

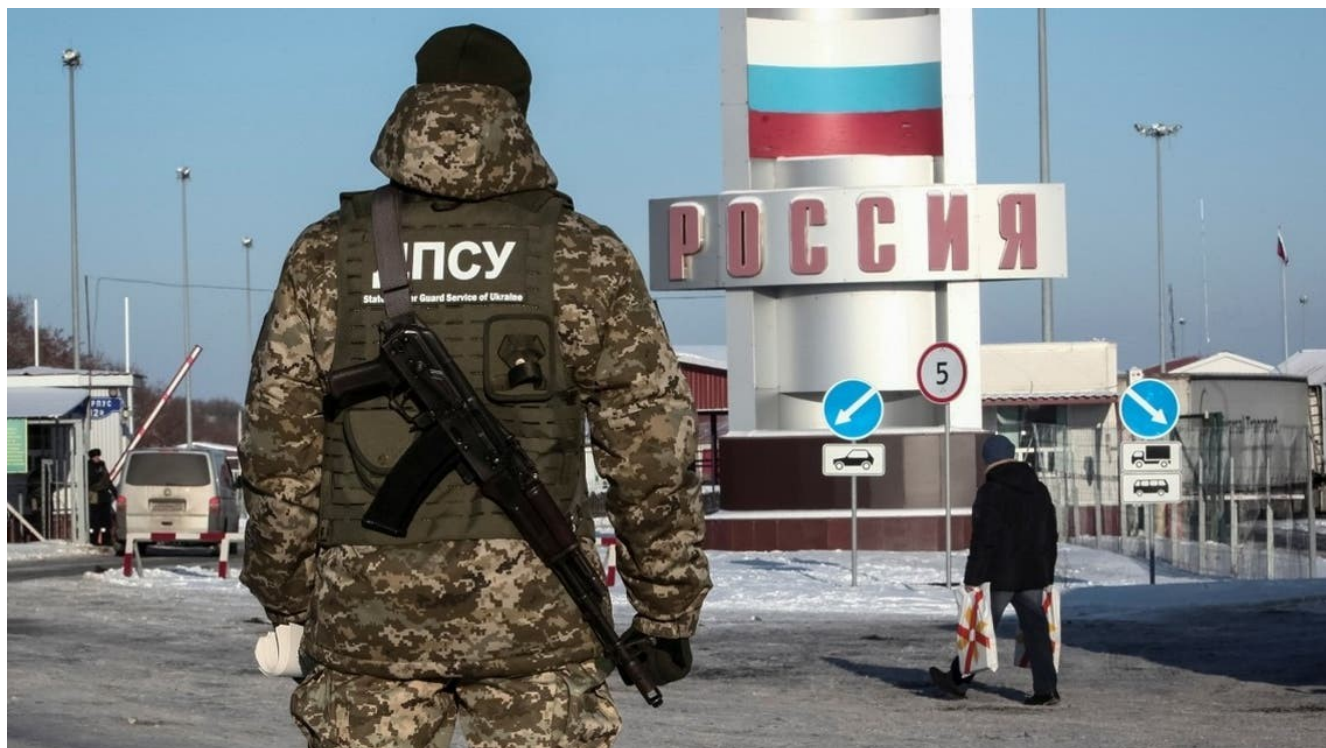
TENSION ON THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN BORDER

It has been over 30 years since the fall of the USSR. The world breathed out one gigantic sigh of relief, and so decades of tension and almost everlasting threat of nuclear war finally came to an end, as democratic governments were established in many of the old Soviet republics. Did the nations flourish happily ever after? Unfortunately not. The biggest Soviet republic, now Russia, is still very protective of their previous states.

For us to be able to understand the full extent of this problem, we have to look at where it all started, because Russia has been fighting Ukraine in low intensity war since 2014. After the former president Viktor Yanukovych was ousted by the pro-EU protests, due to his rejection of the EU accession agreement in favor of closer ties with Russia. This move was not only opposed by the government, but also majority of the people and their discontent led to his expulsion. Russia was clearly opposed to pro-EU protests since it had incentive to have the best possible relationship with Ukraine, not because of trade alone, but rather because of the fact that Ukraine was in an ideal geographical position between Russia and the EU. This so-called satellite state, was Putin's idea of the "New Russia" as he described in his infamous essay "Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." Eventually, Yanukovych

fled to exile in southern Russia. Russia's reaction was quite intense, since President Putin convened an all-night meeting with security service chiefs to discuss the extradition of the deposed Ukrainian president. At the end of the meeting, Putin remarked that Russia must start working on returning Crimea to its territory. Two days later Russian soldiers, masked and without insignia, entered Crimea and captured their Supreme Council (Parliament), which led to the installation of the pro-Russian Sergey Aksyonov as head of government in Crimea and led to the 2014 Crimea status referendum.

This referendum was considered illegitimate by most international bodies, not only because it was held under occupation, but also because the only option other than reunification with Russia was the restoration of the 1992 Crimean con-



Source: https://vid.alarabiya.net/images/2021/11/03/fd620537-5818-4738-a90f-d04913b83795/fd620537-5818-4738-a90f-d04913b83795_16x9_1200x676.jpg?width=1138

stitution. This was ambiguous, since there was no option of keeping the status quo because the restoration of the 1992 constitution would bestow much more power to the parliament, including powers to establish relations with other states. Therefore, both referendum choices would result in the de facto separation of Crimea from Ukraine. Still, legitimately or not, Crimea has effectively become part of Russia as a result. The US and European Union have imposed economic sanctions on Russia to punish Moscow for this, but there is no sign that Crimea will return to Ukraine.

even troops and conventional military support to destabilize the Donbas region.

This has all ushered us to the current crisis. When we know the background and the root of the conflict, we are able to understand why Russia is mobilizing its troops on Ukraine's borders. We know that Putin has an ambition of expanding Russia and creating perhaps something like the new Soviet Union. We know that Russia is capable of attacking sovereign states and lands, and we know that Russia is capable of doing a lot of damage.

