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A New Era of Geopolitics, Ukraine, Taiwan, French Elections, Kazakhstan, The Filibuster, Peru's Oil Spill, Guacamole Shortage, The Labor Crisis



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REUTERS

By Andrew Wong

A new chapter of history has begun. Vladimir Putin's brazen and unprovoked attack on Ukraine on Friday, February 24, signaled a tumultuous end to one chapter of world history: a final nail in the coffin of the dominance of the American led, post Cold War liberal international order, and the peace that came with it. We are officially back in the era of great power competition, and it is scary out there.

On one side, we have the United States and the West, the victor of the Cold War and the dominant hyperpower of the world by every metric for the last 30 years. Yet our position as the hegemon of the world has waned: our decades long misadventures in the Middle East, apathy towards foreign entanglements, and internal democratic decay are just some of a myriad problems plaguing our foreign and domestic policies. While the West struggled to solve these issues, the other great and rising powers of the world have took notice, and quietly sought to remake the world in their own image. We are entering an era of multipolarity, and things will never be the same again: the Russians' invasion of Ukraine and China's increased aggression throughout the entire Indo-Pacific region are just the beginning of a new reality.

This new 21st century great power competition will be unlike any other humanity has seen in history. As the largest war in Europe since the Second World War rages on, we are beginning to see what our new reality will look like.

The interconnectedness of the world today, created by the rapid digitization of the world and the exponential spread of the internet, means that now everyone on this planet is now on the frontline of this new competition. The new great power competition will soon come to encompass all aspects of politics, economics, and society. It will be a battle between liberalism and totalitarianism, between laissez faire capitalism and state capitalism, and between freedom and repression. New warfighting domains in cyberspace and outer space will be explored as a means to gain any sort of hard power advantage, while in the real world, the globalized world of unfettered free-trade will rapidly come to an end as the great powers begin to decouple and insulate their economies from each other.

This is the new reality we live in - a new era where great power conflict has returned, where all sides wield weapons of immense soft power and hard power that can completely upend the world as we know it. Peace can no longer be taken for granted. Conflict will no longer have a frontline. Economic warfare will cripple global trade and markets. Cyberattacks can plunge organized society into chaos for weeks on end. Meanwhile, increasing military tension has the possibility of rapidly escalating into nuclear Armageddon. Putin's invasion of Ukraine is only a small taste of how crazy the world we live in can become, and it's only going to be crazier from here as the geopolitical world rapidly changes to meet this new reality. A new chapter of human history is dawning upon us. Get ready - it's going to be a long ride.



Tension and Turmoil: The History and Consequences of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

GETTY IMAGES

By Ziv Shah

Right now, the biggest news story is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Every day, new information is being released about Russia's intentions, the West's actions, and what could come of this precarious situation. But why does Russia want to invade Ukraine, and what would the impacts be?

Why is Russia Invading?

In 1950, an organization called NATO was established. Known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO was a strategic and military alliance formed to provide security against the Soviet Union. After World War II, European nations were left in ruin. Economies destroyed, and security constantly under question. The Soviet Union was expanding its sphere of influence, especially in Eastern European countries, creating its own military alliance known as the Warsaw Pact. The West needed some way to be sure that if their security was threatened, others would send forces and aid. So, NATO was created as an alliance to state that an attack against one member would be considered an attack against all the members. It has historically been of support in attacks against forces supported by Russia, with the first example being the Korean War. The attack by North Korea was considered an example of Communist aggression driven

primarily by Russia, and members quickly coordinated defense forces and headquarters. NATO remains the largest peacetime military alliance in the world.

After the Fall of the Soviet Union, and sequentially the Warsaw Pact, NATO expanded east, picking up Eastern European Nations that had been in the Warsaw Pact. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, and many more joined. As NATO expands further and farther east and gets closer to Russia, Putin has started getting more and more concerned with its expansion.

In 2008, NATO stated that it planned to enroll Ukraine, an action which Putin considers an existential threat to Russia. He made it clear that he believed a line had been crossed with the actions of trying to enroll them. Putin has claimed that Ukraine is a fundamental part, both "historically and culturally" of Russia.

In the past, Russia has relied heavily on Ukraine, during and after the Soviet era. Ukraine was the second biggest Soviet state, with Russia being larger, and was relied on for trade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This Ukrainian reliance on Russia (and vice versa) has now withered away as Ukraine seeks to align itself with the West. There are around eight million ethnic Russians living in Ukraine, who have been used as a reason for Russia's interest in Ukraine; to protect their people. Kyiv, the capital, has been called "The Mother of Russian Cities", it was on par in terms of influ-

ence with Moscow and St. Petersburg. Lastly, Russia has relied on Ukraine for energy, and has been paying transit fees for its pipelines, to keep them pumping gas to customers in the rest of Europe.

In 2014, Ukraine's Crimea Oblast (region) was annexed by Russia. It was the first significant action on Russia's behalf to threaten Ukrainian security. It is important to note that this region was only officially annexed when Crimeans voted for independence in a local referendum, the validity of which was heavily disputed. It was the first time since WWII that a nation has annexed the territory of another, and saw the bloodiest battle in Europe since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. During this time, tensions between the two countries heightened when mass protests ousted the president, Viktor Yanukovich, who was allied with Putin.

In December of 2021, Putin sent America and NATO a list of demands that it said were needed to ensure Russia's security. Amongst them was that Ukraine would never join NATO, and that NATO would draw down forces in Eastern European countries. Western nations dismissed the main demands, and threatened sanctions on Moscow. Russian forces started building up around the Ukrainian borders at this time, however the Kremlin denied these accusations, and they were not enough for major notice.

Ukraine is deeply divided upon this subject. It has historically sought to align itself with Western institutions more closely, such as the European Union and NATO. A Russian speaking group in the East (specifically in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk) has favored closer ties with Russia however the Ukrainian speaking part of the population in the East has favored ties with Western Europe.

Russia is considered by many to be seeking to regain power and prestige, trying to reach the power of what the Soviet Union once had. When it seized Crimea, it gained a hold on the Black Sea, and from there can project its power and influence further than it has before. Putin has made it clear he will never allow Ukraine to become “anti-Russian” and has described Russians and Ukrainians to be “one people” who “occupy the same historical and spiritual place”.

What is happening?

The United States is committed to Ukraine’s sovereignty, and does not recognize Russia’s claims to Crimea. Before the war, the United States insisted that Ukraine and Russia settle disagreements with the Minsk Agreements. Made in 2014-2015, these call for a cease fire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, and Ukrainian border control over places it shares with Russia. D.C. has boosted aid to Ukraine in response to Russia, nearly tripling aid sent, in the form of mostly military supplies and training. European countries, along with the US, have posed sanctions on Russian sectors and officials.

In February, major action was taken by Joe Biden, with 3000 US troops being ordered into positions in neighboring NATO countries, Poland and Romania. Many world leaders have started meeting with Putin to talk about de-escalation, such as French President Emanuel Macron, but none have succeeded. In one of the most recent meetings on February 11th, diplomats from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia were not able to come to an agreement after nine hours of negotiations.

On February 24th, Putin ordered an invasion of Ukraine. He calls it “demilitarization” and “denazification” of the country, however it is clear that these are not his true intentions. At the beginning, he ordered troops to seize Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, but was met with impressive amounts of Ukraine resistance that continue to hold off, and frustrate Russia. Now, Putin has escalated attacks, sending in mile long convoys and beginning indiscriminate shelling of civilians. He has even put Russia’s nuclear deterrent on high alert. On March 2nd, Russian forces overtook the city of Kherson in south Ukraine, marking the first major city to have fallen since the start of the conflict.

