

Aimless, Immoral Crackdown at the Border

The Headline

For years activists have been demanding the end of Title 42; last week it finally happened. The rule – the brainchild of Trump advisor and arch-xenophobe Stephen Miller – used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to ban people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border from seeking asylum in the United States. The Biden administration inherited and continued the policy, only to see it expire along with the end of the national health emergency declaration for COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the demise of Title 42 has not ushered in an era of humane treatment for people fleeing to the United States to escape violence, persecution, and economic instability. Instead, there has been a veritable arms race between Republicans and Democrats over who can best demonstrate their “toughness” in the face of a purported “wave” of migrants crossing the border. Republican governors have [deployed](#) National Guard units to the border and pushed to [expand](#) cruel programs to ship migrants across the country against their will. The Biden administration, not to be outdone, unveiled a new version of Trump’s [asylum ban](#) and sent 1,500 troops to the border to insure that there would be no interruption in the U.S. policy of denying the fundamental human right to asylum.

None of this was necessary. The simple fact is that the only crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border is one of the U.S. government’s own making. The United States is the richest country on earth, with more than enough resources to provide for the asylum seekers at the border. Yet during the Trump years, the United States [nosedived](#) from its one-time position as the leading refugee resettlement country. Even in eras of more humane policies, the United States and other wealthy nations still paled in comparison to the refugee intake of countries, like Lebanon or Turkey, adjacent to longstanding conflicts. Our laudable welcoming of Ukrainian refugees gives the lie to the idea that there is some fundamental roadblock to treating asylum seekers humanely. As Refugees International president Jeremy Konyndyk [said](#) of the rush to take a stand against migrants, “It’s bullshit, frankly. It’s embarrassing.”

Thankfully, some in U.S. politics have responded to the end of Title 42 with sense and humanity. The ACLU, the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, and the National Immigration Justice Center are [suing](#) the Biden administration, challenging the new asylum ban. [Activists](#) around the [country](#) have gathered resources to provide temporary housing, food, and care for people who make it across the border. In Congress, progressive Democrats, led by Rep. Veronica Escobar, issued a [letter](#) urging the Biden administration to actually alleviate a major part of the economic instability driving people from their homes in the first place by ending broad sanctions against Venezuela and Cuba.

What’s next: The Biden administration can choose to rescind its asylum ban and respect migrants’ asylum rights at any time, and activists are already [piling on pressure](#) for it to do so. In the long run, though, Congress has to act, both to fix our broken asylum system and to end the U.S. policies that drive much of the insecurity in the Western hemisphere. Efforts like Rep.

Escobar's to reduce the burden of sanctions are vital, as are the reintroduction and passage of bills like the [ARMAS Act](#) to stem the flow of guns south from the United States.

The Happenings

May 25th, 3:00-4:00 PM EDT: "What does the future hold for Taiwan?," [Brookings Institution](#)

June 11th-13th: "FP4A Leadership Summit," [Foreign Policy for America](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview Sheridan Cole, Advocacy Associate at the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in working on human rights in Southwest Asia and North Africa? What is one thing you wish was better or more widely understood about democracy in the region?

As a child, I had the immense privilege of participating in an international peace education program for youth called CISV. When I was 11, I traveled to Brazil to live with 60 children from 12 different countries for a month. Together, we engaged in educational programming focused on human rights, conflict resolution, sustainable development, and diversity, and all the while building friendships across cultures. The experience fundamentally altered the trajectory of my life, making me certain I wanted to work at the intersection of international affairs and human rights. As I grew in CISV, I came to realize the stark underrepresentation of youth from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and consequently chose to study the region and the Arabic language in college, which reinforced my desire to work in the field post-graduation.

Far too often, policy conversations about rights, governance, and democratization in MENA do not acknowledge the complicity of the United States and other Western governments in upholding and strengthening brutal authoritarian regimes across the region. Not only has the U.S. government failed to adequately support democratic movements, civil society, and independent media in the Arab world, but it has legitimized, emboldened, and supported dictatorships through arms sales, foreign assistance, and diplomatic relationships that turn a blind eye to brazen repression and horrifying rights violations.

2): Last year, you co-authored a piece on the crackdown on civil society in Tunisia under President Kaïs Saïed. Since then, Tunisia's once-promising democracy has further declined, as authoritarianism, including arbitrary political detentions, have become the norm once again. The Biden administration emphasizes a foreign policy based on a democratic values - should President Biden be doing more to keep Tunisia accountable? What are our viable options?