Without the legal protection of other states, Ukraine now knows that Russia is unpredictable and dangerous. This means that Ukraine has to choose between two futures: either a future as a modern, free, and sovereign country that's part of the EU and NATO, or a future as a Russian satellite state. Thankfully we are able to see that the new government and President Zelenskyy are trying to strengthen ties with the west, yet whether it will save Ukraine from Russia's oppression is a valid question. One thing is definite, and that's that Russia will try to prevent Ukraine from becoming a western state. This is perhaps the final reason why Russia is mobilizing its army—a last move to slow down or impeach the process of Ukraine's Westernization.

OLIVER ERBEN



Source: https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/76fb13985b4a6c3771bd86e5439af11a?impolicy=wcms_crop_resize&cropH=2001&cropW=3000&xPos=0&yPos=0&width=862&height=575

STORMS OF THE SKY

Every year around winter, areas across the globe are met with extreme cold and storms. In 2021, there were more than 10 extreme weather events that cost more than USD1.5B in repairs each. For example, the summer monsoon flooding in India that took 1,292 lives, the disastrous heatwave in western Canada and northwestern United States, floods in Germany and China and a cold wave in central U.S. This year the winter season is predicted to look like the last, but with a couple of surprises.

In Syria and Lebanon, extreme weather conditions mean that refugees who have limited financial resources must decide whether food, heating, or medicine are their main priority. As of July 13, 2021 more than 6.7 million people have been displaced in Syria, and are currently living in makeshift tents trying to shelter from the cold. In Jordan, another place sheltering Syrian refugees, an unexpected change occurred when it started to snow. Snow in Jordan is unusual, so when the first snow fell Syrian children celebrated by playing outside. Sadly, due to these weather challenges as well as the ongoing Covid crisis, offering help to Syrians is more difficult. A

Syrian mother who was receiving aid from the Norwegian Refugee Council said, "Heating is what I am mostly concerned about. I can handle eating one meal a day, but I cannot bear this cold. I am sick and so is my husband. Heating is our priority." This year, due to inflation the cost of fuel has risen to 400,000 Lebanese Lira instead of 17,000, meaning more people will not be able to afford heating this winter.

On the south of Africa, the countries Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi were hit by a tropical storm named Ana in the beginning of January. The storm left tens of thousands of damaged homes in its wake and forced more than 110,000 to flee from their houses from the threat of floods and landslides. In the weeks following tropical storm Ana, Mozambique was already expecting another storm and at least 6 cyclones by the end of March. The amount of destructive storms and heavy rainfall has risen in Mozambique over the past years causing damage to infrastructure and making it more difficult for repairs to be made as well as for people to get to their jobs. Neighboring Malawi has been declared a state of natural disaster after

parts of their electric grid were destroyed.

In other parts of the world like Ecuador, heavy rainfall created a 10 foot landslide in Quito, killing 24 people with dozens more missing. In the UK, two back to back extreme weather events occurred, with Storm Malik on January 29 and Storm Corrie following soon after cutting power for about 80,000 people. In the United States, a tornado went from Arkansas to Illinois on December 10th. Tornadoes in these areas are not uncommon but the strength and duration of this tornado was unusual. As of December 18, there have been a total of 61 tornadoes across the southern U.S. The occurrence of these tornadoes in autumn and winter rather than summer or spring came as a surprise to meteorologists and citizens.

Some scientists believe that the recurrent rise in abundance and strength of storms is an effect of climate change. Warming temperatures and an increase of moisture in the atmosphere increases the potential for strong updrafts, making storms. Additionally, rising sea levels lead to an increase in flooding. The growth of consumerism and meat farms are also ruining the environment and

changing climates, as well as the increasing use of fossil fuels. The rise in droughts and warmer oceans are other factors that add to the abundance of water vapor in the air. When this extremely moist air moves over land or into a storm it leads to more intense precipitation in the form of heavy rainfall or snow. It is predicted that in the upcoming years disastrous storms will be more frequent and will have a bigger role in our everyday lives. More precisely, the UN predicts that by 2030, fifty percent of the people in the world will have already been exposed to storms and tsunamis. The weather is a reminder that just as the political and economic atmospheres on the ground are intensifying, so is the one in the sky. Now, more people are noticing these events, and are trying to spread awareness and show that more can be done to protect people, and the planet.

Now, more people are noticing these events and are trying to spread awareness on the things humans do that harm Earth's environment and people.

ELISKA LEE

CAN THE CRISIS IN DARFUR RE-EMERGE?

The Darfur crisis is not a conflict an average person hears about every day. Darfur is a poor region in the west of Sudan that experienced terrible armed clashes in the past decade. To understand the whole issue, we must look back at history. The whole territory of the current Sudanese state had been under British rule until 1956, when it gained independence. Darfur had been a centre of issues and violence since even before the declaration of independence. Darfur is mainly inhabited by an ethnically African population while the rest of the country is inhabited by Arabs. The British rule has privileged the Arab community and the Arab dominance continues to this day. Sudan has not had an ethnically African leader since 1956.

Darfur has always been underinvesting in fields such as education, healthcare and other necessities. This was one of the reasons why a rebel group called South Sudan Peoples Defence Forces formed. The armed conflict started in 2003, when rebel groups and government-backed militias (Janjaweed) started conflicts all over the region.

Even though these armed conflicts might seem terrible, it is certainly not the

worst thing about the whole situation. Governmental militias started an internationally recognised genocide of the ethnically African inhabitants of Darfur. The militias destroyed whole villages with no mercy. All men, women, and children were killed. Sometimes, they were sent to "rescue camps", however the inmates of these camps live in horrible conditions.

People have to deal with the lack of access to potable water and food on a daily basis. Human rights are being violated. Many governmental organisations and NGOs are building camps in neighbouring countries (Mainly Chad) in hope to secure safety to the displaced people.

As in many armed conflicts, the international community plays a very important role in the Darfur crisis. In 2006 the United Nations Security Council approved a joint UN x African Union peacekeeping mission sending over 17 000 troops to the region. The military response to the genocide came late, over



Source: https://d7nm3c5ruslmy.cloudfront.net/africanexponent-com-client/images/africanexponent.com/general/54887c017e4721560999036468_aspR_2176_w768_h353_e400.jpeg

three years. This was mainly caused by two factors. The Sudanese government was not open to any kind of peace negotiations and kept constantly rejecting any kind of conflicts in Darfur. Second reason was the allies of Sudan in the UNSC, mainly China and Russia that blocked any kind of harsh international sanctions against Sudan and its leaders.