Even with the situation looking very bleak for Ukraine, they are mounting an impressive and strong fight back against Russian soldiers.



Javelin Anti-Tank Missiles for the Ukrainian Army arrive in neighboring Poland

Civilians are taking up arms, learning how to make molotov cocktails, doing anything they can to help fight. When offered a safe ride out of Ukraine, president Volodymyr Zelensky was quoted saying “I need ammunition, not a ride”.

Several countries around the world have responded to this call, offering military equipment, but no troops. Joe Biden sent \$350m of weapons, the European Union sent 450 million Euros worth, and the UK promised the delivery of supplies to Ukraine. Not only aid to Ukraine, but these countries are also attacking Russia and Putin directly, sending sanctions and more. Several sports have banned Russian athletes, with the biggest by far being FIFA, who blocked Russia from competing in this year’s World Cup. Also, Russia was blocked from the SWIFT banking system, blocking the transfer of wealth. This and several other sanctions have caused the Russian economy to fall, with no end in sight unless Putin puts an end to this war.

Not only is he opposed by those around the world, but also those in his own country. Many public Russian figures have protested, including tennis player Andrey Rublev, who wrote “no war please” on a camera after a win in a Dubai tennis tournament. Children of prominent Russian businessmen have spoken out, as have countless numbers of TV show hosts and journalists. Anti-war protests have popped up everywhere across the globe, including in Russia, with thousands of arrests every night. At this point, it seems like the whole world is against Russia, with even Switzerland taking the side of Ukraine.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addresses his nation in the aftermath of the Russian invasion

REUTERS



Ukrainians crowd under a destroyed bridge as they try to flee crossing the Irpin river in the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine.

NEW YORK TIMES

What are the effects?

The conflict in Ukraine has had the most casualties in a war since WWII. There have been more than 50,000 casualties and over 1.5 million citizens displaced (Global Conflict Tracker) as of the evening of March 2. Ukraine has applied to join the European Union, and the majority of the world has turned against Russia. This marks the start of a new period in history; gone are the post-Cold War peace days, conflict is now a very real threat for some. No longer is everyone trying to avoid conflict, but using their military advantage to gain territory. The rise of Russia represents a break in the liberal control of Europe, as what is essentially a dictatorship has risen up and taken control of Eastern Europe. However, Russia is on the way to becoming a pariah state, being ostracized by the rest of the world. Even longtime ally China has called this invasion a “war”.

Even though the global threat of nuclear war has been around since the cold war, none were ever used on a global power because of the doctrine of MAD (mutually assured destruction), but with Putin putting his nuclear deterrent on high alert, nobody knows where this could lead. The US and other countries have promised a swift and powerful response to the launch of any nuclear missiles. However, as Putin gets

more and more desperate, he could take drastic action. He has in recent days sidelined some of his advisors in the war on Ukraine, and seems to be acting by himself.

If Russia does succeed, it could shift the geopolitical situation in Afro-Eurasia, showing that African and Asian nations may have more power over Europe and America, and that Authoritarian states can gain more power in a climate dominated by liberal democracies. Just as Russia controls much of Europe’s oil, Qatar and Saudi Arabia would likely try to use energy control to strengthen their position on the global stage. It would also create another refugee crisis, as already over a million people have been displaced, and countries such as Poland have had to take in Ukrainian citizens. If Russia gains control of Ukraine, it may not just be an end to one conflict, but the beginning of many. Putin has emphasized a desire to restore Russia to its Soviet Union days, and Ukraine may just be the first step. The Baltic states’ security comes into question. The Soviet Union controlled many of Baltic states, and many experts agree that those would be a step in Putin’s plan. The only way to tell however, is time.

But for now, we can support citizens in Ukraine. If you would like to help, you can donate to UNICEF, Choose Love, Project Hope, APK-MUK, Red Cross, or Internation Rescue Committee.



Javelin Anti-Tank Missiles for the Ukrainian Army arrive in neighboring Poland

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Escalation in the Far East

RITCHIE B. TONGOEFE/DIGIS MAK

By Alex Wong

The Republic of China, commonly referred to as Taiwan, has faced repeated threats of annexation from the People's Republic of China. Cross-strait tensions have been ratcheted up a level, as Communist China continues to fly its planes through the sovereign airspace of the Republic of China. With the fate of Taiwanese democracy and way of life hanging in the balance, the world is starting to take note of the precarious situation of the Republic of China.

The bloody Chinese Civil War had resulted in the exile of the Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, from the Chinese Mainland, with the victorious Communist Party taking control of the Chinese Mainland. Although the Nationalist government had been anti-Communist, it was by no means democratic. Generalissimo Chiang-Kai Shek continued his tyrannical rule over the island of Taiwan while in power. His rule was marked by persecution by his secret police and a cult of personality that rivalled that of his Communist counterpart on the Mainland, Mao Tse-Tung. Even after the death of Chiang in 1975, power passed to his son, who continued the dictatorial rule of his father. It was only after the death of Chiang's

son, a student-led democratic movement, and the rise of Lee Tung-Hui that the Republic of China finally achieved full democracy. Unlike the Tiananmen Square Massacre, where Communists massacred student protestors for standing up for democracy, protestors in the Republic of China were granted an audience with President Lee Tung-Hui, who empathized with the student protestors and set up the first free and fair elections in the Republic of China in 1996. However, even after the establishment of free and fair elections in Taiwan, the ruling Kuomintang party remained in power, until 2016, when Tsai Ing-Wen and her Christian Democrat Party won an upset victory. Tsai ran on a platform of promising to be tough against the Communist threat, as the Kuomintang had grown increasingly closer with its Communist neighbors.

Fast forward to the present day, and tensions between Peking and Taipei have never been higher. The Republic of China is no stranger to threats from Peking, as bunkers throughout the country are commonplace and there is compulsory military service for all eligible persons (similar to that of Singapore and Switzerland). They have been living with the threat of a communist invasion since their exile in 1949.

However, Peking has been ordering bombers to fly through the sovereign airspace of the Republic of China in very obvious acts of aggression. Communist leader Xi Jinping has also said "reunification with [the Republic of China] must be fulfilled". The People's Republic of China does not recognize the sovereignty of the Republic of China, instead of considering it to be a breakaway province of the People's Republic of China. Communist China has also made illegitimate claims to the Spratly and Senkaku Islands through Taiwan.

There are various reasons for the increase in Cross-Strait tensions; the ego of Xi Jinping, the weakening of America's position on the global stage, and the threat Tsai Ing-Wen's administration poses to the People's Republic of China. The inauguration of President Joe Biden came as good news to Peking, as Biden had warm relations with Xi and the ruling Communists during his tenure as vice president of the United States and United States Senator. Biden also appeared to have a weak foreign policy approach, which has resulted in various foreign policy debacles. Most notably, in August of 2021, a disastrous drawdown and withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan resulted in Taliban insurgents taking over the country.

Above: A Military Parade in Taiwan during National Day Celebrations in 2021



A Chinese H-6 bomber (top) flying over the Bashi Channel near Taiwan as a Taiwanese F-16 (bottom) approaches.

