on the brink of famine. According to the Famine Review Committee (FRC), an independent technical body that reviews the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) for famine classifications, food insecurity in Sudan is worse than previous projections - more than half of its 48 million citizens are acutely food insecure and facing severe levels of hunger. According to the FRC analysis, an estimated 24.6 million people in Sudan are projected to face severe levels of acute food insecurity between December and May. Famine has been detected in at least five areas, the analysis said, with projections indicating that five additional areas will face famine between December 2024 and May 2025, including in North Darfur localities, including Um Kadadah, Melit, el-Fasher, At Tawisha and al-Lait. There is also a risk of famine in 17 additional areas such as the central Nuba Mountains, including in Delami, Western Kadugli, Um Durein and al-Buram localities, and in areas likely to experience high influxes of internally displaced people in North and South Darfur.

The toll of the war on civilians is likely to get much worse in the coming months, according to political analysts and aid workers. With no decisive military victory on the horizon, experts say that Sudan, whose war is often overlooked, is going to see more displacement, more hunger and more disease outbreaks in 2025, compounding what is already the world's worst humanitarian crisis with 30.4m people in need of assistance. The country itself is poised to become ever more fragmented, and could split not only into SAF and RSF areas, but also along other lines, if local warlords and militias who currently support the main sides decide to carve out territory for themselves. In the first 20 months of the war, more than 9 million Sudanese have been internally displaced, while 3 million others have fled into neighbouring countries such as Chad. Apart from hunger, disease is rampant as well. The country is in the midst of a large cholera outbreak, something made all the more difficult because more than 70% of Sudan's hospitals and medical facilities have been shuttered by the war. Despite such problems, Sudan is struggling to get sufficient humanitarian funding from the international community. This year, UNHCR, the United Nation's refugee agency, sought to raise \$1.031 billion (€1bn) for Sudan. But as of the end of October, it had only received 40% of this amount.

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US sanctions Pakistan missile program; shift towards pro-India stance