The peacekeeping mission was withdrawn leaving a relative peace in the region. Sudanese leader Al-Bashir is accused of different war crimes including conducting a genocide. This may seem like the end of this story. Unfortunately, it

isn't. There are still thousands of people in the camps without access to food, safe water and other basic necessities. The current government is not that oppressive as the former one, but it doesn't seem to care about the current Janjaweed actions in the region. You can probably spot some similarities between the status quo and the state in 2003 when the conflicts began. Many are afraid that the conflict will erupt again and will be even worse than the last time.

ADAM CHRISTL

How Likely Is a D-Day on Taiwan?

Taiwan has been a de facto independent country for over eight decades, and yet it is only officially recognized by 14 UN member states, none of which are states of astounding geopolitical relevance. Taiwan is a breakaway state from the diplomatically, economically, geographically, and demographically massive mainland China, which is sensitive to other countries recognizing Taiwan. The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) states that the state will strive to peacefully unify China, exaggerating that both parties must do everything in their powers to achieve a peaceful solution. A different article of the same constitution writes that Taiwan is a territory of the People's Republic, and it is the state's duty to make sure the "secessionist forces" do not break away. So, will the PRC go with



Reuters

Source: https://www.economist.com/img/b/1280/720/90/sites/default/files/images/2021/04/articles/main/20210501_fbp002.jpg

peaceful or no unification, as one article suggests, or will they quash the secessionist rebellion, according to the other?

The first question that has to be asked when considering the likelihood of an invasion is: how would an armed conflict unfold? Naturally, we're inclined to think the PRC would easily defeat Taiwan, after all the People's Liberation Army (the PRC military; PLA) has a 13 times bigger manpower, and 12 times bigger budget than the little island's defence force. This certainly is a big advantage, but these numbers don't tell the full story. Interestingly enough, Taiwan might have the better hand. For one, while PRC's army is considerably bigger and richer, not all of it may be deployed for logistical and strategic reasons, whereas Taiwan certainly

would deploy everything they have and more, calling on to the reserve personnel. The second advantage of Taiwan's is the unpreparedness of the PLA for an amphibious invasion: the PLA Navy has eight amphibious transport docks (the type of ship needed to deploy on a hostile shore), which is desperately little to manage an amphibious invasion. Another help to the Taiwanese is the environment. The Taiwan Strait is only navigable twice per year, for roughly a month, which would effectively make one month the invasion window, and that is quite little. Not only the nature of the sea, but also of the shore is playing into the Taiwanese hand, as there are only 14 invasion beaches, and all of them are bordered by cliffs or thick jungles, making it very easy for

the Taiwanese to stand their ground. It isn't just luck that is helping Taiwan, it is also their own preparedness: Taiwan has an excessive network of underground tunnels and bunkers, including underground ballistic missile launchers all around the island, or the borderline sci-fi air hangar with a runway built into the side of a mountain. Although China would likely maintain a surface naval superiority, Taiwan's fleet of submarines and deep-water mines, would cripple the invading force severely. This all makes us uncertain, that an invasion would be successful in the first place.

The second important question is, what does China stand to gain? The first thing that comes to mind is the economic benefit. Taiwan's GDP is as big as that of Aus-

tralia, it is outstandingly productive for its size, and on top of that, it holds a key global market position in the technology, specifically semi-conductor business. However, it is more than likely that an invasion would incur serious damage to the country's factories, which as such would require costly rebuilding. Moreover, with the complexity of the Taiwanese market, know-how is the biggest asset, and the people who have it are very likely to flee or not cooperate with the Communist Party in the rebuilding. So, the economic incentive is not as strong as may seem, but there is still the PRC's constitutional pledge to unify Taiwan with mainland China, and that has to hold some value, and it does. The Communist party holds a strong grudge against the Nationalists (the group that created Taiwan), as they fought a war against each other and ideologically disagree on probably everything. The conviction that Taiwanese existence is a mistake holds true and remains the biggest incentive for a possible invasion.

Currently, an invasion represents a huge risk to the Communist party, which they are unlikely to undertake because the economic reward is little to none. While the latter won't change, the former might, if the PLA acquires necessary arsenal and training to be able to confidently win a war without major losses, then they might invade Taiwan. However, the acquisition of such will take at least a couple years, so we do not need to worry just yet.

MATĚJ MAREK



Source: https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/styles/full_width_xl/public/image/2021/07/xi-jinping-gives-speech-marking-the-ccps-100th-anniversary-002.jpg

THE BEAUTY OF A STRANGER

Opening his eyes, Albert saw the blank ceiling of his bedroom. Again. The same ceiling as every morning. The phenomenon of waking up has gone through several stages in recent years in his eyes: first, there was excitement, followed by waning jolliness, over to neutrality, dread, and ultimately absolute hatred for the mere thought of opening his eyes the next day. That was his current state. He despised waking up because he knew what the day would bring. Nothing ever changed. The same job, people, interactions and tasks. Every day was differentiated only by minor changes in the placement of cars on the street or the way the bartender in the coffee shop looked at Albert, depending on her current state of mind. However, if someone placed two different days in front of him, he could not, for the love of God, who he did not believe in, tell them apart. The thing was, he didn't know if he wanted to. The stereotype was sort of comforting.

Not wanting to reflect on his own life anymore, he got up. Suit, coffee, no good-byes. On his way out of the house, he stumbled over a rock and tumbled to the ground. His first thought was not that he might hurt himself. It was that the fall could maybe, just maybe, make this day stand out. However, being engulfed in his morning routine, he soon forgot the stone

and headed off to work. But first, the coffee shop. The barista seemed less than welcoming today. 'Maybe she feels the same way I do?' flashed through his head while he took the cup out of her hand. The thought lingered for a moment too long. He did not see the man behind him and proceeded to fall for the second time that day. "Now this one, I'll remember for sure!" He thought the words stayed in his head, but they slipped out into the world. The man, now covered in Albert's coffee, looked at him queerly:

"This what you will remember?"

"Oh, sorry! I did not mean to say that out loud. And so sorry about the coffee. I'll pay for your cleaning!" responded Albert, still laying on the ground.