Although Biden blamed this debacle on the Afghan Security Forces, the Chinese, Russians, and other enemies of the United States saw this as a sign of waning American supremacy. In response, Russia began threatening an invasion of Ukraine, and the PRC (not wanting to be left behind by their Russian allies) started threatening the annexation of the Republic of China. Officially, the United States does not recognize the sovereignty of the Republic of China, however, it routinely sends political and military advisors to the island. The Republic of China considers the United States to be a stalwart ally of the country and thus would expect an American response should a Communist invasion come.

In recent years, the atrocities of the Chinese Communist Party have come to light. The genocide of Uyghur Muslims in the East Turkestan Autonomous Region, the smothering of Mongolian culture in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, and heavy handed suppression of pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong have all resulted in international condemnation. On

top of that, a stagnating economy and the aging population of the Chinese mainland means that China's dominance on the global stage may be waning. As such, Xi Jinping wants to show the world how powerful he can be. Xi also appears to be having a bit of FOMO (but for dictators), especially after the invasion of Ukraine by his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. Therefore, Xi sees threatening the Republic of China as an appropriate course of action.

The administration of Tsai Ing-Wen has not stood idle to the Communist threat. Tsai's predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang, had focused on closer relations with the Chinese Mainland and even went as far as holding a summit with his counterparts in Peking. However, many in the Republic of China disapproved of Ma's weak position on the Communist threat and thus elected no-nonsense candidate Tsai Ing-Wen and her Christian Democratic Party to the Presidency. Since her inauguration, Tsai has stood firm against the Communist threat, not being shy of flaunting the sovereignty of Taiwan and building strong

relations with foreign countries such as Czechia and Lithuania. Tsai's no-nonsense foreign policy has scared the Communists, as her administration continues to build both strong relations abroad and defense capabilities at home. An invasion of the Republic of China would not be an easy feat for the People's Republic of China. The Republic of China has a robust air force and many in the population have military experience (due to the compulsory military service all eligible persons must go through). It also has a comprehensive system of bunkers, with the capital of Taipei alone having over 1000 bunkers to protect the safety of the Taiwanese people. Air raid drills on the island are commonplace. The Republic of China also has the backing of the strongest military in the world, with American military bases in Okinawa and Guam being able to respond to a Communist threat at a minute's notice.

In summary, while the Communists may be posturing for an invasion of the Republic of China, it is highly unlikely that an invasion will occur. If an invasion does occur, the Taiwanese people will fight relentlessly for their homeland, similarly to the brave men and women fighting for their homeland in Ukraine. The best way that the citizens of the Republic of China can beat back the Communist threat is by continuing to live their lives as normal and preserving the Taiwanese culture. The Chinese Communist Party is no stranger to the eradication of cultures, as seen in East Turkestan, Inner Mongolia, and Hong Kong. Even so, the Taiwanese people are strong and proud people. With a strong government in power, they will be able to outlast the Communists and perhaps see the collapse of the Communist State as a whole.

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA/WIKIMEDIA

Tsai Ing-Wen



U.S. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY/WIKIMEDIA

Taiwan Strait

The French Election



COMPOSITE: SIPA/SHUTTERSTOCK/REUTERS/NURPHOTO/GUARDIAN

By Sarina Lalin

France will vote for its new president this April in an election marked by anxiety over national identity, division over the ongoing response to Covid-19, and questions regarding how to balance the nation's diversified economy. Under the Fifth Republic constitution, the French government has a semi-presidential system, meaning that the president governs alongside the Prime Minister and ministers of the country. The process by which the president is elected is a very unique approach, encompassing two voting rounds and a winner by absolute majority. The first round is a free-for-all among all official candidates, to be held on April 10th. To even be considered for the first round, potential candidates must be nominated by 500 elected representatives such as mayors and deputies. Assuming that no candidate wins over 50% of the vote in the initial round, the second round of voting will be organized in which the top two candidates will compete in a run-off, to be held on April 24th (Paris). Due to the unprecedented circumstances of the past few years, France is preparing to face a very unusual presidential election, with a disillusioned electorate, no high polling left-wing

prospects, and a clear favorite who is yet to announce his candidacy.

That favorite is President Emmanuel Macron. Despite his full campaign team and his "desire" to run for a second term, the current president has delayed his official declaration until closer to the March 4th deadline. Macron is still expected to officially announce his candidacy; however, he has refrained from doing so thus far in order to wait for the Covid-19 situation to improve. Some argue that Macron is using the pandemic to make French voters forget about what they see as France's decline, while others believe that the delay is a strategy to keep his opponents guessing. Regardless of his intentions, one thing is certain: Macron has a clear lead in the polls. Macron has consistently earned the top choice at about 25% of respondents in recent opinion polls. Additionally, a recent study by the Economist has used reputable pollsters to predict the outcome of the presidential election. The results show that Macron is highly likely to progress to round two and win, with around a 95% chance of making it to the second round and an 88% chance of winning the presidency (The Economist's French election model).

Mr. Macron appears stronger today than he

has in a long time. Under his leadership, the economy has grown by 7% and unemployment in France currently stands at 7.4%, which is considered very low for the country (Corbet). Additionally, the dismantling of Covid-19 regulations right before the election, including mask requirements in many public areas, appears to be a direct symbol and powerful message of his competence as a leader. The idea that he has defeated the coronavirus pandemic and guided the economy through its difficulties is certainly contributing to his popularity. While President Macron is clearly bidding well for the upcoming election, he seems to be the only non-right candidate with this fortune.

France may be known for its labor protection laws and generous social welfare policies, but far-right views have become much more mainstream in recent years. The global pandemic, a disillusioned electorate, issues regarding immigration, and France's decline as a global power... All of these are factors in the country's sudden shift in political beliefs.

Above: The most prominent candidates of the 2022 French Elections

According to an Ipsos poll, only 25% of French people believe that France is not in decline. As a result, immigration has emerged as a major concern for many citizens as they believe it has contributed to their loss of influence (Teinturier). Due to conservatives' strident views on immigration and the left-wing's lack of an answer on the matter, many people have adopted a more right-leaning way of thinking. In addition to this, left-wing voters in France are much more disengaged. A high percentage of the left's population is France's youth and, due to their high rate of abstention, right-wing voters are more mobilized at this stage in the campaign (Momtaz). The French left is being virtually drowned by dominating right and far-right views as they struggle to produce even one viable candidate. At this point, the presidential election is essentially Macron, known for his centrist views encompassing both liberal and conservative ideology, against the right.

The rise of Eric Zemmour, a far-right politician who says Islam is an existential threat to France and has been accused of inciting hatred on numerous occasions, is the most distinguishable sign of the right-wing's popularity. He blames French decline on the surplus of immigrants and the influence of Islam, associating the presence of those who are not "natives of the country" with danger. Zemmour was hired as a journalist for *Le Figaro*, a well-respected right-wing newspaper in 1996. His passionate and provocative works have made him a successful writer, a prominent columnist, and a popular TV pundit. (Paris and Flandrin). After many years of entertaining the possibility of running, Zemmour has decided to run for the 2022 presidential election and create his own political party, *Reconquête*. In a recent opinion polling, Zemmour earned the third leading choice at about 15% of respondents (Poloni). Zemmour has very extreme views on immigration and Islam, so the fact that he has so many supporters is evidence of the changing times.