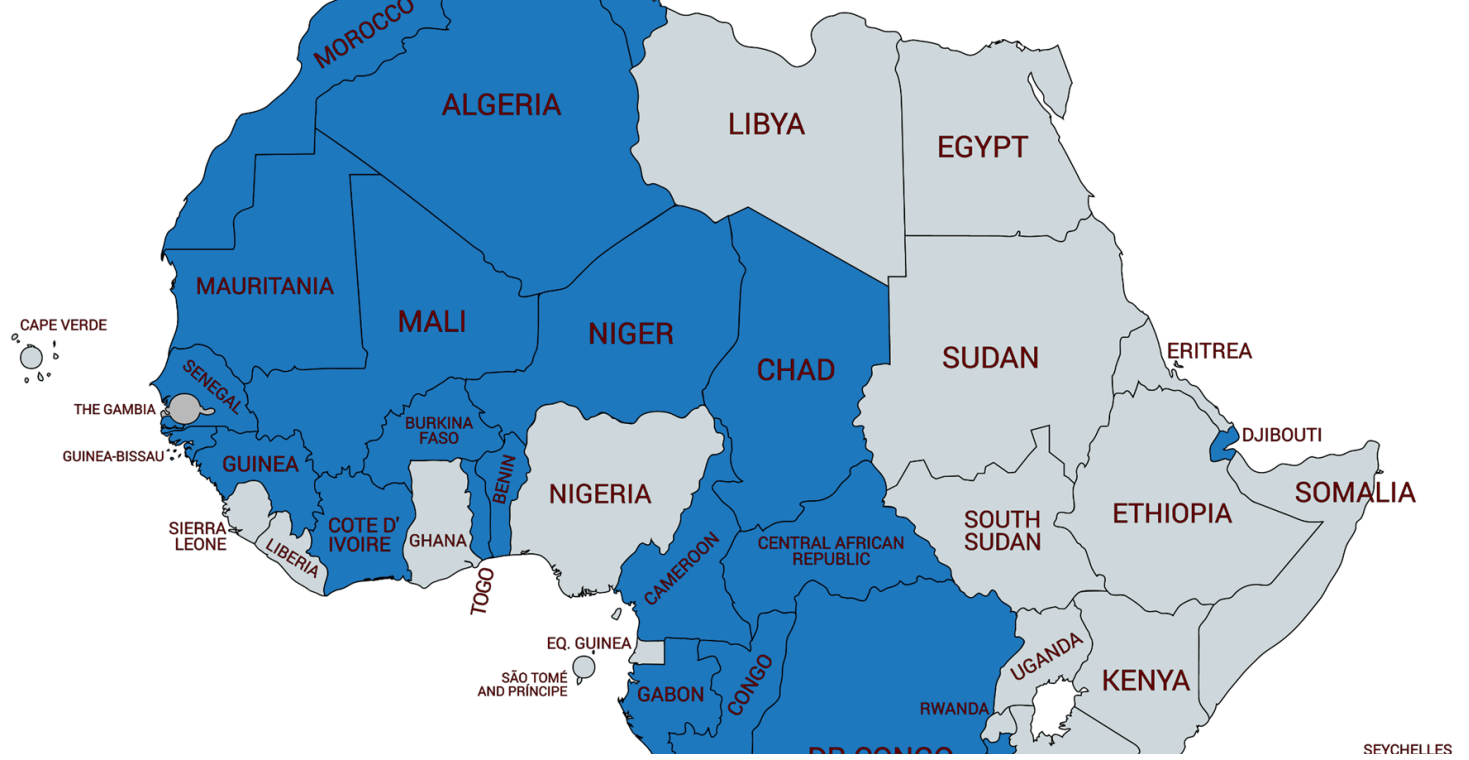
The United States recently announced that it was imposing new sanctions related to nuclear-armed Pakistan's long-range ballistic-missile program, including on the state-owned defense agency that oversees the program, the National Development Complex, and three other firms - Affiliates International, Akhtar and Sons Private Limited and Rockside Enterprise, all located in Karachi. A State Department factsheet said the Islamabad-based NDC has sought to obtain components for the country's long-range ballistic-missile program and missile-testing equipment. The sanctions were imposed under an executive order that "targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery," freezing any U.S. property belonging to the targeted entities and barring American citizens from doing business with them. The Pakistani foreign ministry said in a statement that the U.S. action was "unfortunate and biased" and would harm regional stability by "aiming to accentuate military asymmetries," an apparent reference to the country's rivalry with nuclear-armed India.

This unprecedented action marks a significant departure from Washington's

previous stance regarding Pakistan's missile program, highlighting a shift in both policy and rhetoric, and is the first instance in recent history where the U.S. has openly sanctioned a state-owned military conglomerate. The imposition has raised significant concerns among Pakistani leaders, who perceive this action as indicative of a "double standard" in U.S. foreign policy, one further exacerbated by the growing defense partnership between Washington and India, which includes advanced missile systems and high-end technology transfers that have substantially enhanced India's military capabilities. Such developments are viewed as creating a strategic imbalance within the South Asian region. Analysts caution that the incoming administration in Washington may intensify scrutiny over Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile program, building upon sanctions imposed by outgoing President Joe Biden. Trump's administration seemingly appears poised to adopt a more aggressive stance toward Pakistan-U.S. military cooperation, particularly given his key advisers' strong pro-India stance that includes advocacy for enhanced military collaboration with India.

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France losing colonial era grip on Africa

France is fast losing its once-dominant colonial influence in Francophone Africa, a region long considered Paris's geopolitical 'backyard' even after the breakup of the French Empire. As Paris was devising a new military strategy that would sharply reduce its permanent troop presence in Africa, two of its closest allies struck a double blow. In late November, the government of Chad, considered France's most stable and loyal partner in Africa, announced that it would terminate its decades-long military cooperation agreement with Paris. Senegal followed suit just hours later, when in an interview published hours later by *Le Monde*, Senegal's new president said it was "obvious" that soon French soldiers wouldn't be on Senegalese soil. Both countries, which hosted a combined 1,350 French troops, framed their decisions around their desires to uphold national sovereignty – a sentiment that has increasingly presented French military presence as an obstacle rather than a safeguard.