"That won't be necessary as long as you tell me what you meant by that sentence. Come, let us sit over there, in the corner, and you can tell me everything." The man started pulling Albert away. Only now did Albert notice how peculiarly dressed the man was. Under his black top hat, a mane of greying yellow hair was flowing down on his shoulders. He wore a colourful suit, which was clearly made to fit. It was quite hard to determine whether he was dressed rather poorly or exceptionally well. Nevertheless, still shocked from the fall and the man's sudden interest, Albert followed him to the table and sat down to chat.

Suddenly, it was as if a gate had been opened. Albert poured his heart out to this stranger. He had no idea why he shared all his most intimate desires, fears and worries with the peculiar and strange man. Maybe it was precisely because of that: he would probably never see the man again in his life, he did not know him, the man was in no position to judge Albert, and he never did. He was just willing to listen. It was like sharing his thoughts with a wall. I believe many people would share their thoughts with walls if they did not have the feeling of insanity looming over them. That's why strangers exist. They are the walls to our thoughts, and they are here for that. Just passing by. Sometimes, they even offer some advice. Such as the strange man:

"From what I have gathered, you are stuck in a dead-end job, which you hate with no time for any hobbies or love life, only living your days one after the other. Why is that? Do you have an inner need to go back to that job? Do you feel like it is your destiny? Destiny is the lie people of lesser minds tell themselves to give some meaning to their life. It is in the same category as ideologies and religion. They are all based on the same pathetic concept of human life having some sort of ulterior meaning, some reason to be here and not end it all. People who believe this are ut-

terly selfish. Do you know why? They are already alive. They are free to experience this existence in any way they want, and it is not enough for them. They are not content with the mere presence of existence, they require a meaning for their existence. And so they create gods and dictators and thought problems and multi-level marketing schemes to give themselves a feeling of meaning. The hidden truth is: there is no meaning! You are not for a reason, you simply are. And if you want to quit your job, there is not a single thing holding you back. Your life will be different, yes, you may struggle, but you will do what you want. You will dictate the rules of your own existence, and you will push the boulder up with a smile. Don't commit philosophical or real suicide, embrace the absurd!"

Albert just sat there with an open mouth. His troubles were lifted, mainly by sharing with the strange man, who had already left, but also by the speech. Albert did not understand everything the man said, but there was a sense of newfound life in him. He knew for sure, that he would remember this day for the rest of his life.

MIKULÁŠ ŠKORPIL

The best magazine at Open Gate is:

	This element can be found in multiple forms, for example, coal, graphite, or diamonds.
	This element is the most abundant chemical in the whole universe, and it is transformed into Helium by fusion in stars.
	Physical quantity you can calculate by dividing work (Joules) by time (seconds) or multiplying voltage (Volts) and current (Amperes). Its unit is watt.
	This element is a gas, which is necessary for the survival of all living organisms on the Earth. This gas is a product of photosynthesis ($6\text{CO}_2 + 6\text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + 6\text{O}_2$)
	An element with 7 protons, making up 78% of Earth's atmosphere.
	$= \sqrt{-1}$
	This letter is used to represent the Speed of light (in vacuum), for example we can see it in the famous equation $E = mc^2$.
	The lightest alkalic metal. It is widely used in rechargeable batteries.
	electrically negatively charged subatomic particles
	

Sources:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrogen>
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<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithium>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon>
<https://wallpaperaccess.com/medical-lab-hd>
<https://cz.pinterest.com/pin/496733033892479020/>

Note: fill in the symbols/abbreviation (except line 3)

DANIEL STRNAD



SALAD BOWL

with roasted tofu and chickpeas
that anybody can make under 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

200g of chickpeas
180g of tofu
100 g of leafy greens-
lettuce, arugula, sorrel
50g of vegetables of
your choice- carrot,
tomatoes, cucumber
olive oil
soy sauce
balsamic vinegar
Spices:
paprika, salt, pepper,
thyme and oregano

DIRECTIONS

1. In a bowl mix together tofu, olive oil, soy sauce, balsamic vinegar and spices. Let it sit for at least 10 minutes.
2. In another bowl mix together chickpeas, olive oil, soy sauce, balsamic vinegar and spices.
3. Cut the vegetables and put the leafy greens on a plate. Add olive oil and salad spices.
4. Roast both chickpeas and tofu on a pan for at least 7 minutes.
5. Add the roasted tofu and chickpeas onto the plate.
6. Add the chopped vegetables on top and enjoy your meal!

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The recipe is meant for two people but if you have no one to share with you can leave the surplus for another meal. You can also very well adjust it based on what you currently have in the fridge- you can add rice, mushrooms, beans or various types of vegetables. It is a fulfilling salad with all necessary nutrients. Don't hesitate to try it. Bon appetite!

BARBORA VOTLUČKOVÁ

UPCOMING SUN & FUN

As the last petal leaves, it put an end to the year's leaves
The good weather thieves, their snowstorm heaves
My whisper whines louder than the midnight wind
Stars glitter confines into a clouded twister, skimmed
Presence of mind goes astray, in the night's sky it writes its' essay
Is tomorrow today? Or is it the same dim light of the day
One good morning, the gardener of nature, will play the light strings of sun
Melody so calming, the scent of lavender, will invite spring, it has begun
Wet forests drop off their first shower
Rivers have reached their rush hour
Fields and plains bring new homes to dandelions
Calendar turns and the 21st March aligns

SERGEJ ŽUKOV



Source: <https://www.thoughtco.com/comprehensive-list-of-spring-words-2081468>

AVOIDING CHANDELIERS, AUSCHWITZ AND COWS

Smash! A chandelier that should have been hanging from the ceiling suddenly hit the floor and turned into a flood of little shards dancing on the linoleum. My heart stopped. It was only half an hour ago, that I had sat at the exact place. If I had doubted my decision for this adventure before, at that moment I frankly regretted it. Fortunately, I could not have given up then.

It was my very first multiday pilgrimage on foot. Other pilgrims started in Hrob but I joined them in Most (approximately in half of the way) and we were headed to Dolní Ročov. Due to my celiac disease, I also had to carry all my foodstuff in my backpack in addition to everything else that I needed, since the main sources of nutrients along the way consisted of bread, chocolate and Eucha-

rist. Fortunately, after two days, we spent the night in my hometown Louny and I was able to replenish my supplies and take a much-needed shower.