CHEEP/WIKIMEDIA

Eric Zemmour

Another example of this right-wing popularity can be seen with another potential candidate and politician, Marine Le Pen. Le Pen is the daughter of former party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, who created and led the National Front, the main far-right party in France. In contrast to her father, who is known for his provocation, Le Pen has a more mainstream approach with a softer tone and a message directed toward blue-collar workers; however, she remains constant with the party's typical anti-immigration and anti-NATO platform. Marine Le Pen ran for president in both 2012 and 2017. She came in third place in the first round of the 2012 election. Despite a dismal performance in the presidential debate with Emmanuel Macron, she advanced to the second round in 2017 and received the highest vote total ever for a far-right party with 33% (Paris and Flandrin). Marine Le Pen is predicted to be Macron's biggest competitor in the upcoming election. She has earned the second leading choice with 17% of respondents and has a 45% probability of advancing to the second round (The Economist's French election model).

The French Presidential election of 2022 is shaping out to be an interesting one...The unprecedented circumstances of the past few years have certainly altered people's perception of life and this change is clear in the shift in their political beliefs. While Macron is labeled as the clear favorite, it is impossible to predict the outcome of the election, especially with right-wing stances becoming increasingly popular. With only seven weeks until the initial round of the election, it remains to be seen if Macron will officially announce his candidacy and which right-wing candidate will rise above the others.



THE WHITE HOUSE/WIKIMEDIA

Emmanuel Macron

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THE KREMLIN/WIKIMEDIA

Marine Le Pen



TIME/GETTY IMAGES

By Sophia Deeney

Kazakhstan is the largest country in Central Asia and the ninth largest country in the world, with an area of 1.052 million mi² and a population of 19 million people (Britannica, 2020). It mainly borders Russia in the northwest, but also China in the east, and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Aral Sea, and Turkmenistan in the south (Britannica, 2020). The vast majority of Kazakhstan's inhabitants are Kazakhs, a Turkic ethnic group originating in Uzbekistan and Russia, with only a small percentage of inhabitants of Russian descent (Britannica, n.d.). Kazakhstan gained its independence on December 16th, 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and has since been a constitutional unitary republic (Britannica, 2020). The jewel of Kazakhstan is its economy, with the country possessing an abundance of natural resources, most notably oil (Britannica, n.d.). Kazakhstan produces 1.6 million barrels of oil daily and has attracted billions of dollars in foreign investment (BBC News, 2022). However, the country's wealth has not been funneled down to the population, who have an average income of less than £2,500 a year (BBC News, 2022). For nearly three decades after claiming its independence, Kazakhstan was ruled by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, a former Communist Party member with strong

connections to Russian President Vladimir Putin (BBC News, 2022). President Nazarbayev, who focused on economic reform while resisting moves to introduce more democracy, stepped down in 2019 to allow for the current president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, to take his place, which proved to be detrimental to the political stability of the country (BBC News, 2022).

The Kazakhstan revolts were a series of massive protests that began on January 2nd, 2022 after a rapid increase in the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), a cheap, low-carbon fuel that several Kazakhs use to power their cars, following the end of a government-enforced price cap on January 1st (Bilefsky, 2022) (BBC News, 2022). The government claimed the price cap was resulting in LPG shortages and it could no longer afford to boost supplies (BBC). Its decision to lift the cap nearly doubled the price (BBC News, 2022). As the protests escalated, the peoples' demands shifted from reduced fuel prices to greater political freedom (Bilefsky, 2022). Citizens were furious at social and economic discrepancies, such as earning below minimum wage and living under a corrupted election system, exasperated by a wrathful pandemic and aggravated by the lack of real democracy (Bilefsky, 2022). Protesters are primarily calling for the political forces in charge of the country since 1991 to be deposed,

but they have failed to communicate this demand safely and effectively (Bilefsky, 2022). Several citizens involved in the revolts utilized methods of destruction as means of attracting the government's attention to their demands, which manifested a larger issue that has permanent geopolitical ramifications (Bilefsky, 2022).

The riots began in the city of Zhanaozen, a prominent oil hub, where peaceful demonstrations were performed by native Kazakhs traveling in small groups with posters imploring for fundamental political reform (Marson & Grove, 2022). Predominantly Islamic armed terrorists and bandits quickly overtook these nonviolent protests, morphing them into full-scale attacks on entities crucial to the social and political stability of Kazakhstan (Marson & Grove, 2022). Soon enough, thousands of enraged demonstrators went to the streets of Kazakhstan, causing the country's despotic government to face its worst crisis since independence in 1991 (Bilefsky, 2022). City Hall in Almaty, the country's largest city, was immediately set ablaze and the airport was invaded (Bilefsky, 2022). Protesters set fire to police cars as well as the regional office of the ruling Nur Otan party (Bilefsky, 2022). The police accused protestors of being responsible for the deaths of 13 policemen and the injuries of 353 others (Bilefsky, 2022). Moreover, as

rogue demonstrators attempted to gain control of police stations and government buildings through unwarranted aggression, a total of 225 people were killed, 19 of them from security forces in Kazakhstan, the rest protesters, and over 5,000 were arrested by Kazakhstan officials (Aljazeera, 2022). Approximately 1,000 individuals have allegedly been injured across the country, with 400 being treated in hospitals (BBC News, 2022). These vicious raids were finally tamed on January 11th, marking a one-week period of destruction that reverberated throughout the country (Aljazeera, 2022).

The Kazakhstan government's response to the uprisings in the country was frail and considerably delayed as the newly elected president, Mr. Tokayev has been attempting to carve out a stronger position for himself (Bilefsky, 2022). Tokayev's political branding distracted Kazakhstan's bureaucracy and elites from calming the revolts, which contributed to the government's slow reaction to the demonstrators' demands (Bilefsky, 2022). In a frenzy of fear, Mr. Tokayev also took over the National Security Council of Kazakhstan, which marginalized his former patron and predecessor, Mr. Nazarbayev (Aljazeera, 2022). This increased tensions within the government and paved the way for greater political issues involving the Kazakh government (Aljazeera, 2022). As the government reached its breaking point, they conceded to a few of the demonstrators' demands including the possibility of dissolving the Parliament, which would result in new elections for the people (Bilefsky, 2022). In addition, efforts to calm the demonstrations included the institution of a state of emergency and the blockage of social networking sites and chat apps such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and, for the first time, the Chinese app WeChat (Bilefsky, 2022). Public protests without permits were already illegal, causing the imprisonment of approximately 8,000 individuals in the aftermath of the revolts (BBC News, 2022). Curfews have been imposed as well, along with the prohibition of large gatherings (BBC News, 2022).

Those steps have largely failed to quell the unrest, setting the stage for an announcement on January 7, 2022, that called for a tougher Kazakh response and authorized security forces to "fire without warning" at the protesters. (Bilefsky, 2022). With the initiation of the President's Shoot-to-Kill policy, Tokayev had several Kazakh policemen shooting down both Islamic terrorists and peaceful Kazakh protesters, which resulted in hundreds of deaths (Aljazeera, 2022). After complaints about beatings and torture of those detained in the aftermath, Tokayev ordered his police on Saturday the 11th to avoid abuses and told prosecutors to be lenient to those who have not committed grave crimes (Aljazeera, 2022).