Chad and Senegal's surprise decisions are part of a broader trend of anti-French sentiment across Western Africa,

particularly in the Sahel region. In recent years, military coups in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have been accompanied by vocal public opposition to the French presence, as well as wishes from the juntas themselves to eject France's military presence. In Mali, French troops were expelled following the junta's decision to engage with the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group for security assistance. Similar dynamics unfolded in Niger and Burkina Faso, further shrinking France's military footprint in the region. In response to its waning influence in Francophone Africa, France has sought to cultivate ties with Anglophone African nations such as Nigeria, Kenya and Rwanda. However, unless this is done as part of a new strategy focused on partnership and development focus, the chances of success are not that great, seeing that there is competition from countries such as Türkiye, China and India and UAE on this front. One thing France cannot afford to do is think along lines of traditional focus on hegemony centered on military aid, or else it will get relegated to the sidelines.

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Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope's Christmas sermon condemns Israeli crimes in Gaza; Israeli backlash

Following an air strike that killed seven children from one family, Pope Francis has condemned the bombing of children in Gaza as "cruelty" and denounced the "extremely grave" humanitarian situation in Gaza, while appealing for the release of captives and a ceasefire in the war-torn coastal enclave. In his Christmas "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and world) address on Wednesday at the Vatican, Francis also appealed for peace in Ukraine and Sudan. "I think of the Christian communities in Israel and Palestine, particularly in Gaza, where the humanitarian situation is extremely grave. May there be a ceasefire, may the hostages be released and aid be given to the people worn out by hunger and by war," he said. Israel has killed at least 45,361 Palestinians in its war on Gaza and wounded 107,803 since October 7, 2023, the day a Hamas-led operation was launched into Israel during which 1,139 people were killed and about 200 were taken captive. Israeli "retaliation" has turned into a genocidal spree, displacing nearly the entire population of Gaza and left much of the enclave in ruins.

Israeli officials issued an immediate rebuke, accusing Pope Francis of "double standards." Israel's foreign ministry summoned the Vatican's ambassador, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, to express outrage over Pope Francis' strong criticism of its abuses against Palestinians in Gaza, accusing him of ignoring its security concerns. In recent sermons and masses, Pope Francis has denounced the deaths of Palestinian children, accusing Israel of committing acts of "cruelty" by targeting schools and hospitals and unleashing violence that has devastated Gaza. On Nov. 21, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza. Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its military campaign in the enclave. The pontiff has also called for an investigation to determine if Israel's attacks in Gaza constitute genocide, according to excerpts from an upcoming new book.

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A new era of McCarthyism against Palestine protests in US universities?

The past year saw many instances of wholesale repression of pro-Palestinian activism across U.S. university campuses. Several of them, like Columbia University and New York University have redefined protests against the state of Israel and its founding ideology Zionism as acts of anti-Semitism. Others called in law enforcement on students, faculty and staff demanding an end to Israeli genocide in Gaza, leading to arrests, expulsions, and even the denial of degrees for students for participation in protests. The current-day crackdown is reminiscent with past suppression of civil rights and anti-war protests in the 1960s and 1970s, emphasizing a historical pattern of repression. This is made possible by the corporate-like structure of universities prioritizing order and donor relations over academic freedom, stifling meaningful civil disobedience. As such, the American university – just like the American nation-state – is once again at peak repression like in the 60s and 70s. The overall result has been far fewer protests in the fall of 2024 than there were back in the spring – universities do not want meaningful protests that aim to disrupt and force change, rather they only want weak

protests, the kind that will not force them to change how they operate or how they invest their endowments – protests with no teeth at all.