There were many other little misfortunes that I encountered along the entire journey, including extremely painful and large blisters, caused by my inexperience and wearing brand new sandals. Or the last night that we spent in a place that, if the mattresses were removed from the bunk beds, would look just like Auschwitz Birkenau, and I could tell because I had been to Birkenau before.

Yet the most iconic one was so strange and surprising that I cannot even consider it a misfortune, rather a highlight of the whole pilgrimage. There was one night that we spent on a farm and we were sleeping in the open air so our dinner was outside as well. We knew that it was a cow farm, but what we did not know was that the meadow where we slept was the place where the cows were during the day. So when we were suddenly attacked by a herd of mooing cows enticed by the smell of our food, we could not believe our eyes and I have never seen them away. However, they only left after people pack anything so quickly. Luckily they were called for milking, to which we were invited to as well and each of us was rewarded by a cup of fresh warm milk.



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/animal/cow>

ELIŠKA STRÁNSKÁ

COLLEGE ADMISSION SCANDALS AND THE VALUE OF PRESTIGE

In March 2019, the world was introduced to one of the largest college admissions bribery scandals in history. Through establishing a widespread criminal conspiracy employing athletic coaches, exam proctors, and admission officers all over the US, a former private college counselor let the children of wealthy parents pay their way into different top-tier schools for nine whole years.

As I was sitting in my fairly modest bedroom that March morning, reading all the shocking headlines of major news

media informing me about the scandal was a strangely unique experience for me. "The parents of college applicants are accused of paying in total more than \$25 million to the organizer of the scheme..." On one hand, this served as a definitive wake-up call to my childish (and a bit naive) reality in which morality rules in hand with heroism to prevent such corrupt systems from ever forming. Like a chick kicked out of its nest, I was once again being forced to feel yet another harsh side of the American dream - albeit

in the mildest way possible, thanks to my demographic. In addition to the symbol of other issues of the flawed system, there was now a bright red sign shouting at me: "Money can buy you more than happiness, it can even get you a Harvard degree!". As someone who doesn't play golf in private clubs every weekend nor enjoys his summer holidays on daddy's super-yacht, the news of this has obviously ruined the rest of my day.

Perhaps more importantly, the latest of scandals involving Ivy League colleges among other highly competitive schools marked the pathologically increasing amount of value we put on prestige when comparing different educational institutions.

Over the decades, names like Harvard, Yale, or Stanford have become much more than just synonyms for the superlative of a college education. We should remind ourselves that these private institutions are much like other big companies, boosting their acceptance rates artificially to look as competitive as possible and happily advertising

themselves by selling us anything from mugs to clothes with their logos (which has earned their place in fashion as "trendy"). This marketing strategy has not only engrained their names firmly into our modern popular culture, it has falsely created a new standard of academic excellence inaccessible for most of the students, but as easy to buy for the rich as it is to buy a loaf of bread in a local bakery.

Having graduated from a prestigious well-known school is certainly nice to flex on your CV, but the Varsity Blues scandal has clearly shown us that the nearly cult-like perception of these elite institutions ultimately leads to reinforcing the horrible level of social inequality. All things considered, the healthy approach to choosing a future school, in my opinion, is like choosing what clothes to wear. It is obvious that wearing designer clothes makes you look fancy, but sometimes it pays off to settle on the less prestigious choice and make sure it is actually a good fit for you.

VOJTA PAVROVSKÝ



Source: https://cainlive.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/IMG_0332-e155658179564.jpg

SCHOOL CULTURE IN SINGAPORE

A few years ago, I made a friend from Singapore. Recently, I've been quite interested in the quality of education there since Singapore has one of the best schooling systems. Therefore, I turned to my friend, who can answer some of my questions and provide a view into her education system. We both attend private IB schools - with hers being more on the creative side. Singapore highly focuses on the quality of their education which makes it one of the best in the world. I couldn't help but wonder if their schools are really that different. Are they different because of the work culture there? Or is it because they prioritize it more?

I want to focus on the workload and environment. While the workload is different at an art or science school, it is quite manageable in both cases. They have around 7 subjects for which they have a project every month. Most of their projects are in groups of 2 to 5 since her school promotes teamwork and communication. What makes it different is the approach to exam season and the overall process. Exam seasons are harder and much longer, and many students are part of multiple study groups to prepare for them. Needless to say, there is a lot of

'crunch' time before exams as is there anywhere around the world. The work culture is a mix between Western and Asian standards. Having a strong work ethic and competitiveness is a key to success along with collectivism and high efficiency. This type of environment can be toxic and quite stressful, especially when it comes to the exam season when everyone wants to get the best marks and have the best performance. This type of environment may be harmful, yet it has formed a successful bonded school culture. As my friend says, it makes school a bit more fun while also educational and effective.

In my opinion, the mix between Western and Asian standards creates a balance, so you get the best out of those two. It may be overwhelming at times, but I think it would be effi-

cient to implement such characteristics throughout all schools. Exams in the form of group projects would allow us to prepare for future work life, while also teaching us responsibility and communication skills. Balancing the pros and cons of the Western and Asian standards could prove

beneficial in the future. Education should be the primary focus of the country as it would allow society to grow and develop into a functioning and connected one.

CALISTA MAŘÍKOVÁ



Source: <https://www.asiaone.com/lifestyle/8-changes-singapore-education-system-you-should-know-about-year>

THE GLOBAL AUTHORITARIAN WAR ON EDUCATION

Since the beginning of time, authoritarian leaders have been trying to do anything to keep and expand their power while keeping their nationals under the illusion that they are, of course, the good guys. From state control of media and crackdowns on free speech to good old censorship on books and publications, authoritarians will do anything to push their narrative. Even if it means making their population more ignorant, incapable of critical thinking, and generally less intelligent on average.

It is proven that once our minds are made up about an issue, it is hard to change that. Therefore, the easiest way to control how a nation thinks is to start with its most vulnerable. Children's innocent curious minds are the perfect place for authoritarian manipulative tactics as they are the easiest to influence. As one old proverb says, "Twig is bent, so is the tree inclined." Early influences have a permanent effect. This rings true in both positive and negative ways. And so the censorship of education begins.