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also

invited the Russian-led military alliance called the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to intervene in an attempt to extinguish the revolts (Bilefsky, 2022). The CSTO coalition consists of six former Soviet governments including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan (Bagchi, 2022). CSTO military intervention caused numerous deaths of anti-government demonstrators, with hundreds more becoming injured and hospitalized (Bilefsky, 2022). The CSTO began a slow withdrawal of troops on Thursday, January 13th, 2022 with the Russian Defense Ministry reporting on Saturday, January 15th that all of its planes had returned all of its troops from Kazakhstan (Aljazeera, 2022). As of January 15th, it was not clear whether troops from other CSTO countries remained in Kazakhstan (Aljazeera, 2022).

The Kazakhstan revolts have produced several geopolitical ramifications impacting Russia, the United States, and Kazakhstan itself. The recent protests are significant because the nation has long been viewed as a pillar of political and economic stability in a turbulent area, even though its stability has come at the expense of a repressive regime that stifles dissent (Bilefsky, 2022). The demonstrations are further destabilizing an already explosive area in which Russia and the US compete for influence (BBC News, 2022). The uprisings have jeopardized Kazakhstan's alignment with Russia, whose president, Vladimir V. Putin, views the country as part of Russia's sphere of influence (Bilefsky, 2022). Russia has used the deployment of Russian paratroopers and CSTO "peacekeepers," as an opportunity to reassert its dominance in its former Soviet domain (Bilefsky, 2022). Moscow's grasp on the region at a time when Russia is attempting to impose its economic and geopolitical power is challenged in countries such as Ukraine and Belarus (Bilefsky, 2022). The instability in Kazakhstan has revealed the weakness of the strongman leaders that the Kremlin has relied on to preserve order. The actions, according to the Kremlin, signal another prospective threat to authoritarian control in a neighboring nation (Bilefsky, 2022). The nations of the former Soviet Union are also keeping a careful eye on the protests, and what happens in Kazakhstan might help fuel opposition movements abroad (Bilefsky, 2022). Kazakhstan is particularly important to the United States because it has become a key nation for American energy companies, with Exxon Mobil and Chevron investing tens of billions of dollars in western Kazakhstan, where the crisis began this month (Bilefsky, 2022). Although it maintains close links with Moscow, Kazakh governments have also maintained close ties with the United States, with oil investment seen as a counterweight to Russian influence (Bilefsky, 2022). Moreover, the US government has historically

been harsher on post-Soviet authoritarianism in Kazakhstan than on authoritarianism in Russia and Belarus (Bilefsky, 2022). Finally, the Kazakhstan revolts reflected broad dissatisfaction with Kazakhstan's oppressive authoritarian rule and chronic corruption, which has resulted in assets being concentrated within a limited political and economic elite (BBC News, 2022).

The Kazakhstan National Security Committee claimed in late January that the situation in Almaty had settled and that security personnel had regained control (BBC News, 2022). As a compromise, the Kazakhstan government has delayed the removal of its price cap on liquefied petroleum gas; ordering the prices of all vehicle fuel to be maintained for six months (BBC News, 2022). Politicians have also been ousted from their positions. President Tokayev stated that the administration had failed to carry out "one of its main tasks - keeping inflation in check" (BBC News, 2022). However, the protests will not cease entirely in Kazakhstan, as analysts say uprisings will continue in the city of Zhanaozen, which has a history of anti-government strikes and demonstrations (BBC News, 2022).

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ABC NEWS

By Thomas Davis

What do Joe Manchin, Aaron Burr, Julius Caesar, and South American Privateers have in common? The filibuster. The word “filibuster” was first used in the 18th Century to refer to South American pirates who would destabilize governments and pillage land. Today, it remains a strategy for minority groups to play an oversized role in government. Today, in the United States, the filibuster is a political strategy in which a senator threatens to speak for hours to delay a vote. The filibuster, although seemingly integral to United States politics, does not make an appearance in the United States Constitution. The filibuster only exists due to Aaron Burr’s belief that the Senate should not be so regulated. Burr rallied senators and abolished the filibuster’s predecessor: the previous question motion. Since its inception, the continued existence of the filibuster has been uncertain, with it being unused for decades at a time. Today the existence of

the filibuster is still uncertain with Senator Joe Manchin (D) stating that he will not eliminate the filibuster under any circumstances, but with other senators strongly supporting its elimination.

The filibuster, as a political tool, was first used in the United States in 1806, but its origins can be traced back to ancient Rome. Historians believe that the first time that a filibuster was used in Rome was in 60 B.C. by Cato the Younger in order to prolong debate regarding contracts with tax collectors. It is also known that Cato utilized the filibuster to combat the political agenda of Julius Caesar. This two-thousand-year-old political strategy is still relevant today, despite the efforts of the framers of the constitution, who saw it as undermining the democratic system. The filibuster is commonly seen as a way for minority parties to manipulate larger political bodies. Alexander Hamilton criticized minority control as “a poison” in his Federalist papers. Before the existence of the filibuster, a political tool known as the “previous question motion” existed. This voting

procedure allowed for a simple majority in the Senate to end deliberations and initiate the final voting procedure. The filibuster increased the requirement for ending deliberations to a 3/5ths vote, rather than a simple majority.

One of the first uses of the filibuster in American Politics was in 1811, when Barent Gardenier, a representative from New York, attempted to filibuster a trade embargo against Great Britain. Barent Gardenier’s filibuster was incredibly unpopular among his colleagues and was promptly shut down through the use of the previous question motion. Currently, a similar process exists to shut down filibusters, senators can initiate the end of a filibuster if 60 senators utilize the cloture vote. Also known as the three-fifths rule, this allows for the end of the debate and subsequently the end of the filibuster. The cloture vote is the only way to currently end a filibuster after Aaron Burr recommended that the Senate drop the previous question motion. Currently, nearly all bills that go through the Senate are filibustered, this fact makes the acquisition of 60 votes vital for any

Above: Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D) speaking to the press after a Democratic strategy meeting regarding the Voting Reform Bill

One would think that with Aaron Burr's destruction of the previous question motion, the filibuster would become increasingly popular. However, it took nearly 3 decades for the idea of a filibuster to come to fruition in the minds of the senators. The date of the first real filibuster is often debated; some historians argue that the first filibuster was in an incident between Thomas Benton and Henry Clay in 1841, while others believe that the first filibuster was used by Senators from Virginia and South Carolina to block the moving of the United States capital to Philadelphia. During the 1850s the filibuster became common practice so naturally, a name had to be made to refer to this political strategy. The filibuster was a term used for privateers who would destabilize governments in Southern and Central America. Similar to its original meaning filibuster now means a tactic used to sabotage and counter the agenda of Congress. The filibuster gives the minority party power because they can slow down debate and insist that their demands are met or they will just continue the filibuster.

The increasing popularity of the filibuster was becoming a problem. Engulfed in a suffocating state of war, America faced World War I. With German attacks on American merchant ships becoming common, the arming of trade ships became a real possibility. When proposed on the floor of the Senate, Republican Senator Robert La Follette began a filibuster to stop the proposed arming of merchant ships. President Woodrow Wilson not only called these people "a little group of willful men, representing no opinion but their own" but also pushed for the establishment of the "cloture" rule. The cloture rule at the time required a two-thirds majority to pass. This seemingly significant alteration was in actuality insignificant as the cloture rule would only be used 5 times in the coming 46 years.

