

Allies Do Not Get a Pass on Human Rights

The Headline

Last week, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi [attended](#) an official state dinner at the White House and [addressed](#) a joint session of Congress. It was the first time an Indian Prime Minister has been formally invited to Washington, D.C. since 2009. Coverage of Modi's visit has largely focused on India's role in competition between the U.S. and China, and deals announced during the trip to expand markets for U.S. weapons contractors in India.

Too often, both in the press and in Modi's meetings with U.S. officials, those issues were prioritized ahead of discussing Modi's disturbing human rights [record](#). Modi has violently cracked down on [critics](#) and India's diverse minority populations - especially Muslims who have faced [acute discrimination](#) and attacks. The culture of repression was even present during Modi's visit to the White House when Wall Street Journal Reporter Sabrina Siddiqui asked Modi about his record back home, only to be [harassed online](#) by his nationalist supporters.

The bottom line, no U.S. "ally" should be getting a pass on human rights just because Washington strategists see them as a means to an end. Standing up for our ideals has strategic value, and refusing to even publicly discuss human rights with a leader our government wants something from makes it more difficult to prioritize human rights in any other relationship. Thankfully, progressives in Congress made their [voice](#) heard. A bicameral letter led by Rep. Jayapal (WA-07) and Senator Van Hollen (D-MD), signed by over 70 lawmakers, called for President Biden to speak up with Modi about his abuses. Rep. Omar (MN-05) and Rashida Tlaib (MI-12) went a step further, boycotting Modi's speech in Congress and introducing a resolution [condemning](#) religious freedom abuses in India.

What's next: The thing about human rights is that everyone is entitled to them, all the time – not just when world leaders find it strategically convenient. If the U.S. is going to be in the forefront of human rights activism, we need to be willing to talk about abuses wherever they appear – at home, in countries we have close relations with, and everywhere else in the world. Activists, dedicated reporters, and progressive lawmakers will continue to keep up the pressure not to undermine our efforts on human rights by shunting them to the side in our country's most important relationships.

The Happenings

June 30th, 3:00-4:00pm EDT: "A Racial Equity Lens to U.S. Foreign Policy," [CSIS](#)

July 13th, 9:00-5:00pm EDT: "New Voices: 2023 Conference on Diversity in Nuclear Policy," [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

July 19th, 12:00-1:00pm EDT: “40 years of Misguided US Military Intervention in the Middle East,” [Stimson](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview [Kat DesCamp-Renner](#), Government Affairs Associate at J Street. You can follow her on Twitter [here](#).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in working on U.S. foreign policy? What is one thing you wish was better/more widely understood about US policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

I first remember becoming interested in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, which happened when I was 11, just as I was getting old enough to pay more attention to news and politics. But it must have started a little bit earlier; recently my dad mailed me some old diaries that he kept when I was a little kid. I found an entry from when I was about five, in which he wrote about how I told him I was worried about the war in Iraq and wanted to know when it would be over. But even though I was really fascinated by the Middle East, I didn't ever think of foreign policy as something you could do as a job; I grew up in Oregon and didn't know much about DC and the world of diplomacy. I was originally an astrophysics major in college, and was going to just minor in Middle Eastern studies for fun. I think toward the end of my freshman year at UVa I realized both that Middle East policy could be the basis for an actual career, and that I cared too much about it to do anything other than that as a career.

I wish more people understood that the current failures of US policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict weren't inevitable, and they're not unchangeable. The situation we're in right now is the result of years of concerted pressure by advocacy groups that find any criticism of Israeli policy to be unacceptable. There have been times when presidents have been more willing to exert pressure—George H.W. Bush famously withheld loan guarantees from Israel until it halted settlement activity and entered a peace conference with the Palestinians. Our current political reality isn't permanent, and we do have the power to change it.

2): Last week, you were following the development of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in the House Armed Services Committee. What were you and J Street tracking most closely?

I've been tracking the NDAA for J Street as it moves through committee markup in both chambers, and now heads to the floor in the House, mostly focusing on content related to Israel, the Palestinian Territory, and Iran. One thing we're following closely is any amendment that tries to foreclose the possibility of future diplomacy with Iran. For the first six months of the year there's been a raft of anti-diplomacy legislation, and now they'll try to attach all these bills as amendments to the NDAA. J Street is part of the coalition that groups that work on supporting diplomatic resolutions to the Iranian nuclear issue and we'll be working closely with all our

partners, including Win Without War, to ensure that the NDAA doesn't include provisions that would block diplomacy.

Buried Ledes

The American Immigration Council (AIC) reports that refugees [paid \\$25 billion in US taxes in 2019](#) -- punching "above their weight economically" and "outpacing the national average on household income and entrepreneurship". Nan Wu, AIC research director, [shared hope](#) that this report would encourage informed conversations about the importance of refugee resettlement and the invaluable contributions refugees make to our communities.

Despite the ongoing violence in Syria, Lebanon and Turkey are [moving to expel Syrian refugees](#) at increasing rates. With Arab countries recently restoring diplomatic ties with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and re-welcoming Syria into the Arab League, the 5.4 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon and Turkey are facing the frightening possibility of being forcibly repatriated. Lebanese ministers said in March that they would begin deporting 15,000 Syrians every month until all 1.5 million are removed, while Turkish President Erdoğan vowed to return 1 million of the country's estimated 3.6 million Syrian refugees. Recent deportees have even included legally-registered refugees.

The Hajj pilgrimage began on Sunday in Mecca in what is expected to be ["the largest Hajj pilgrimage in history"](#) according to an official from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have been fully relaxed, more than 2.5 million Muslims are expected to participate in the pilgrimage this year, following the path the Prophet Muhammad [walked over 1,400 years ago](#). Amid this year's extreme heat of about 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) in Saudi Arabia, thousands of ambulances and 32,000 health workers [are on standby](#) to treat cases of heatstroke, dehydration, and exhaustion.

Speaking of extreme temperatures, the [record heatwave](#) covering parts of Texas, Louisiana, and Mexico was made "at least five times more likely due to human-caused climate change," scientists have found. Over the past three weeks, some places have even reached above 120 degrees Fahrenheit, making this heat dome one of the strongest ever recorded. A [report from the Center for American Progress](#) estimates that healthcare costs — such as visits to emergency departments and hospital admissions — during days of extreme heat are costing the United States about \$1 billion every summer.

An unidentified tourist in Rome was caught on video [carving a love note](#) ("Ivan+Haley 23") onto the Colosseum. The Italian culture minister, Gennaro Sangiuliano, said the suspect should be identified and legally punished. Italy's ANA news agency claims he could face up to five years in prison and a fine of about \$16,400. This isn't the first case of tourists menacing Italian landmarks. Two Americans were once accused of breaking into the Colosseum to [enjoy morning beers](#) and, in Venice, two Australians were once [fined \\$1,500 each](#) for riding motorized surfboards in the Grand Canal.

In Brazil, Outback Steakhouse is [surging in popularity](#). In fact, for five years straight, the American restaurant chain has been voted Rio de Janeiro's most popular restaurant, which explains why there are now 150 Outback branches in the country. This has even inspired the knockoff restaurant, Outbêco, which opened in 2020.

[Trivia](#)