A country that has mastered the art of academic censorship perfectly is the People's Republic of China. Anything that the ruling Communist Party deems detrimental to the stability of the state is banned - from books, news reports, social media to music. The curriculum of all levels of education is structured by the state, and the academic papers and findings by university professors are rigorously monitored. Anything critical is immediately suppressed. Perhaps the most divisive issues are the "Three T's". Taiwan, Tibet, and Tiananmen. These are to be avoided at all costs. Nevertheless, the regime goes after anything that may question the Communist Party's governance. A Hong Kong teacher was fired for simply starting a discussion in class with the prompt: "What is freedom of speech?"

Until recently, the Party line was able to focus solely on censoring Chinese universities, but in the past few years, they have been able to expand their ambitions worldwide. The pressures exerted by China have led to an epidemic of self-censorship at American universities. Professors that anger the Chinese leadership lose access to Chinese scholars, analysts, and the ability to get a visa to China in the future. Furthermore, Beijing freezes funding to Chinese scholars wishing to attend schools that speak out. For many, this is enough to make them keep their mouth shut. And just like that, the Chinese crackdown on Academia becomes a global issue.

However, this is not exclusive to totali-



Source: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/book-bans-are-latest-front-in-america-s-culture-war-shrkwc9kx>

itarian countries like China. Albeit to a smaller extent, this is an issue in democratic countries as well. Not all countries are able to deal with their despicable past like Germany. Japan still refuses to teach its pupils about their war crimes, and in the USA, conservatives have embraced their own kind of "cancel culture". Republican states have taken it upon themselves to ban what they consider "Critical Race Theory" along with "Gender ideology" and other books they deem inappropriate for their youngest. According to the *New York Times*, school officials and lawmakers are banning books in school libraries at an unprecedented rate. Since the start of the school year, the American Library Association reported over 230 bids to pull books off the shelves.

Under the disguise of preventing "reverse racism" and promoting unity, they are trying to minimize educating America's racist history and the injustices minorities continue to face today. Do not be under the illusion that this is just about banning some contemporary ideology. They are even trying to ban books that are strictly about historical events like the Holocaust and slavery. For example, one Tennessee district has banned books about civil rights icon Ruby Bridges. Ruby was the first black girl to attend a white-only school. The same white parents that protested her going there are now protesting teaching their

children that they did it.

Award-winning world-famous novels have not been exempt. The district has also banned the Pulitzer prize-winning graphic novel *Maus*; arguing that its depiction of the Holocaust is disturbing for the youth. Perhaps they should have considered that the Holocaust is, in fact, supposed to be disturbing. In addition, a district in Kansas banned 29 books including Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The book was said to be banned due to sexual overtones and a negative depiction of Christianity. It is beyond ironic that the novel is about a patriarchal dystopian society that begins to crumble after the government starts to ban books.

The truth is that books and historical facts are not dangerous. Ignorance is. Perhaps these leaders from all over the world are scared that their children will be exposed to ideas that may lead them to a more just and equitable world. Perhaps they are scared they would see them for who they truly are. However, putting an end to this censorship is of utmost importance. Acknowledging humanity's mistakes and shortcomings is the only way for our society to prosper and not repeat history's horrors. We must all stand up for it because as Audre Lorde said, "Your silence will not protect you."

ŠÁRKA NEUMANNOVÁ



Source: <https://newrepublic.com/article/150476/american-elite-universities-self-censorship-china>

GRADES

Why do we always want to achieve the best in school? Some of us see it as good for our future, some do it because of their parents. Very often we look at the grade as a number and fail to read the comment and feedback from our teachers. There is a public debate whether we should be assessed by the formative or summative type of assessment. Most of the schools in Czech Republic use summative assessment. However, a more recommended way of grading is formative verbal evaluation, which is used, for example, in some schools in England.

How do we react when we get a good grade? We are happy because we managed to achieve our goal. But if we do not manage our best and get a bad grade, are we focusing on the grade or on improving throughout our mistakes? I think that grades bring more unnecessary stress for some of the students, especially at the end of the semester, when the tests pile up.



Source: <https://4axofn288etdd2o6u15iv8h7-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Apr.-10-Formative-vs-Summative-Assessment-Whats-the-Difference-1024x534.jpg>

So, what should we do to reduce the amount of stress and keep the summative assessment? There is one potential solution—a three-day weekend. With three days off, we will get more time for our homework, preparations for tests and so our grades will get better. It will also boost our health, productivity, and motivation. The only disadvantage is that we would have to wake up earlier and end a little later. But that is worth it for three free days that can help us to achieve our best.

Do not stress about your grades, they are just numbers, think about where you made the mistake, so you will learn a lesson, and won't repeat it. I think that a three-day weekend will reduce stress and make us happy. After the term I say to myself: Did I try my best? If the answer is yes, I am satisfied. Ask this question yourself. Are you not happy? You must be, because you surely made the biggest effort.

ONDŘEJ GALYÁŠ

THE CURSE OF RESOLUTIONS

Every year in our life is unique. We meet new people, we feel unusual feelings, see new things, visit unfamiliar places and we face different challenges. Some things stay, like the people we love, the school we go to, or the buses we commute with. One of the things that will not go anywhere soon are New Year's Reso-

lutions. Shortly after New Year's is the time when people flood the gyms and use the sports centre entry card they got for Christmas. Everybody thinks about the resolutions once a new year comes and even though you might not admit it, you make some of your own. By now, we should make the 2nd of January, "The

Resolution Day," so we can celebrate the failure that comes with them. There are also some positives though, so let me introduce them first.

They are a motivation for people to change their life for the better, and since everybody sets them, you can work with somebody with the same goals to achieve them together. Even

year," and once it turns around wrongly you just go: "The next year is definitely my year, mark my words." It seems funny, but it is not. Even though it is just a joke, it explicitly shows the person's mindset towards the resolutions. We do not really care about them; we just use it as a conversational talking point once a year.