The filibuster, while already becoming more present in United States politics, would only grow throughout the Civil Rights movement. Aided by the filibuster, Southern Senators successfully stopped lynching from becoming a federal crime. Due to a small fraction of Southern Senators in the Senate, white supremacist groups were indirectly aided by the government. Considering the longevity and bloody nature of the filibuster, many are concerned about its continuation, especially as a means to advocate for the minority.

In the current era of the filibuster, Democrats are pushing for a voting reform bill that will end the filibuster. While Democrats and Republicans cannot agree on the voting reform bill, some do agree that the Senate is incapable of getting anything done. Democratic Senator Evan Bayh stated in 2010 that "The people's business is not getting done", seven years after Republican Senator John McCain stated, "We are getting nothing done my friends, we're getting nothing done". The reason for this lack of progress is the filibuster. The ability to block any legislation in the Senate allows the Senate to be a roadblock to societal progress. With the end of the filibuster, the United States could finally begin to view modernization and regain its status as a beacon of democracy. The Senate saw the voting reform five times in the last year and every time Republicans have blocked the progression of the voting reform bill through the use of the filibuster. After the cloture rule was changed in 1975 to be three-fifths majority, having a sixty/fifty majority has been the dream of both parties. Currently with the Senate split fifty/fifty, ten Republican Senators need to be flipped to block the filibuster and invoke the "cloture" rule. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer began a motion to lower the votes needed to block the filibuster to fifty but was blocked not by Republicans rather

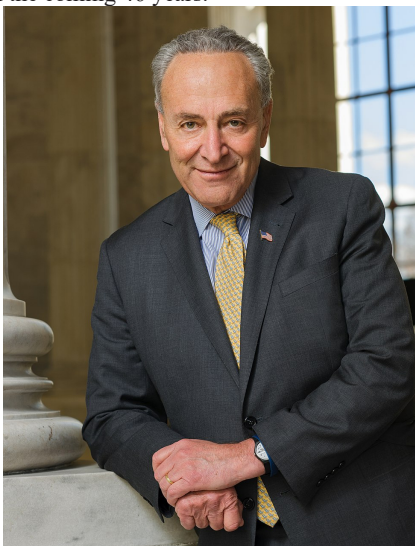
by Democratic Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema. In this Shakesperian betrayal, Senator Manchin and Senator Sinema buried the hopes of Democrats for voting reform. The filibuster, while not being mentioned in the Constitution and being born out of a loophole following the death of the previous question motion, is fiercely defended by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell. Mitch McConnell is quoted saying ending the filibuster rule "[w]ould shatter the Senate for short-term power". Ironically, the "backbone of the United States Senate" in the eyes of the Republicans was not mentioned by the framers of the Constitution. While the future of the filibuster remains uncertain, it is unlikely that anyone will see its abolition in the near future.

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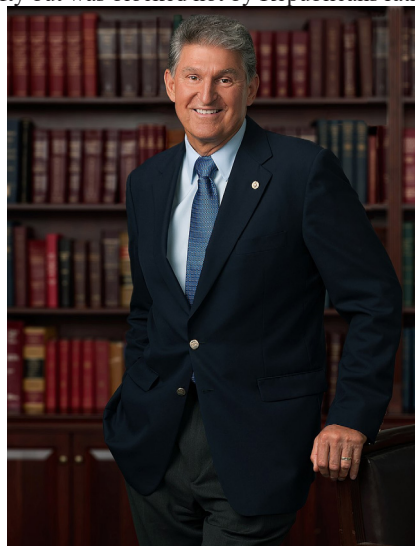
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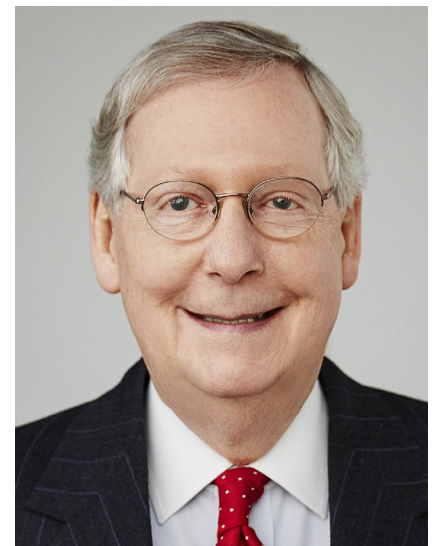
U.S. SENATE PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO/WIKIMEDIA

Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY)



U.S. SENATE PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO/WIKIMEDIA

Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV)



U.S. GOVERNMENT/WIKIMEDIA

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY)



REUTERS

By Joaquin Stevenson

On Saturday, January 15, 2022, at 5:20 pm, local time, an underwater volcano off the coast of Tonga erupted. The volcanic eruption lasted for approximately 8 minutes and its effects were felt across the Pacific Ocean. As a result of the eruption, a tsunami was generated, affecting many nations across the Pacific Ocean. Peru, in particular, had to face an oil spill of significant magnitude.

Peru is a South American nation located about 6,670 miles east of Tonga. Peru and Tonga are separated by the vast Pacific Ocean, no major landmass stands in between these nations. Peru is a country of 33 million people, of which 11 million live in the Lima region.

On January 14, at 11:20 pm Peruvian time, the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcano, located 40 miles north of Tongatapu Island, erupted. Satellite images taken by the US National Weather Service's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Hawaii show how violent the eruption was. The International Pacific Tsunami System (ITSU) is headquartered in Hawaii under NOAA and as such, is in charge of sounding the tsunami alarm across the Pacific Ocean.

"The System makes use of 69 seismic stations, 65 tide stations, and has 101 dissemination points scattered throughout the Pacific Basin under the varying control of the member states of ITSU."

Alaska, the West Coast of the United States, Canada, Mexico, American Samoa, Ecuador, and Chile sounded their respective tsunami alarms. Beaches were closed and any oceanic activity was forbidden. Peru did not sound the alarm. On the morning of Saturday, January 15, 2022, Peruvians headed to the beaches to enjoy a nice summer day. Local fishermen had come back from their early morning fishing. The fishing coves and port cities were running business as usual for a bustling summer Saturday.

Early that afternoon, the country started hearing reports of "el mar se salió" (the sea is coming out). The Peruvian Navy issued a statement saying that there was an "abnormal swell but nothing that warrants a tsunami warning". As the afternoon progressed, boardwalks and coves faced 6 foot high waves that suddenly went into restaurants, stores, and damaged facilities across the country's 1500 mile coast. In the northern region of Lambayeque, a pickup truck driving 3 people got drawn into the sea. Two women drowned as a result of the "abnormal swell". Dozens of people along the

coast had to be rescued due to the sudden tidal increase. At 7:41 pm the Center for National Emergencies (COEN) asked the individual towns and provinces to take care of their shoreline. 22 ports shut down due to the abnormal swell. While Peru's southern neighbor, Chile was under a tsunami alert, Peru continued without one.

There was something most Peruvians did not know was going on that Saturday afternoon. At around 1 pm on January 15, the oil refinery of "La Pampilla" had reported a small oil leak of 7 barrels. "La Pampilla" is located on the coast of the district of Ventanilla, Lima, and is owned by the multinational company "Repsol".

What is Repsol?

Repsol is a Spanish petrochemical company based in Madrid, Spain. In 1996, Repsol purchased the "Pampilla" refinery from the government-owned oil company, PetroPeru. La Pampilla is the largest oil refinery in Peru and accounts for more than 50% of fuel production in the country.