Moreover, this year, besides students who missed out on graduation, an untold number of faculty and staff have seen themselves out of jobs or outright fired over their participation in pro-Palestine protests. Colleges have sacked a considerable number of anti-genocide contingent and adjunct faculty, who were already vulnerable due to their “short-time contract labour” status. Many more contingent faculty who have spoken out about Palestine, however, have simply been put “under investigation,” and their contracts quietly allowed to expire without renewals. This signifies, according to Donald Earl Collins, a new era of McCarthyism at US universities, where crackdown over the past year has had a chilling effect in quashing protests at predominantly white universities attended by America’s educational and socioeconomic elites, and the sheer amount of pressure coming from pro-Zionist centre-right and far-right politicians, state legislatures, and the US Congress has inadvertently put even the most well-meaning university

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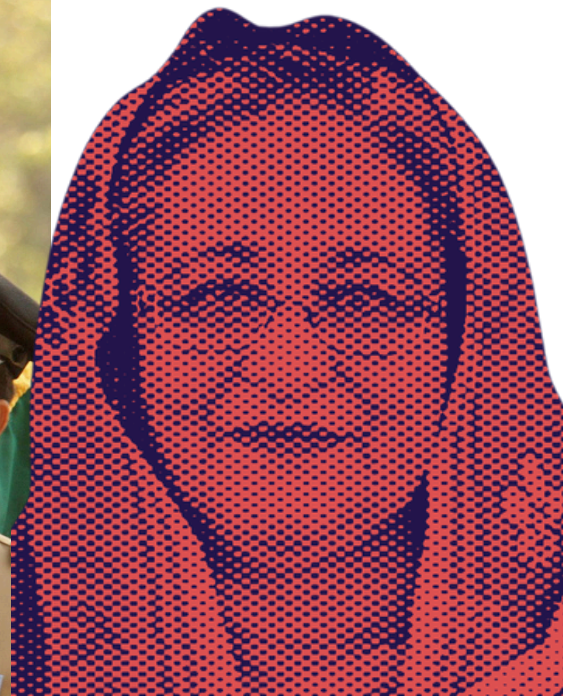
administration in a repressive role. According to Collins, however, this blanket attempt at suppression of protests could eventually backfire, potentially provoking more unrest and violence. What is clear at this moment however, is that U.S. universities are not at all bastions of critical thinking and social justice, but simply repressive environments hostile to genuine political discourse.

Photo: Mohammed Abubkr/ Pexels





Photo: Syed Zakir Hossain



Bangladesh sets up commission on BDR mutiny massacre; seeks Hasina extradition from India

Bangladesh has ordered a commission to re-investigate a failed 2009 paramilitary mutiny and subsequent crackdown, including the role of alleged “foreign” backers. The BDR mutineers had stolen thousands of weapons from the headquarters of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) paramilitary force before embarking on a killing spree in the barracks in February 2009. While the army eventually crushed the mutiny, the number of dead included 57 army officials. Eventually, hundreds of soldiers were handed punishments by special military courts, ranging from death to a few years in prison, with the United Nations criticising the process for failing to meet basic standards. Since Sheikh Hasina’s fall, families of soldiers killed in the violence have been campaigning to reopen the investigation. Protesters have also alleged India’s involvement in that plot. Meanwhile, as the country celebrated its Independence Day on December 16, Dr. Yunus the head of the country’s interim government said that elections in Bangladesh could be held by the end of 2025, provided that electoral reforms are carried out first.

Among other developments, Bangladesh has sent a formal request to India to

extradite ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 23 December, who fled to New Delhi in August amid the student-led protests that ended her 15 years in power, as per the country’s foreign affairs adviser. India’s Foreign Ministry said it had received Bangladesh’s request but didn’t immediately provide details. The Dhaka-based International Crimes Tribunal has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and her close aides, and the government has sought help from the international police organization Interpol for her arrest. On the other hand, after victims and families of victims of disappeared persons filed legal proceedings against Hasina and her administration on charges of disappearance, illegal detentions, and human rights violations on 6 January 2025, the International Criminal Tribunal again issued another round arrest warrants against Hasina and 10 others, including her former defence adviser Tariq Ahmed Siddiq and former IGP Benazir Ahmed, ordering authorities to ensure court appearances by February 12. As per Indian newspapers, Hasina has been living in safe houses in India since August and has been changing locations periodically due to security concerns.

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