So why do we keep making them every year? The answer is simple. Because it is our human nature. We look towards the New Year as an end to the problems that we are struggling with right now. It gives us hope into the new year that we can make it better than the last one. We aspire to a year that will come with new opportunities and experiences. Most people will forget about them by the end of January and say, "Well, at least I tried," but those that genuinely want to set goals for them selves and achieve them know, that the New Year's resolutions are irrelevant. If we want something to happen, we can make it happen at any point of the year and when a new year comes around, we can already be winning the race that everyone is about to start.

ADAM CHÁRA



Source: <https://www.polsko.travel/cz/novinky/top-6-mist-kde-oslavit-silvestra-v-polsku>

CALIFORNIA VS. THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Every country in the world has its differences as well as similarities. No country is necessarily better than the other, because both the positive and negative aspects make up the country, and every country has a considerable amount of both. I do not think it is always fair to compare countries because they are so deeply unique. However, living in California and the Czech Republic I have noticed a few interesting differences.

Customer service in California is emphasized. The cashier, waiter, or whoever is helping you always greets you with that all-American honey glazed smile, even if they are not feeling it. As it goes, "The customer is always right," even if it may sometimes be unreasonable. In the Czech Republic, people do not bother to hide their annoyance and are not afraid to be rude or degrading. Even if you are kindly asking for help, you might still be treated coldly. At least you know that if the person is kind to you, it is genuine, and it is easy to tell the rude people apart from the good ones.

What we all note when comparing the US with other countries is the price of healthcare. A friend of mine once sprained her shoulder, and a visit to the doctors (X-rays) cost over \$1000. But

when she had a staph infection in her knee in the Czech Republic, they treated it for just 7 crowns.

The education in California is not as bad as people believe American public education to be (compared to other countries). Your success is based not only on your grades that you get in your classes, but what classes you take and what level of difficulty of the classes you choose. I think that in the Czech Republic, the classes you take are structured for you, so everyone shares the same schooling experience, whereas in the US, intelligence and educational experience tend to vary.

A quite controversial topic is Americans' lack of knowledge in geography. This often depends on where they are and what school they go to. My school did not offer a geography class although we did learn some geography integrated within our history classes. However, other schools where my friends attend do provide geography classes. The US is focused on productivity, and sometimes considers certain things as unimportant. Geography is one of these things that has been deemed as unproductive, because they assume you can learn it on your own. Though we do not take geography,

we take other classes in its place.

Public schools in California are very prepared for low-income families, by providing Chromebooks for every student, as well as free lunch and Wi-Fi routers if needed. If attending a public school, you are only allowed to go to a school in your district. This means that school is typically a walking or biking distance from everybody who attends. Only some teachers have a long commute to school. Lunch time in my public school was a lot different than lunch here. We all had our lunch break at the same time, including every student and every teacher. Our school was a sort of outdoor school, and so we would always be sitting outside in the sun. Lunch at school either consisted of 'warm lunch' from school, lunch from home, and/or snacks from the 'a la carte' line. The 'a la carte' line was a sort of store where kids would run and line up to buy food. Typically, I would sit outside on the grass under a tree with my friends with my lunch from home, and people would be playing sports, taking naps, doing homework, or chatting. It felt much like a picnic, but with the pessimistic pressure of school. Barely anyone ever sat in the cafeteria, everyone would be sitting all over campus, on the grass fields, on

benches, at picnic tables, on stairs, or even on the floor in the middle of the hallway.

What people often compare is the drinking and driving ages. The driving age being at 16 in California is particularly useful and is one of the contributions to the less reliable public transportation. Despite that, there is not a lack of public transportation options in California, just a lack of demand. There are buses that go from city to city, and a train called BART that can take you across the state. A lot of people I know typically take the train to San Francisco, because it is sometimes difficult to drive there, and parking can be quite terrible.

There are so many other small details that differentiate the two places (such as lowering the bar being optional in California when skiing, or school sports, and PE requirements) and it is hard to mention them all. Nonetheless, both California and the Czech Republic are wonderful places to live, and I have learned a lot from the two different environments. Consequently, I am so glad that I have been given the opportunity to experience living in Czech.

ANESKA LEE

THE BEST ALBUMS OF 2021, FROM...

A sixteen-year-old boy, whose opinions may or may not be influenced by personal biases. Couldn't fit all of that in the title, unfortunately. Ignoring that, another year has passed us by, and, considering the amount of unfortunate news that we were subjected to, a thing that has helped many people, including me, is music, as it always does. This was in fact my first year when I started personally seeking out new releases in the music world, and thankfully, the music world delivered and then some. In this article, I want to mention my top three favourite albums of the year, but rest assured, there is an incredible number of albums I wanted to include on this list, but could not, like: *By the Time I Get to Phoenix* by Injury Reserve, *An Evening With Silk Sonic* by Silk Sonic, *Mood Valiant* by Hiatus Kaiyote, *Sinner Get Ready* by Lingua Ignota and *LP!* by JPEGMAFIA. Those albums are all fantastic and deserve to be honourable mentions, but I do not want to delay my love-liest listening experiences anymore, so let us kick off this list with...

3. Squid – *Bright Green Field*: An amazing post-punk, Talking Heads-inspired, bop-fest from start to finish. If there is any album from 2021 that shows the pure joy of putting together sounds as a group, it

is this one. Every moment is filled with fantastic grooves from the drums by Ollie Judge, the rhythmical riffing of the guitars of Louis Borlase and Anton Pearson, and the often unsettling, but just as often wacky synth from Arthur Leadbetter. Bring in the unique addition of brass from final member Laurie Nankivell, and the expressive vocals from Ollie (a drummer and a lead singer, how luxurious!) and poignant commentary on the urbanized section of England, and you have the most replay-able and addicting record of the year. In fact, it is so addictive, I am listening to it as I am writing this!

2. Black Country, New Road – *For the first time*: Very rarely do you find bands who manage to not only release excellent debut albums, but also prime themselves to become their given generation's indie darlings. A la Arcade Fire, for whom our band here has named as an influence, but from whom the band's sound could not be further from. For the first time's sonic pallet can only be described as anxious, foreboding, or even terrifying. Along with the usual instruments for a rock band, like guitar (played by Luke Mark), bass (Tyler Hyde), drums (Charlie Wayne) and keys (May Kershaw), the

ensemble features, oddly enough, a violinist in Georgia Ellery, and a saxophonist in Lewis Evans. This creates an interesting dynamic, allowing some incredible compositional choices, like the jam that is the opening track Instrumental. This is only compounded by guitarist and front man Isaac Wood's vocal delivery, which may come across more like spoken word than singing, and lyrics, which are as abstract as they are strange, describing a disconcerting self-discovery journey through the eyes of a man with a rich girlfriend on Sunglasses, confessing one's love during a fellow experimental rock band Black Midi's performance on Track X, and the anxiousness of failing a science fair experiment on Science Fair. To put it lightly, it is a lot. But, when you get used to it, you will find this 6-track and 40-minute anxiety attack of an album highly compelling.