Cleanup of the oil spill

That afternoon, crude oil was being transferred from the Italian tanker “Mare Doricum” to the refinery. As the afternoon progressed, the shores of Ventanilla started seeing blobs of black on the ocean, prompting the closure of the beaches by the municipality.

The next day Repsol-La Pampilla reported that the spill had been caused by the abnormal swells due to the volcanic eruption in Tonga. It was reported that the spill had spread to the size of 2 football stadiums. On January 18, a more accurate impact of the spill became known: more than 6,000 barrels of crude oil had leaked to the ocean. A Repsol spokesperson went on national television to state that the company would help clean the spill but clearly stated that it was the Peruvian Navy’s fault for not issuing a warning.

Repsol’s initial response did not sit well with the government or the Peruvian people. First, Repsol did not own up to the spill, blaming the Navy for the failed alarm system. Second, Repsol’s top executives sent a spokesperson to talk about this ecological disaster to the Peruvian authorities and the press, signaling a lack of care. Third, Repsol’s response to the clean-up was not perceived as one that denoted urgency. After a few days, the CEO of Repsol decided to speak and state that his company would clean up the spill, putting all blame on the volcanic eruption in Tonga.

Repsol does not have a history of transparency with the Peruvian population. In 2003, there was another oil spill which they also downplayed. This recent one at “La Pampilla” has also been far worse than originally stated. On January 28, 2022, following an investigation, Repsol stated that the spill had actually been over 10,000 barrels. The Peruvian government claims that the spill was closer to 12,000 barrels.

Environmental Impact:

About 90 miles of Peru’s coastline have been contaminated by the oil spill. The protected areas contaminated by this oil spill include the Natural Protected Area of Ancon, home to a wide array of marine life and the Network of Guano Islands, home to marine birds and mammals. The coast of Peru is home to a rich selection of fish and shellfish, making it a staple food item for the Peruvian coastal population. The area of the spill is frequented by fishermen who make a living from the Peruvian sea. The beaches are now tainted with a black substance and dead wildlife has been washing up.

What about the Navy of Peru?

The Navy of Peru has not accepted responsibility for any wrongdoing in this matter. However, the Office of the Public Defender, “designated in the constitution as an independent office to protect the constitutional rights and freedoms of the individual and the community; monitor the performance of the duties of the state administration and the provision of public services to the population.” has requested an investigation into the Navy’s response to the Tonga volcanic eruption. The investigation is still underway.

The Cleanup

Volunteers have flocked to the areas affected to help with the cleanup, however, a lack of resources is evident. Volunteers have been working with two Peruvian environmental agencies with limited resources and there is a lack of training on what to do.

Repsol’s response has been slow. Technology and equipment have slowly been trickling to the coast of Lima. There does not seem to be a cohesive plan for this cleanup and the Peruvian government has not been clear about its cleanup expectations. In a statement, Peru’s environmental agency said that they estimate 7,500 square miles of ocean and coast are contaminated, but they failed to pressure Repsol for a clear plan of action. On February 3, 2022, Repsol stated the clean-up would be complete by late March which is much later than their original estimate of late February.

Meanwhile, environmentalists and experts who have assessed the impact and damage state that given the rate at which Repsol is cleaning the mess, it is going to take at least 6 years.



Cleanup of the oil spill on a beach outside Lima, Peru



A demonstrator wearing a fish mask protests in front of the Repsol office in Lima, Peru

REUTERS

The Local Economy

Lima region fishermen and merchants have been protesting outside of La Pampilla refinery asking for some sort of subsidy from Repsol. This oil spill has taken their livelihood away. Almost a third of the Peruvian population lives in the Lima region (11 million people). Fish and shellfish are relied upon for sustenance and are a key contributor to the Peruvian economy. Repsol has not yet responded to their requests.

The local tourist industry has been greatly affected as well. During the summer months, a significant number of tourists visit the beaches and the islands. With this oil spill, there can be no more tourism in the area. The impact of this oil spill on the local economy is suspected to be significant but hard to quantify as much of Peru's economy is informal.

The Latest

On February 14, 2022, Repsol announced that it would be taking legal action against the Italian tanker "Mare Doricum" stating that the spill was caused by the ship's movements. As additional reports and studies have emerged on what caused the spill, Repsol has decided to move

away from blaming the spill on the Peruvian Navy or the volcano. The unspecified multimillion-dollar demand states that the damages on the Repsol facilities were caused by the ship's movements. Therefore, the oil spill is not Repsol's fault but rather the "Mare Doricum's". The Mare Doricum was working for Singaporean Teekay Tankers Chartering Pte. Ltd and the ship owner is Fratelli D'Amico Armatori S.p.A.

On the same day, the United Nations issued a report stating that the oil spill will affect the Peruvian coast for 6 years. An expert mission working in Peru a few days after the spill declared the oil spill as "serious", and at a "level that severely tests the response capabilities of any country".

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A casualty of the oil spill



SIMPLY RECIPES

No More Guac?

What Is the Mexican-American Avocado Trade? Why Did the United States Ban Avocados From Mexico? What Are the Effects and Proposed Solutions?

By Rohan Yadav

Come game day, what is an almost ubiquitous adoration of virtually every Super Bowl fan? Of course, the answer is touchdowns, but guacamole, more specifically avocados, comes in a close second. But, unfortunately, this delicious fruit (yes, I said fruit) could become a scarce commodity in the United States.

On February 11, 2022, two days before the Super Bowl, the United States temporarily banned avocado imports from Mexico “until further notice” after a verbally threatening phone call was made to a U.S. safety inspector working in Uruapan in Michoacán, Mexico.

The Mexican-American avocado trade has been a tumultuous road for the past century. 100 years ago, the US health organization banned Mexican avocado imports due to alleged reports of weevils (small beetles) located in the seed. Later, in the 1970s, the United States, due to the free-trade agreement currently known as USMCA (United States-Mex-

ico-Canada Agreement), slowly reopened avocado trade relations and officially lifted their ban on Mexican avocado imports in 1994. Since then, due to high American demand, avocados have become one of Mexico’s predominant and most lucrative trades, after beer and tequila, grossing approximately \$3 billion in annual revenues. Michoacán, the center stage of Mexico’s avocado trade, supplies 80% of the United States’ avocados and has exported more than 135,000 tons of avocados to the United States since the start of 2022. Further, average avocado prices have risen 11% to approximately \$1.50 per avocado compared to past years.

Therefore, with avocado consumption and demand at their highest, the prohibition couldn’t occur at a worse time. Moreover, both Mexico and the United States mutually rely on the avocado trade to regulate a stable economy. Therefore, analysts predict that a long-term avocado ban can cause cataclysmic effects that will reverberate throughout both countries.

The avocado prohibition caused a massive shortage of avocados in the United States. The

availability crisis not only affected people’s inability to add guacamole to their future Chipotle orders but also was directly correlated to an increase in avocado prices, which had already been skyrocketing. The lack of avocado availability in the United States has caused many companies, like Eco Farms, to announce a possible 25% increase in avocado prices. Even Chipotle publicly indicated they only had “weeks” of avocado inventory left. With companies scrambling at the scarcity of avocados that had plagued the United States, analysts hypothesized a falling of stocks, and a collapse of avocado-reliant businesses and restaurants, which, ultimately, would cause a massive hindrance to the United States economy.