The Biden administration—despite pledging to center human rights in U.S. foreign policy and having a rhetorical focus on democratic renewal across the globe—has had a tepid and inconsistent response to Tunisia’s stark autocratic consolidation under President Kais Saied. At this moment, while Tunisia is facing dual economic and political crises, it is pivotal for the administration to be supporting pro-democracy civil society and maintaining the right to peaceful expression and free assembly in the country.

Though the administration and Congress don’t have infinite leverage to reverse Tunisia’s authoritarian slide, there are viable policy options. First, the administration should clearly and publicly condemn Kais Saied’s consolidation of power, his unprecedented crackdown against his perceived political opposition and civil society, and his incitement of violence against sub-Saharan migrants residing in the country.

Second, assistance is a crucial tool. Given the central role that the Tunisian Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) have played in Saied’s democratic erosion, all U.S. assistance to the MOI and MOJ should be immediately halted. Further, Congress should condition military assistance to the country on an end to military trials of civilians, which Saied has leveraged against those who have criticized his rule. Meanwhile, it is essential that the administration prioritize increased economic support for the country, especially for pro-democracy civil society under threat and on the front lines of the fight for the country’s democratic future.

Buried Ledes

Researchers from Brown University’s Costs of War project estimated a [minimum of 4.5 million - 4.6 million excess deaths](#) attributable to the war on terrorism. Of these deaths, 3.6 million to 3.7 million were “indirect deaths” produced by the economic, environmental, psychological, and health conditions. In addition, the report considers [long-term consequences](#) of war on human health, emphasizing that certain groups – particularly women and children – bear the brunt of these costs. The report’s author and co-director of the Costs of War project, Stephanie Savelle, said: “There are reverberating costs, the human cost of war, that people for the most part in the United States don’t really know enough about or think about.”

The Pascua Yaqui Tribe worked with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Tribal Homeland Security Advisory Council to [draft regulations to formalize a U.S. southern border-crossing process](#). The Pascua Yaqui Tribe and dozens of other Native American nations’ homelands were divided in two by the U.S. southern border. These rules, if approved, would establish the first clear border crossing procedures for a Native American tribe that could also be used by other tribes.

Thailand’s recent elections, the liberal Move Forward party [won the largest share of votes](#), threatening the authoritarian military establishment in power since 2014. But it’s unclear whether the military will agree to peacefully transfer power. Ousting the military would

signal a democratic return to Thailand, one of Washington's [oldest allies in the region](#). Thailand plays an interesting role in the U.S.-China relationship, receiving direct infrastructure and military investments from China while maintaining security protection and a major trade partnership from the U.S.

The Norwegian Refugee Council has released a report indicating [a record-high number of 71.1 million internally displaced people](#) around the world in 2022, a 20% increase compared to 2021. This high toll is caused by conflict – such as ongoing violence in Ukraine, Syria, and Ethiopia – and natural disasters intensified by the climate crisis – like [La Nina](#) phenomenon, flood displacement in Pakistan, Nigeria, and Brazil, and droughts in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

In light of the State Department's recent release of its annual report on religious freedom, a senior government official said [the United States wants India to condemn persistent religious violence](#) and hold accountable those who engage in dehumanizing rhetoric toward religious minorities. Among the senior official's concerns were “open calls for genocide against Muslims, lynching and other hate-fuelled violence, attacks on places of worship and home demolitions, and in some cases impunity and even clemency for those who have engaged in attacks on religious minorities.” This comes as the Biden administration prepares to host Indian prime minister Narendra Modi for an upcoming state visit despite [concerns over human rights violations](#).

Official discourse in China has increasingly employed the slogan gǎnyú dòuzhēng in the context of U.S.-China tensions, which has been translated to “dare to fight” in pieces published in the [New York Times](#), [Reuters](#), the [Financial Times](#), [Foreign Affairs](#), and others. However, the Center for Strategic and International Studies reports that “dare to struggle” is a [more accurate translation of the Chinese slogan](#). The widely-used “dare to fight” translation “risks leaving English-speaking readers with a potentially inaccurate impression of its connotations,” with the Chinese slogan portrayed as an “inherently militaristic, belligerent one.”