1. Emerald Orbit – *Wholisms*: I found this album on Reddit. It was posted on the subreddit r/indiemusicfeedback. I was trying to promote my own music and saw this colourful, strange album cover, and thought: "Why not? Let's listen to it!" And that was the beginning of my year-long obsession. Emerald Orbit is the project of Elliot Fraizinger, who has claimed on several occasions that this album took him 4

years to make, and it is evident. Not only is this record one of the most detail-heavy in terms of production, not only are the lyrics poetic and poignant, not only does this album contain a variety of sounds that makes each listen fresh (but which also makes it hard to categorize the whole project in a satisfying way), but the songs are just unbelievably catchy. Adding in the bizarrely fantastic synth work, often indulging in huge soundscapes, it feels like finding an old 80's cassette in the attic of the house you're moving into, which, along with the lyrics confronting a breakup, would fit quite well. Technically, this album should not be on this list, because it came out in December 2020, yet I think it would have been impossible for me to find this album by any other means. Additionally, I think a year-end ranking excluding this album would be a disingenuous way to show what I listened to this year. So, if there is any album on this list I recommend you check out, and that you are most likely to enjoy, it is this one. Thank you, Elliot, for being the soundtrack to my snow cleaning duties this year.

IVAN PAVLOVEC

HUMAN MEMORY—A FAULTY MACHINE OR A RESOURCEFUL MASTERPIECE?

The human brain is probably the most complex organ in our body, responsible not only for the perception of the world around us but also for the storage of memory. As there are many events in our lifetime that need to be remembered, the question arises: how accurate is our memory and can it be influenced by external factors of the environment?

People tend to believe that their memories are mostly correct and reflect the past reality with great accuracy. However, the process of remembering is not flawless, as memories can fade away with time and tend to mix with other memories as the brain tries to form a continuous and complete picture of events, and in case some details are lacking, it borrows them from other reminiscences. This altering and filling gaps becomes more prevalent when it comes to stressful or emotionally influenced situations. Another problem comes when the brain forms a strong association between their memory and its interpretation, which does not fade over time and haunts the consciousness. This issue is known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and has a similar impact on the brain as addiction. In those cases, the brain does

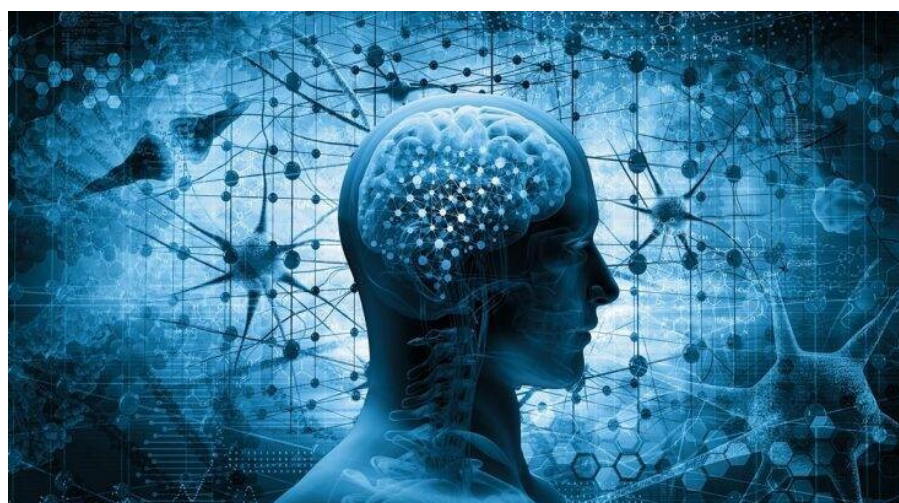
not create memories normally. To understand how this works, we must first know how normal memories are formed in our mind. A protein called actin plays an important role. To form new memory connections, they push the edges outwards so the branches can reach other ones, forming a pathway for information to pass on chemically. Normally, after a while, actin stabilizes and stops growing to sides. However, when it comes to these trauma-induced syndromes, the actins do not cease to work and constantly stimulate the brain, causing the refreshing of memories which may be extremely disruptive.

Apart from the traumas, several studies proved that human memory is apparently not as reliable as we would wish it to be. This is completely normal, as this fading saves the space which would otherwise be crumpled with all the mostly unnecessary details. Yet when it comes to situations in which a lot is at stake, for instance in a trial when a person should give an eye-witnessed testimony, memory can be unreliable. According to the American Bar Association, from 21 wrongful convictions, 19 were caused by false witness eye testimonies. This does

not mean that those people were lying, but it could be that they wrongly remembered important details or events, as even a

smartly asked question could mislead someone's mind and or implicitly suggest a thought around which the new false memory would be formed. Therefore, nowadays the institutions are more reserved when it comes to relying on human memory.

Despite the aforementioned criticism of human memory processing, there are still some studies that say the opposite. One performed at Toronto University which measured recall of an audio tour after several days, says that even though the percentage of facts recalled was relatively low, the correctness of the responses was near a hundred percent. This implies that



Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/workplace/ten-hacks-for-a-super-memory-5103419/>

even though we do not remember everything, still the things which we do remember are very accurate. Also, similar experiments even showed that the participants' abilities to recall memories exceeded the expectations of researchers when the test about remembering a list of words was conducted. Even though the emotional experience was not addressed here so the findings are limited only to the laboratory environment, it still provides an interesting insight into our very complex mechanism of storing and refurbishing our memory which will never stop astonishing humanity.

NATAN KRATOCHVÍLA



WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE THE WORLD, SO WE'VE BEEN CHOOSING THEM CAREFULLY FOR FIFTEEN YEARS.

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