Answers were proposed to mitigate the consequences of the avocado trade suspension on the United States. For example, another location Americans have considered for avocados is the state of California, which supplies approximately 15% of the avocados to United States consumers. However, with America’s drastic increase in avocado consumption, California

to meet American demand. In addition, unlike Mexico, California doesn't have the acreage and climate necessary to be a significant avocado supplier year around, circumstantially leaving the United States reliant on Mexican avocados.

The United States suspension of avocados left Michoacán, a prominent Mexican state of avocado exportation, economically, financially, and politically vulnerable. Mexico, on average, produces 100,000 to 130,000 tons of avocados daily, so without avocado exports to Mexico's biggest consumer, America, Mexico will be stuck with a large surplus of avocados. Furthermore, unlike the United States avocado scarcity, the surplus of avocados in Mexico caused the domestic price of avocados to drop; ultimately, making avocados less valuable and profitable in Mexico. With Mexico's financial stability reliant on avocado sales, such price drops can cause Mexico's agrarian life to deplete, as well as impact agricultural workers, farmers, and landowners.

Many agricultural workers cultivate avocado plantations and rely upon the avocado trade to provide for their families and themselves. However, with a collapse of the avocado trade and domestic prices, workers will be forced to find work elsewhere outside the avocado farms. As a result, the majority of the workers will look towards the United States for jobs opportunities, causing massive waves of immigration across the United States border. Additionally, if the United States temporary ban morphed into something long-term, it would facilitate drug cartels' and criminal enterprises' ability to smuggle avocados and attract recruiters.

What Are Drug Cartels Involvement Mexican-American Avocado Trade?

Drug Cartels have been involved in the Mexican-American avocado trade since the United States lifted their prohibition in 1994. During the 70s, 80s, and 90s, Mexico was submerged in debt, so the United States agreed to help by buying Mexican avocados, yet America demanded large compromises from Mexico. For example, the United States demanded increased attention on business and fewer government taxes. To that end, the Mexican government wasn't investing as much in local institutions, communities, infrastructure, causing impoverished Mexican cities and areas to be highly susceptible to drug cartels' influence. Many cartels seized control over avocado-based towns by strong-arming local police forces and corrupting local politicians.

Drug cartels and kingpins make their income primarily from selling large quantities of illegal narcotics to American consumers, such as cocaine, meth, marijuana, and heroin. However, cartels noticed the high American demand for avocados and began to view the avocado

trade as another lucrative area to exploit. As a result, cartels began imperializing existing avocado farms and fertile forest regions to grow avocados for export to the United States. The cartels' need for fertile land has severely hurt the environment and natural forest systems by replacing trees with their own avocado groves, which the locals call "green gold."

The cartel's control over agricultural areas has brought violence to avocado-based communities, especially Mexico's primary avocado exporting state, Michoacán. With the avocado trade supplying lucrative profits, rival drug cartels and gangs compete for control over avocado groves and cities, resulting in ample violence. Also, cartels prey and, quite literally, put strangle-holds on land laborers and truck drivers, forcing them to work illegally in exchange for security. Cartels and gangs also intimidate local governments and force them to pay protection fees; ultimately, causing cartels to steal, on average, 30% of Mexico's avocado profits.

While cartels and gangs threaten the Mexican growers' prosperity and livelihood, some inhabitants of cartel-run towns have formed small vigilante armies or unofficial militias to protect workers and farmers. When rival cartels, gangs, and farmer militias clash, places like Michoacán experience excessive violence and a rapid rise in death and homicide. However, since the majority of Mexico's towns are dependently reliant on American avocado imports, farmers and workers succumb to the cartel's dominion for their own personal safety and assurance.

Cartels played a vital role in the United States' decision to suspend Mexican avocado imports. February 11, 2022, days before the Super Bowl, cartels controlling avocado-based regions desperately sought avocados to be exported out of Mexico, for they foresought high American demand. However, an inspector employed by the United States to regulate avocado quality and health denied permission of an avocado shipment from Michoacán, verbal threats were made towards the inspector. While details of the threat haven't been publically disclosed, analysts discern the verbal danger stemmed from the Michoacán cartel and gang-related violence and dominion. As a result, the United States APHIS (Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services) banned the import of Mexican avocados to ensure the physical safety of United States inspection personnel until Mexican authorities and security forces could guarantee their safety. According to analysts on the Mexican-American avocado trade, Mexico, especially Michoacán, risked further breaking the trusted relationship between the two countries.

Updates and Solutions?

As of February 16, 2022, the United States has resumed importing Mexican avocados: ending the one-week suspension. Since the suspension on February 11, 2022, United States Ambassador to Mexico declared that Mexico, and avocado exporters alike, have worked on preventive security measures to ensure avocado inspectors' safety. A compromise was reached between the United States and Mexico, which resulted in creating a proposal that included forming a security team and intelligence unit to enhance foreign inspector safety and strength bilateral avocado supply chains.

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GETTY IMAGES

By Kelly Cao

All around the country, there has been a major labor shortage and workforce crisis, with “4.5 million people quitting their jobs in November alone”, according to the World Economic Forum, and “10.6 million vacant jobs in the United States – a record high”, as stated by the United States Chamber of Commerce. This figure is in stark contrast to the pre-pandemic figures, as there was a 6.7 percent unemployment rate before the pandemic.

CAUSES

This crisis is in large part due to increased health concerns and hesitation resulting from COVID-19. Due to the pandemic, 1.2 million people have not sought employment. Goldman Sachs found around 50% of the 5 million people missing from work are retirees, with the majority of that number retiring prematurely. Just in April 2020, towards the start of the pandemic, “nearly 21 million jobs were lost” (Washington Post). However, there have also been other contributing factors that should be acknowledged, such as burnout, childcare, the desire for higher pay, and a decline in immigration (Business Insider). As Robert Reich, former United States Secretary of Labor during the Clinton Administration told Time Magazine, “Workers are burned out. They’re fed up. They’re fried. In the wake of so much hardship and illness and death during the past year, they’re not going to take it anymore.”

EFFECTS

Due to the lack of workers, companies across a wide range of industries, whether that be hospitality or manufacturing, have had to reduce their operations, lessen their hours, or even close down completely, leaving “Help Wanted” signs in the windows for months on end. Take the healthcare sector, for example. A survey by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses found that two-thirds of nurses’ experiences during the pandemic prompted them to consider leaving their careers. In a separate poll by the American Nurses Foundation, 21% of those polled stated that they planned on leaving within the next six months, with the greatest reason being that work had been negatively impacting their health and wellbeing, and 31% saying that there was a lack of support from their employer during the pandemic. In April 2020, the Census Bureau conducted the Pulse survey to understand the effects of the pandemic on households. Although many steps were taken by the government to reduce the damage done by COVID-19, there were still 20 million adults who lived in families that were malnourished and 12 million adult renters who were behind on their rent payments as of October 2021. These effects seemed to be particularly concentrated in Black and Latino people, along with other people of color, which only highlights the structural racism and inequities that continue to be found in education, employment, healthcare, and housing.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Research suggests the turnover rate could be reduced by increasing employee flexibility, benefits, and wellbeing, as many people have not found satisfaction with their exhausting jobs and have little profits to enjoy. For now, however, “we will have to get better at utilizing the labor we have”, remarks Ron Hetrick, a senior labor economist at labor marketing analysis firm Emsi Burning Glass. With the recovery from the pandemic and return to normal life, we can only hope to see a recuperation in the workforce as well.

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VITAL

SIGNS

